

INTRODUCTION

Regressions and Progressions

“Nobody really finds hisself, cuz if he finds hisself, he knows the future.”

—Heavyweight champion Leon Spinks, 1978

Let’s get one thing out of the way before I begin. Yes, Michael E. Arth is my real name and, no, my parents did not purposefully combine my middle initial and last name together to spell “Earth.” I was named for my paternal grandfather Edward Arth, who I never met. I also did not particularly notice the global connection until I took LSD for the first time, at age seventeen, after reading through books on philosophy, economics, and psychology that my father had confiscated and hidden under his socks. I knew he would not read them himself, so I was able to use his sock drawer as a lending library beginning in the summer of 1969.

Eating the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge was something my parents, my teachers, and the Catholic Church did not approve of—especially by a boy whose young mind had not yet been thoroughly indoctrinated—but I was determined to find out what was what, and not let anyone stop me. Since those days, I have often thought there must be no more interesting time to be alive in the history of our species than the present. At the same time, this eternally most-interesting-present is immeasurably enlivened and enriched by constantly looking both backward and forward—a habit of trans-temporal thinking that I find essential.

From an early age I was a polymath, interested in just about everything—well, except *math*, unfortunately. My work, which is also my leisure, usually takes the form of projects, ranging across the domains of art, architecture, construction, urban design, policy analysis, politics, futurology, filmmaking, and writing.

I also have a rather unusual talent that some clinical types have referred to as a mental disorder, but which I prefer to think of as a form of creativity. Multi-leveled, time-transcending, meaningful coincidences known as synchronicities often happen around me. The meaning of these connections across time and space may become less mysterious as this account unfolds, and by the time we have arrived in the “present time,” 2053, we may have a working explanation of this phenomenon that now figures profoundly into the fate of our species. Lest you might be thinking, “what the hell...?” let me give an example, which is also germane to this story:

The inspiration, indeed an early draft for *The Time Traveler*, was *The American Butterfly*, a manuscript I wrote in 1980 when I lived in Paris. Years later, the manuscript came true in various ways, even though I’d mostly forgotten about it, especially since some of the names, places, and descriptions seemed quite arbitrary and unimportant. The predictive elements of that fictional story are now nestled comfortably within the facts of this memoir, and will unfold

in due time. Suffice it to say, the earlier manuscript was mostly forgotten after that 1980 “memoir of the future,” along with the earliest version of this memoir, were put away back-to-back inside a manila envelope.

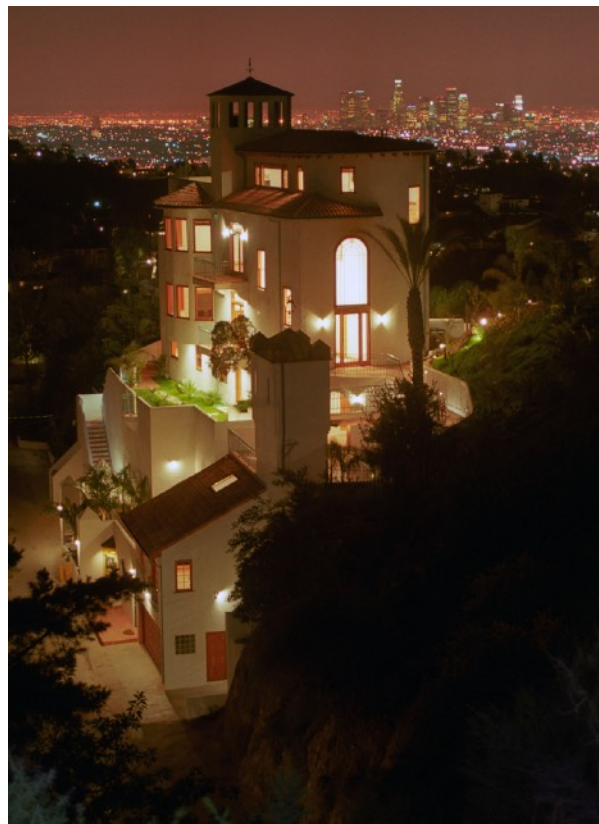
Nine years later, rediscovery of the manuscript would reveal that much of what I had written about my personal future had come true, in hair-raising detail. The primary difference between that work and this one, other than the substantial amount of life lived in between, is that in this imagined memoir of the future, slapped against the back of this true account, *The Time Traveler* will not only be about my personal world, but also about the fate of the world.

In addition to the above interests and quirks, beginning in 1993, I spent a year and half working as a hypnotherapist in Los Angeles. My office was on the seventh floor of “Casa de Lila,” a white elephant of a mountaintop Xanadu I designed and nearly built, but could not afford to finish. Casa de Lila was my most ambitious building project to date, and I hoped its sale was going to make me the million dollars I needed to withdraw to my ivory tower to write full time, and enjoy the view with my future wife, whomever she might be.

Instead, the villa devoured the half-million in equity built up from the first house I built, and turned it into a stint in bankruptcy court. Like many of my projects before and hence, I charged ahead without knowing how to finance it, or knowing if it would produce an income. My optimism was boundless, and the finances probably worked out to some extent, because of my risk-taking. There were sometimes glitches while waiting for the money to catch up, but



Day and night views of Casa de Lila in Los Angeles, which I designed and built 1990-1994



even the set-backs were interesting and instructive.

I had always been interested in human psychology, but not so much that I wanted to make a career of listening to other people's problems—I had enough of my own challenges. There was enough interest in mind research and psychology, however, to take two courses in hypnotherapy, hang out a shingle, and survive a rough period without any other means of support. I got to be a therapist of sorts, and was paid just as much as a psychologist when the work was available. Often the problems were challenging, but I felt useful.

Most clients wanted to cut down on some combination of smoking, eating, and worrying. There were plenty of shameful buried memories to unearth, and there was always some emotional drama or spiritual crisis that cut through the chitchat to put us directly into the crux of the matter. I made a big show of telling clients not to come to me unless they were ready to be set back on their path in one or two sessions. This had the effect of setting up their expectations for a speedy resolution, combined with their full cooperation. It also prevented me from getting bored.

Most clients wanted to be regressed to relive childhood dramas, and find out about their past lives. Initially, I was open to the question about whether we have past lives, having read Ian Stevenson's *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation* (1980) and having myself, a few years earlier, lain on the floor of a psychologist's office for my own regressions. I recalled an immediate past life as a philosophical Greek writer, who lived in a whitewashed villa splashed with bracts of red bougainvillea by the deep blue Aegean Sea. It seemed so real, even down to the pictures on the mantel, that I subsequently tried to find out if there was a writer who fit the description. I imagined meeting my children from a previous life and describing, to their utter astonishment, the villa where they had grown up. But there were no kids from a previous life, nor any such writer. I uncovered nothing except embarrassment at my own self-delusion.

Furthermore, after hypno-regressing dozens of clients, and combing through the thinnest of anecdotal evidence—in both my clients' stories and literature on the subject, and finding no logically consistent reasons why an immortal soul—itsself a highly dubious proposition—would have to forget everything to start all over again and again. I concluded there was little basis for a belief in reincarnation. Even though these regressions sometimes gave useful insight into the psyche of the clients, our days in the sun seemed to be bookended by birth and death. Finally, while listening to my clients, I came to see manufactured memories as a testament to the human imagination and our capacity for self-deception.

I constantly fight self-foolery by reminding myself that the search for truth is more important than trying to concoct pleasant fictions. Nevertheless, I can understand that believing in lives beyond this one, fore or aft, gives comfort to people looking for some distraction from the yawning maw of death. Mortality does not sit well with me either. For even though I was blessed with a long life in which to anticipate my demise and ponder life's mysteries, I have warily eyed the prospect of declining health and mobility, where my abilities, my memories, and my loved ones slowly ebb away until I perish forever. As a result, I have

more than a faint hope—bolstered by recent developments—that medical science, the technological rapture, or cryonics as a last resort, will intervene before death becomes irrevocable. If not, well this is where a philosophical attitude comes in. I have resigned myself to the possibility that nothing can save me, or anyone, from what has traditionally been the terminal condition of life.

After trudging through forests of vague stories thick with emotion, but lacking in verifiable information of any kind, I decided to try progressing people into their imagined, yet plausible future, after regressing them into both their actual and imagined pasts. I soon discovered that progressions were just as useful as regressions. The stories, whether true or not, conjured from the embellished past or the hoped for future, helped to free the corporeal souls of the human creatures who sat before me.

One of the first progressions involved Natalya, a delicate and birdlike, 18-year-old Russian émigré. She was already trembling from nicotine withdrawal because I would not let her smoke on my property, and from having climbed six flights of stairs, so I wasted no time. After the obligatory trip back to her childhood, the womb, and some dull, preposterous past lives that are not worth recounting, we reversed course and charged forward, making short stops at age twenty, thirty, and forty before pulling up to eighty of age, our final destination.

Natalya was pretty except for her nervous preening and the smoker's pall, which hung over her like a shadow from the scythe of the Grim Reaper. Nevertheless, as she "aged" during our progression, she turned into a calm, wizened old woman, full of good-natured advice, who had the full attention of her younger self. Whether these two aspects of the same women, united for a moment across time, were remembering the advice of their mother, their grandmother, or summoning some inner wisdom, they played their parts without a hint of self-consciousness. The old woman discharged her wisdom and felt better about dying, and the younger one felt energized and ready to face the years ahead. It's also possible she never had another thought about it after leaving my house and lighting up a cigarette.

Still, I was onto something with these progressions because it subcontracted the tricky job of offering advice back to the clients, who could then take both credit and blame for the chore. The most notable progression involved Dolores, a woman still clearly in the prime of life, who it seemed had inadvertently written down her birth year as 1937, instead of 1957. Except for her old fashioned name, I simply could not imagine her being so old as to remember World War II. When she saw me staring at the patient release form she said, "People say I don't look my age, but I'm pushing sixty. I'll be fifty-seven on my next birthday."

Dolores was slim and, if she had fully owned her full height of five-eight, and not avoided eye contact, she would have been very attractive. She explained that she was a childless owner of three cats, and had spent her rather straight-forward, undramatic life working as a computer programmer, and riding a stationary bike in front of her TV. She had also protected her delicate, freckly skin by avoiding the sun, alcohol, and tobacco. Her only vanity seemed to

be a full mane of luxuriant, auburn locks cascading past her shoulders. A few tendrils of gray indicated she did not dye her hair. The hands usually give away a person's age, but in her case the hands insisted she was 37 and not the age on her driver's license, which she finally pulled out to prove conclusively that appearances can be deceiving.

Dolores admitted being as predictable as the 1990s computers she programmed. She was depressed, but not sure why. The first session consisted primarily of breath work, and—at least from my standpoint—was as untroubled as her unlined face. She did, however, cry a little at the end, and said she had been trying to work out something related to the “energy” of her prospective apartment. I suspected there was something brewing that went much deeper than *feng shui*.

The second session was on a clear spring night. From our lofty aerie, the entire Los Angeles basin was a sea of lights. I stoked the fire in the kiva-style corner fireplace. We sat cross-legged in front of a fire on cushions that were piled on top of the rugs and blankets, which were spread over the Saltillo tile floor. By the warm flickering glow of the fire and the candles, and the pulsating city lights outside the windows, something remarkable happened.

While she was breathing deeply, and as I was progressing her decade-by-decade into the future, she seemed to physically age before my eyes. With each breath, her already slightly stooped shoulders sank lower. Her hair became a wet, stringy tangle from her tears, and from the saliva that spilled from her open mouth. Strands of gray hair, previously barely noticeable, curled up from the dank warmth of her breath and created a halo-like cobweb around her skull, accentuated by the dancing flames on the candles behind her. Dolores was hunched over and slack-jawed. Her cheeks hollowed out as her eyes darkened in their sockets and sunk into her face. She aged well past her chronological age, as her frame seemed to shrink beyond what seemed possible. Just as I was wondering how much effect the dim light was having on my imagination, her voice also began to age. At first, she said the words, “I’m not old” in a reasonable approximation of her own voice. However, as she repeated herself, her voice deepened with each incantation, like a chain-smoking street troll who was descending into alcoholism, while living under a bridge. Each utterance of “I’m not old” took her deeper into senescence. “I’m not old. *I’m not old...*”

Finally, she added “I’m not ugly” in such a frightful man's voice that I was forced to avert my eyes. I imagined her head pivoting like the possessed girl in *The Exorcist*, thus revealing her true pedigree as a loathsome harpy who would suck my energy to restore the kilter of the lair she was about to invade. Despite her insistence to the contrary, she was undeniably old and ugly, and even moribund. Glistening strings of spinnbarkeit connected her mouth to her legs, which were now stretched out stiffly in front of her on the rug as if from rigor mortis. When she could get no lower, or no older without becoming a corpse, she paused like an automaton waiting for instruction.

It took me a moment to survey this wreckage of a human being. Her face was completely drenched with her tears. Her hair matted her cheeks. She seemed completely spent as she

waited, nearly bent in half, and as still as a corpse. I composed myself, put a governor on my racing thoughts, and asked her to begin the process of taking away the years to return to her younger self.

“Dolores, take a breath. When you exhale you will take off five years.”

For an uncomfortably long time she did not stir. Just as I was about to check her pulse, she took a small breath, and barely spit it out.

“Okay, that was only about six months, a year at the most,” I said. “Now take a deeper breath and let it go.”

From this point, each new breath slightly inflated her shriveled and decrepit form. When Dolores was finally fully and reassuringly fleshed out, upright and back to the present, she glowed in the warm light. She cleared the frog in her throat, expelled the ghost of an old crone, and seemed to cough up a few other creatures besides. She brightened as if her soul had returned, and looked even younger than she had before. She found a hair band in her purse and pulled back her hair into a pony tail. “Wow,” she said with a laugh, “I’m glad I got that out of my system!”

She fanned her face, bulged her eyes for comic effect and slightly stuck out her tongue. “No wonder I was depressed,” she said. “I can see that I was stuck in a funk from not being willing to age gracefully. So many people telling me how young I look enabled me to postpone accepting that I’ll get old and die just like everyone,” she said with a wry smile. “It was like I was almost afraid to laugh for fear I would make wrinkles and reveal the old lady I was turning into. I had to go to the brink of the grave, to the very bottom of my fear, to see that I can handle it.”

Her perky and lucid self-analysis was impressive. “I made peace with myself,” she said, “and that old lady waiting inside of me is not going to scare me any more!”

Her seriousness melted into a goofy grin. For what would ordinarily be an embarrassingly long time, we both smiled while staring into each others eyes. For me, it was a combination of relief and pride at a job well done, coupled with joy at seeing the burden lifted from her shoulders. Dolores insisted she was cured of her obsession with aging. I believed her.

In my case, the grim reaper still lurks outside my door and occasionally, like Dolores, I have opened the door and taken journeys to the brink of the abyss. I no longer fear death. It is simply unwelcome. I will not go gently into that goodnight, even after living out this tale of past and future I feel compelled to tell.

Michael E. Arth
DeLand, Florida
August 1, 2018

Once Upon a...

1 - TIME



1.1. Our starter home at 11700 Clifford Ave NE, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 10 a.m., Easter, April 1, 1956. My sister Michele, Mom, me, and our 1951 V-8 Ford sedan. The grass seed is freshly sown and the dirt compacted. The bathroom window is on the side of the house, waiting to be cranked out...

TIME was the first word I learned to recognize in print, but only written in all caps, as if the concept was trying to signal to me its order and importance in the scheme of things. I remember the sequence of events remarkably well, considering I was not yet three years old. Adrenaline fixed the memory and the word in my brain, thus establishing a special curiosity about time itself.

It began with the sound of shattering glass, followed by a string of expletives beginning with “God damned son of bitch...” and continuing through several colorful iterations loud enough to alert me, my mother, my sister Michele, baby Greg, the whole neighborhood, and if there be a God, Him as well. It was the summer of 1956 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. My father had just slammed his freckly, flat-topped, red-haired head into the cranked-out, casement-style bathroom window on the side of our flat-roofed, adobe-style house. This accident happened because Dad, known to others as Harry J. Arth, had been mowing the yard with a push-reel mower that required a certain amount of head-down determination.

Dad was proud of his lawn. I know this because of the photograph of sister Michele, age two, pushing her baby carriage across the grass in imitation of our father’s efforts with the push mower that very same summer. On the back of this photo—the only known family photo he ever inscribed—Michele is not mentioned at all. Instead Dad wrote, “Get a load of that

beautiful lawn,” along with a snippet from Isaiah: “The desert shall bloom.”

Part of the reason he wanted the desert to bloom was because the year before we had moved from England, where my father had been a meteorologist in the U.S. Air Force, during the Korean War. England’s “pleasant mountains green,” nurtured by cool, drizzly weather, had given way abruptly to the warm, dry, mile-high desert. Dad was attending the University of New Mexico, and was getting his second bachelor’s degree under a version of the G.I. Bill. His first degree, from St. John’s University in Minnesota, had been in business. He was returning to college to study geology because he saw that black gold would be needed to fuel the burgeoning automobile age.



1.2. Michele, enjoying the new lawn.

Our \$8,800 pseudo-mud hut, bought for zero down under a veteran’s program, was in a new subdivision on the edge of the desert, and had an inspiring view of the Sandia Mountains. My father’s second college degree and his ability to buy a house was partly the result of a highly progressive income tax, which had created the American middle class almost out of whole cloth after the war. During the nine months of my gestation and my first decade outside the womb (1952-1963) the marginal federal income tax rate was 91%. For corporations it was 52%, and for capital gains it was 25%. Most Americans at that time thought taxes were about right and it was part of why they liked Ike. My dad was undoubtedly happy about his new degree, his new job, his new house, and being a member of the middle class, but his throbbing head temporarily banished all pleasant thoughts. What one hears about redheads being quick-tempered might not be generally true, but it was undeniably true in Dad’s case, and I’m not only speaking about his encounter with the bathroom window.

Things returned to normal in the household only when a subscription copy of TIME magazine, which happened to be almost exactly the size of the window, was mustered into the breach, and secured with Scotch tape. The passage of time, in combination with the elements, drained most of the color from the cover of TIME before the glass was repaired, and I was provided with my first memorable example of how time fades into history. After that, every week I watched as the previous week’s TIME magazine was replaced with the latest edition on the drum-like, leather coffee table my parents had bought from a Mexican import shop. I flipped through the pages, as seconds ticked past, looking at the pictures, and also reading the one word at the bottom of nearly every page: TIME. In this way I learned the meaning of the seven days of the week, the four weeks of the month, and the twelve months of the year.

2 - Womb With a View



1.3. My mother, with me in the womb, eyeing a fancy perambulator at Woolworths, April 1953, St. Helen's, Lancashire, England. (She bought a much cheaper one)

Before I briefly practiced hypnotherapy, I was myself a hypnotic subject. During my fifth session, on March 8, 1991, I told the hypnotherapist I wanted to further explore my earliest memories. Sigmund Freud believed we forget events occurring before age three because we are repressing unwelcome sexual memories. Now we know that, as we progress through ages three to nine, almost all of us experience childhood amnesia that sweeps away those precious early memories like so many cobwebs. In my sessions, I was determined to mine those early years as best I could, aware that I might also be exploring my imagination spun out of family stories and the shoebox where Mom kept her old photos.

As I lay on the beige, wall-to-wall carpet with a pillow under my head and a blanket over my body, the therapist regressed me all the way back to when I was a sensation-flooded baby swaddled in the comfort of my pram. I gazed outwards in a state of babbling wonder at the bright blue panorama festooned with puffy, white clouds. Suddenly, the vista was blotted out by a heavily perfumed woman, wearing red lipstick, who swooped in to smother me with kisses. I shook my face, and was instructed to go back even further. The woman's lips pulled away and the sky turned in on itself to form a sphere that looked like a drop of water set against the cold, black void of



1.4. Finally out of the womb. With my mother, Yvonne, in July 1953.

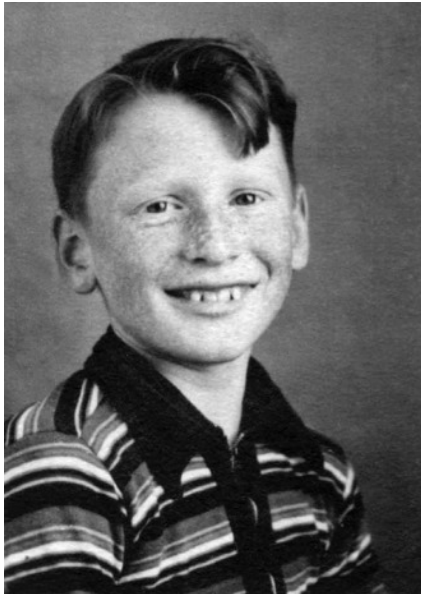
space. For a moment I hung there drifting slowly, as if to admire the view while being calibrated for reentry. I have to assume I was in the realm of imagination at this point, drawing from stories my mother had told me, but at the time it seemed so real I believed it was a true experience. A homing device in me locked onto a mountain-rimmed valley on the Rio Grande River—Albuquerque, New Mexico. The lights of this desert oasis replaced the stars as I pierced the atmosphere and, in a flash, saw my parents embracing in a one-car, garage apartment on Harvard Drive, with its cinder block walls of turquoise and shocking pink.

At this point, my parents had been married scarcely a month. They met at Dugway Proving Ground in Utah, which was my father's first posting in the Air Force after receiving his business degree. My mother was at the base because her stepfather was a colonel there with the Chemical Corps. The Air Force had recently finished training my father as a meteorologist to ship him to England, where there would be plenty of nasty weather to prognosticate about.

Harry Joseph Arth hailed from Finlayson, Minnesota. His maternal ancestors were

Austrian and his paternal ancestors came from a part of Germany and Central Europe that before 500 BC was the domain of the Continental Celts. While a small number of Arths have spread far and wide, the Arth name is still firmly attached to a small town at the base of the Myth Mountains, by the southern shore of the Lake of Zug, in Switzerland. Our family name meant “bear” in their ancient tongue, as it still does in modern Welsh. Our forbearers worshiped *Ursa Major*, the Great Bear in the Sky that circled the pole star. Apparently, the Celts took their cult with them to the British Isles where the name Arth evolved from *Arth Vaur* (Heavenly Bear) into the mythical King Arthur. In Britain, *Ursa Major* is still sometimes called Arthur’s Wain.

Dad was the youngest of seven children. He had three sisters and three brothers, just as I would eventually have. His father Edward, together with his brothers and his wife, Sophia,



1.5. Harry Joseph Arth, 10

owned a general store in Finlayson and ran a strict, no-nonsense household. While my mother was a bottomless well of family stories, my father said he had to work all the time and therefore only had time to accumulate four short stories—stories which were, nevertheless, filled with regret, torture, punishment and toil:

1. At age ten, he chose to receive a bicycle instead of anesthesia while getting his tonsils out.
2. He got whipped with a belt for chasing his brother with a knife.
3. He was only sixteen years old in 1945, thus missing forever his chance to fight Hitler and instead,
4. Dad spent a summer as a merchant seaman on an ore ship in the Great Lakes, shoveling coal in twelve-hour shifts.

My mother, on the other hand, had endless stories to tell. She grew up in Alabama and Tennessee and the list of families we were related to seemed endless: Gupton, Benton, Clinton, Mathis, McKnight, Wilkes, Cavnar, Cavanaugh, Stephen, William, Phillips, Agnew, Caledonian, Benjamin, Griffis, Johnston, Wilson, Burk and many more. Most were southerners of English and Irish descent, but were also said to include those of indigenous origin, and they extended all the way back to the Pilgrims of the 1600s, with the Pre-Columbians going back at least 11,000 years. Family lore has it that Mom got her dark hair, dark eyes, and olive skin from the Cherokees. These Native American attributes skipped me but showed up again in my daughter, Sophia.¹

My father’s shame over his prominent nose, snagged teeth, pale freckled skin, and red

¹Maternal DNA analysis showed that Mom’s European ancestors are in haplogroup U5, one of the so-called “Ursula tribes” who were living with and exchanging DNA with the Neanderthals in Europe up to 50,000 years ago.

hair, coupled with a hormone-driven intensity that had raged unabated since he was a preadolescent, made him want to dilute his paleness as quickly as possible into my mother's rich, olive-brown Alabama-Tennessee gumbo. In the span of seven and half frenzied years, they produced six children—three girls and three boys: first me, then Michele, Gregory, Lisa, David, and Renee. (Later in life, he left my mother, married a woman younger than me, and out of that union came Matthew.)

My interest in art came from my mother's side, which produced numerous musicians, poets and artists who celebrated family life and nature. They inhabited small towns and farms all across the Deep South, but mostly in Tennessee. When my Mom speaks of her Southern kin, it always conjures up for me this family photo taken in 1906. My great-grandfather has



1.6. Family portrait, circa 1906: My mother's father, Zeb Vance Gupton (1892-1936) is on the banjo. Zeb's brother Jimmy Lee (b. 1882) is on the fiddle. The bearded patriarch is my great-grandfather, Joseph P. Gupton (1841-1929). Originally from North Carolina, he fought for the Confederacy, and surrendered with Robert E. Lee at Appomattox. My paternal great-grandfather was a Yankee soldier.

the long beard and cane. My grandfather Zeb Gupton is the barefoot boy playing the banjo. Zeb's older brother Jim is on the fiddle.

Dad had a scientific mind and an overbearing polemical style. Without the slightest hint of ambivalence he clung, with equal fervor, to scientific materialism and to a belief in the literal dogma of the Catholic Church. He developed his wit and an impressive dancing style that drew the ladies' attention to his graceful, muscular physique, and away from what his mother had

convinced him was his ugly countenance. Years later, a female friend of the family was to tell me, in front of her acquiescent husband, that Harry J. Arth had been successful in his endeavor, for despite his looks, he was the sexiest man she had ever met.

Dominated in many ways by my father and eager to please, Mom nevertheless remained outspoken about her interludes of mental telepathy, which she inherited from her mother. Accounts of her “feminine intuition” would invariably launch my father into a plausible recital of how, despite the seeming inexplicable nature of this sort of thing, the laws of statistics can explain all coincidences. If the mood took him far enough, we heard his sincere declaration of statistical folklore that, if a million monkeys were typing randomly for a million years, a monkey might accidentally type out one of Shakespeare’s sonnets, as well as other intelligent-looking nonsense. He once insisted that if he saw a particular monkey typing out a masterpiece, even if it was only the first monkey to ever throw its prehensile paw at a typewriter, it would naturally surprise him, but it would not transgress the laws of probability. He added that he would also want to check the monkey’s IQ, but otherwise, he would be fairly sure that it would probably be a very long time before something like this happened again.

I was still lying on the floor of the hypnotist's office. I imagined my parents’ voices fading away as I became a differentiating zygote. The mass of dividing cells floated along until it found a place to attach itself on the uterine wall. The next nine months were mercifully compressed into one hypnotic session, so there was nothing for me to do but enjoy the ride. Soon I found myself in a state that was, and still is, very familiar to me. It has nothing to do with imagination or hypnosis.

It seems I have always been able to access memories of being in the womb. Sometimes, especially when I was young, and in a still, quiet state, I could hear muffled voices that must be like what one hears in the womb. Even today, especially while meditating, I can remember how it was to have my consciousness moving around to different parts of my fetus. At times I was a point of awareness around my navel that expanded in all directions. Other times, my consciousness was centered in different parts of my body—sometimes in a nubby hand, in a knee, or in my large cranium. When I was inside my head I had a spacious feeling, like being in a large cave. Usually, however, I felt centered in my newly forming body, like a naval captain surveying the construction from the belly of his future ship.

As a child, I came up with the term “flesh-machine dream” to describe to my mother dreams or waking sensations from being in the womb. If these are indeed womb memories, and I am virtually certain they are, then I understand why we ordinarily do not remember them. While approaching full term in utero, we begin to experience the first glimmers of consciousness particular to that experience, but it can only be later recalled if the mind re-enters the fetal state and re-experiences it—like going through a wormhole in the time-space continuum. I have since found this is also true with all non-ordinary states of consciousness, such as those states reached in meditation or with psychedelic drugs. Like Marcel Proust’s

tasting of tea and a small *madeleine* cake that set off a chain of childhood memories in his 4,215 page novel, *In Search of Lost Time*, a memory of a memory is not enough. To get the full flavor, I had to go back in time and live it all over again—and severely edit it for brevity's sake.

Photographs help, better than Proust's *madeleine*, and I spent years assembling them, taking pains to restore each one, and pondering every detail. Most critical to the telling were my journals—transcribed, rewritten, augmented with memories not yet recorded, digitized, catalogued, and verified with other sources. I felt I was living my life all over again, only this time with less angst and more insight. It took a quarter century of living on a parallel track in my spare time to boil it all down so the past cannot only catch up with the present, but even zoom ahead 35 years.



1.7. Mom boarding the S.S. United States. New York. Dec 10, 1952

But first, I will set the clock back to a little more than four months before I was born: On December 10, 1952, my mother set sail from New York harbor, on the newly christened S.S. United States to join my father who had already been shipped overseas to Burtonwood Air Force Base near Liverpool, England. She was four and a half months pregnant with me. Up to this point, as I lay on the rug in the hypnotherapist's office, my regression experience in the womb had mostly been a delight. I was a defenseless, happy field of vibrations in a friendly universe. It was a reassuring and comfortable place with engaging and interesting processes going on. I was an aquatic creature, merrily recapitulating phylogeny through ontogeny. My mother's heart was beating out the rhythm of the cosmos in time to waves of oceanic bliss. I was at play in fields of consciousness, apart from a world preoccupied with time. I was a Buddha baby of pure spirit, floating contentedly on a fragrant lotus. All that was about to change.

The world's fastest passenger cruise ship pulled away from the wharf at noon. It rode

cleanly over the light swells outside the Verrazano Narrows and headed into the open Atlantic. Mom told me she had watched the shoreline disappear into a fog bank as the motion of the ship tickled out of her the first sensations of queasiness.

The hypnotherapist urged me along, which set off a whirlpool that began to spin my world in a circle. At first I rode it gleefully, like a porpoise, splashing along for the sheer thrill of it. There was surrender at first, and trust, for the womb was my playpen and I was safely anchored to the carpet.

My mother lay in her bunk with me floating within. She stared at her reflection in the glossy enameled ceiling above her, trying not to throw up. I was feeling what she felt although I did not know what was going on. The North Atlantic in the winter is rough to begin with, but this particular week the ship encountered a storm the first day out. For five long days, when my mother was not in bed, she was hugging the toilet. She was afraid she would lose me. Even after she arrived in Southampton, she threw up for three more days.

My entire life I have suffered from motion sickness, which intriguingly, no matter how bad it gets, does not cause me to vomit. During hypnotic sessions, my suspicion about the perinatal source of this malady seemed to be confirmed. My re-experience of the ship incident was of being trapped and tortured, with no chance of escape. After repeated suggestions by the hypnotist to return to the experience with less and less emotional attachment, I was calm again and centered in my navel. There were more flesh-machine sensations, which I am familiar and comfortable with, but at the end of my gestation, the nightmare returned. The clean, clear amniotic fluid was perturbed. I felt unsettled. There were disconcerting interference patterns criss-crossing my aquatic world. Like a tiny whale, I could read these patterns and sounds as information. The still point was lost. The first contraction hit me like a tsunami. I was overwhelmed and felt the shape of my body like never before. I was large and felt like I might explode from the pressure. The contractions came closer together, like a series of hurricanes, each one showing its calm eye. In these long contractions, time came into being as our two hearts beat wildly, syncopating chaotically and separately tapping out the seconds, the minutes and the hours.

There was a large contraction and the amniotic fluid rushed out as if the plug had been pulled. My world was sucked down a drain and my head was stuck in the pipe. I was being squeezed into history, and forced to endure the pain of mortal existence. Yet another contraction smothered my resistance into complete surrender. A language of images from all the life that was ever born poured through me. I was every protozoa, every fish, every conceivable sort of hatchling. I was every human mother and every human baby in an endless cycle. I was being shat from the bleeding black hole of the cosmic void into matter. The vulvic volcano of the Earth Goddess exploded in the original Big Bang. My head was being twisted by forceps, my mouth and nose was being probed. I was flipped into the air, like a landed marlin, and the fire of my first breath seared my lungs.

As the light of an artificial sun swept over me, I screamed to the depth of my being. To me I



1.8a. & 1.8b. Sporting my French beret and devil-may-care attitude after getting first haircut from Dad. St. Helen's, England. 1954

was everything. To the doctor, I was nothing special.

He duly noted the date, April 27, 1953, and the time, 6:23 PM, and certified that I was an ordinary male human biped with all limbs intact. The location was Burtonwood Air Force Base Hospital. The doctor apologized to my parents about the forceps, telling them that my head would assume normal proportions within a few months. In the meantime, I was nicknamed "Bullet-Head."

Within the hour, I was buffed and polished, wrapped in a bundle, and presented to my mother for familial bonding. We gazed into each others eyes, each grateful in our own way. At least that's the way Mom tells it, and that's how I felt while lying on the hypnotherapist's rug, snug under a blanket, with glasses off and eyes closed.

My parents named me Michael, the most common name in the world, in honor of the popular archangel, partly, but also because they liked the sound of it. My name would have been Karen if I had been a girl.

Other than those experiences enhanced by hypnosis or psychedelics, I don't actually remember the disturbing events of labor, the noggin-crushing descent through the birth canal or the rude finale of being squeezed out by a vagina. But I do vaguely recall being bundled up and put out in the garden where I admired the snapdragons, tulips, and daffodils. My mother says that I was a very serious, thoughtful child and she dubbed me "the little philosopher." Often I walked around with a finger pointed in the air, as if I were about to pontificate. The



1.9a. Goodbye to rainy England, 1954.

photos make me think I remember England, but I only have one confirmed memory. We were in a taxi driving down a street paved with what my mother later described as being “boulder-sized cobblestones.” I looked out the window and observed a line of row houses. We were leaving home and going off on a great adventure in the New World. My mother was in the front seat and I was in back of her. She was wearing a soft, black-velvet hat. I was intrigued by the little knots at each intersection of the black netting that covered it. My mother told me I was remembering the final taxi ride to Burtonwood Air Force Base. She was sitting in the front next to the driver, wearing the hat I described, while I was sitting on my father’s lap in the back seat. It was August 1954, I was just over fifteen months old, and

this was the first leg of our move to Albuquerque, New Mexico. We were returning to the place of my conception.

At my mother’s relief, our return to the United States was not by ship, but by a four-engine transport plane hopping from Iceland to Greenland, to Newfoundland, and New York. Other than baby Michele being spilled out of her baby basket onto the runway in Iceland, there were no mishaps, but I’m sure that I must have been airsick. I don’t remember the rental house on Ash Street in Albuquerque where Greg was born, but the house my parents bought on Clifford Drive made a huge impression on me. The Sandia Mountains shone majestically and alluringly in the clear air across a stretch of flat desert, viewed from the front of the new house. The vistas were in startling contrast to my father’s description of England’s Great Smog of 1952, which was so bad that, in some



1.9b. Hello to the sunny American desert. Michele and I at grandmother’s house in Patagonia, Arizona. Summer 1955



1.10. With Michele. Albuquerque, 1956

cases, even indoor movies and performances were cancelled because the audience could not see the screen or stage. My father told me the taxi driver had to drive with the door open to make sure he was staying on the road.

Six thousand miles away from the black soot, fog and gloom, the gentle sun warmed our simple, adobe-style home. The beauty of the place made a tremendous impression on me when I was first becoming aware of the world. Tweeds and overcoats were exchanged for Bermuda shorts and loud shirts. My dad's curly pompadour was shorn off so the sun could come in for a landing on his flat top and warm his skull. My mother's olive skin turned so dark she

was often assumed to be mulatto or Hispanic. Just as I was getting to love Albuquerque Dad announced we were moving to an even warmer place....Texas.



1.11. About to be kissed by Michele. Albuquerque, 1957

