

Dear Friends,

Now where were we? It comes back to me now.

PART ONE: DIXIE

On January 3 I left San Francisco for deepest Dixie, to gather more counties and fill in two unvisited patches on my map. I flew to Atlanta and the next day drove out of the strip mall zone, through the brown winter landscape, to Dahlonega, site of the first American gold rush (1828). These are the hills about which it was said that there was gold in them thar. See <http://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/dahlonega/history.php>. The government even built a mint there to coin some of the gold. The nearby Kangaroo Conservation Center, which I had hoped to see, was closed for the winter, or summer as the kangaroos might think of it. See <http://www.kangarooconservation.com>. Georgia hills very beautiful through mist and fog, my car climbing rocky hillsides shining with wet green lichen, deep gullies to the sides. Blue mountains in the distance, a change from green and brown; feathery bare trees in umber like Corot, bushy green pines. FORSYTH, CHEROKEE, PICKENS, DAWSON, LUMPKIN, UNION, FANNIN, GILMER.

Got off the numbered highways finally, out of the woods, into a land of broad pastures and long valleys, brown and gold stubble in the fields, white-fenced horse farms. Chattahoochee River. Tumbledown barns and trim farmhouses, fields unplanted of course in the middle of winter, tule fog stretched long and thin in the mornings. Clouds of birds call in high bare poplar trees. Fog descends from unshaded white sky, gradually whitens below, dramatic and nuanced enough to please even this jaded connoisseur of fog. Blue hills turn black at the horizon with the changing of the light MURRAY, WHITEFIELD, CATOOSA, GORDON, WALKER, CHATTOOGA, and then across the state line into Alabama at Scottsboro, a place whose name still reeks of evil. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottsboro_Boys.

In Alabama I skipped a lot I could have seen – county museums and ante-bellum houses, of which I have visited nearly my lifetime limit, caverns and natural features which seemed less appealing in January than they might have been in June. I skipped the Helen Keller birthplace in Tuscumbia, where I could have seen the very pump at which Anne Bancroft taught Patty Duke to speak. I even skipped the W. C. Handy birthplace in Florence. I wanted to see them, but not very much. What I really wanted to do was keep driving. MARSHALL, MADISON, MORGAN, LIMESTONE, LAWRENCE, COLBERT, FRANKLIN. But Ah can repawt that regional speech is still alav an will in rural Dixie. Also regional food – biscuits, hushpuppies, sweet tea, okra, barbecue, catfish, pah. Most of this is not good for a person; even the okra and catfish were fraad.

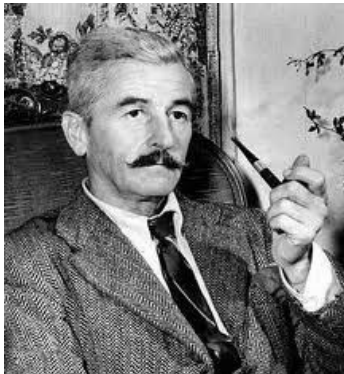


In Mississippi I did some tourism, starting with the Elvis Presley birthplace in Tupelo, a small railroad-style house (left).



That's Elvis in the center of the family picture.

The church where he learned music has been moved to the site. I didn't care much about Elvis while he was alive, but have come to appreciate him since. See <http://www.elvispresleybirthplace.com>. PRENTISS, ITAWAMBA, LEE, UNION, PONTOTOC.



Then it was on to William Faulkner's house "Rowan Oak," in Oxford on the campus of Ole Miss. I read *Light in August* to prepare – I had



not read Faulkner in some years. He is definitely a genius, but hard going anyway, what with the complex writing style and the dispiriting lowlifes he writes about. A slas of laff, I guess. Anyway he deserved the Nobel Prize a lot more than some folks. The house seems very roomy and airy because, unlike most historic houses, it is very sparsely furnished, which makes the rooms seem bigger. Relics – Faulkner's pipes, his traveling bag, his manual typewriter. And an air conditioner – Faulkner hated air conditioning, not such a great attitude to have in Mississippi, but his wife had one installed in her bedroom the day after he died in July 1962. It was in by the time the funeral started. I rested on a bench in his garden. See www.mcsr.olemiss.edu/~egjbp/faulkner/rowanoak.html.

LAFAYETTE, GRENADA, CALHOUN, CHICKASAW, CLAY, MONROE, then back into Alabama: LAMAR, FAYETTE, MARION, WINSTON, WALKER, CULLMAN, BLOUNT. Alabama, like other Deep Dixie states, is neatly tended, no rusty lawnmowers or old refrigerators littering yards as in some states I can think of. Town squares hard hit, as everywhere in America, vacant storefronts and "antique" stores, but less so than in the Midwest. Old men in feedcaps still gather to drink coffee, but now in McDonald's rather than Mom's Café. *Tempora mutantur*, as Edgar Bergen used to say, *nos et mutamur in*

illis.¹ Maybe this adage also means the bad old times have finally passed – I saw black people treated everywhere with the same chirpy Southern courtesy as everyone else. Indeed the Ole Miss student whose work-study job it was to sell me a ticket to Faulkner’s home was black, something which would have surprised Faulkner but I hope not displeased him, any more than it displeased the pretty white coed who came over to Rowan Oak to keep the student company on his shift.

When I saw I had time for a county trip in January, I planned it for the deep South to avoid the freezing weather. January is not a good time to pick up counties in North Dakota. Sure enough, though, Atlanta had a blizzard in mid-December. Well, I thought, that’s not going to happen twice. Wrong! As I made my way toward the Georgia line the weather grew colder, the white skies veined like marble. Looked like snow! In the mornings I had to pour hot water on my car windows to melt the frost, the first time I’d done that in 23 years, since I left Cape Cod in 1988.



And sure enough the snow came, and ice after that. I made it to Gadsden, Alabama, intending to cross into Georgia the next day and do a day’s B-level tourism in Atlanta. But the icy roads were unsafe to drive on. Also the governor of Alabama asked people to stay off the roads if possible, and it is my weakness that I can

deny a governor of Alabama nothing. So I holed up in the Motel 6 in Gadsden and waited it out.

After a day’s wait it was moderately safe to go back into Georgia, which I did (FLOYD, BARTON, PAULDING), and flew home on January 12. Forty-one new counties, pushing 69%. But ...

¹ Times change, and we change with [or *in*] them.

PART TWO: CABBAGELAND

All through my trip to Dixie I had been having disturbing chest pains. Angina, it was, and while my version was not exactly *painful*, it was disturbing because I recognized it as *ischemia* (heart denied oxygen because of blocked arteries). I had had these symptoms on and off for a while, and treated them with tiny nitroglycerin pills which do wonders when popped under the tongue.

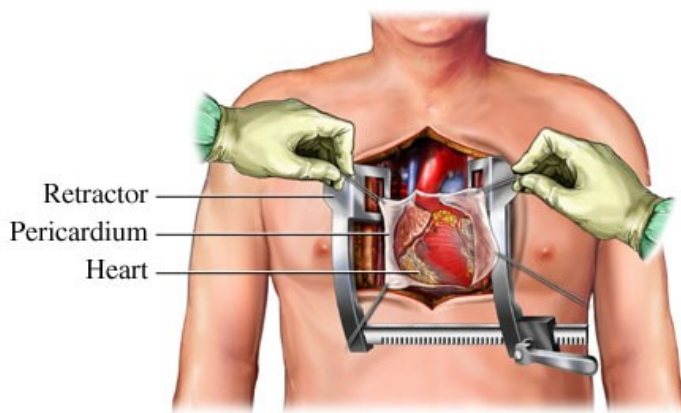
But nitroglycerin is not a long-range solution. Also I had gone from occasional single doses to frequent, repeated, multiple doses. My angina had gone from stable (not to worry) to unstable (worry!). The day after I got back to San Francisco I called my doctor, who told me (as I knew he would) to go to the emergency room. So on January 13 I checked myself into the California Pacific Medical Center at Webster and Clay Streets and awaited developments.

I had scheduled a bypass operation for the previous summer, but at the last moment my doctors changed their minds and decided to try one more angioplasty (inserting stents into blocked arteries to keep them open) to see how it would work. It was now clear how it had worked: not much. They looked into my heart one more time in the cath lab (heart catheterization laboratory) – no good. It was the knife for me.

But not quite yet – I was on a blood-thinning drug, and until it was flushed out and something else substituted they could not operate because I would bleed to death on the table. So they hooked me up to intravenous nitroglycerin, put me on bed rest, and told me to wait a week. I paced like a caged leopard for six long days. The night before the operation I wrote this haiku:

Get some rest tonight.
Anesthesiologists
Come in the morning.

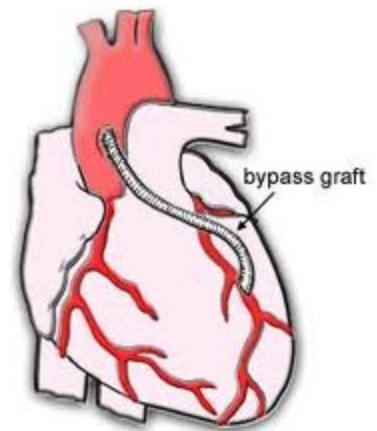
The next day they wheeled me down to the operating room. The orderlies told the nurses I was there for a *cabbage* (CABG = coronary artery bypass graft). The anesthesiologist slipped a mickey into my IV and told me I wouldn't remember much more. And indeed the next thing I knew I was in an intensive care unit, a breathing tube threaded between my vocal cords (meaning I could not speak), my hands tied to the side of the bed (so I couldn't rip out the breathing tube), and in considerable distress (no one had warned me about the restraints). In my drugged dreaming I sank to the bottom of a pool of despair and lay there waiting for tomorrow.



A cabbage is open-heart surgery, a very invasive operation. First the surgeons slice your chest open, cutting the sternum in two with a bone saw. Then they pry you open like a lobster, eat whatever parts they find appealing, and settle down to work replacing the affected arteries with veins taken from your leg. The old arteries are not removed, but are

bypassed the way a new channel in a river bypasses the old one. The old channel remains but is no longer used by the river, and becomes an ox-bow lake. The surgeons sew directly to the heart as many bypass grafts as they feel you need, and then close you up again. After they do this you are unlikely to feel like playing tennis for some months. (If I had played tennis before, of course, I might not have needed the operation at all.) For those who, unaccountably, want to know more about all this, see

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coronary_artery_bypass_surgery



When tomorrow came it was very unpleasant – they hadn't managed my pain medication right, and it got away from me. Gradually I brought the pain under control. The breathing tube came out, but I was still hooked up to other tubes, including an IV, an oxygen feed and a stylish urinary catheter. I could not put lifting strain on my arms, for fear of opening the incision – fortunately I knew from Alexander technique how to stand up without using my arms, which helped some.

At first I was maddened by voluble roommates, which would have driven me completely insane if it had gone on much longer. When I threatened to check myself out of the hospital if they didn't move me to a private room, then Lord Ganesha, the Mighty One, blessed be He, found me a private room in the transplant ward. I spent a lot of time there in a chair by a window, reading books. The hospital is a very isolating environment wholly separated from the world, its own little white-walled prison, and yet a person yearns for *more* isolation as people come in and out of the room, at any hour of the day or night they find convenient, drawing blood, dispensing pills, taking blood pressure,



picking up menus, offering occupational therapy – I was even visited by a Presbyterian chaplain, and a volunteer who wanted to soothe me by playing the harp!²

I had learned, however, that just as I could refuse medications, I could avoid these intrusions simply by leaving an order that I was not to be disturbed. So I left an order, and *stubbornly enforced it*, that I would see *no one* except my own doctors between bedtime and 8 AM, and that despite hospital routine everyone else would *have to wait* to take vital signs or draw blood or deliver breakfast or play the harp, or whatever. This helped me get some rest, which ordinarily a person cannot do in the hospital, which no doubt adds to the high level of infections and secondary conditions people develop there. The whole episode, the week before the January 20 operation and the week after, I remember now as one unified uncomfortable travel adventure, two weeks snowed in in a Motel 6 in Cabbageville, with pain.

On January 27, a week after the bypass, they discharged me and I went home. But not only had I not recovered, I had not yet even begun to convalesce. Every move was painful. I had a hospital bed that smelled of plastic; with the psychoactive pain pills that smell became wildly intensified, like a harsh musical note that would not quit. It poisoned my dreams, which were already poisoned by medication which made them repeat in endless horrible loops for the few disconnected hours I could sleep at all. I could not eat anything – the best I could manage was a kind of milk shake called Glucerna, and not much of that (I lost 37 pounds through anorexia). I carried around a pillow folded over and stuffed into a bag, to use as a splint by holding it to my chest when I coughed (agonizing), so I would not tear the stitches out of my incision. I could not walk across a room without gasping for breath. And the anesthetic had scrambled my brains – I could not think straight, could not make choices, could not write or even type. I sat staring for long periods – it took hours to summon the energy to brush my teeth. I was housebound – my house was like a suburb of Cabbageville, not the hospital but not the world yet either.

Gradually I got better. Medicare paid for an occupational therapist who helped me figure out an arrangement for my bed (three pillows taped together, three more arranged just so) so I could get in and out without undue strain and could get rid of the hospital bed. I paid a kind Malaysian woman to come every other day to shop for me, tidy up, prepare food (which I couldn't eat anyway) and help me



² “Awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early.” Psalm 108:2.

bathe – eventually when I was well enough to leave the house she drove me on short outings. But I grew exhausted very quickly. I was unused to this level of pain and incapacity, and unprepared for it – I had never even broken a bone before, let alone had one cut in half with a bone saw. Anything external (like the trauma of an operation) that can cause physical harm or injury is called an *insult to the body* – I’d never been so insulted in my life. My brother Christopher came out in February and helped me over the worst of it. When the surgeon finally told me I could drive again (no driving allowed for weeks because I would have needed to use my arms) I turned a corner, and could finally see my way out of Cabbageland. I couldn’t drive my beloved 1988 Subaru because it had a stick shift and no power steering, so I rented a modern car and began to re-enter the world.

Of course I had to cancel my trip to India set for February. And I cancelled a trip to France set for May, where I had planned to continue after visiting New York in April. But I held to the New York part of my plan – that seemed both to me and to my doctors like a reasonable goal for nearly three months after the operation, and a sensibly limited maiden voyage. By the time April 14 came around I was able to go. My breath was still short – I had fluid in my lungs and needed a wheelchair in the airport – and my chest still hurt (I now have the distinctive vertical scar that marks members of the Zipper Club like a secret Princeton tattoo). But I was off pain pills, my wits had mostly returned, I could eat again, and use my arms again, and sleep in a normal position. So why not try?

PART THREE: NEW YORK AND THE MIDWEST

On April 14 I flew to New York and settled into Christopher’s apartment on East 74th Street. New York was at its springtime showiest – 74th Street was lined with flowering trees. Pale green and white flowers looked like apple blossoms, but the trees didn’t look like apple trees – could they have been *crab*-apple trees, or ornamental pear? There was no question about the cherry blossoms in the park, though, or the magnolia trees, or the lilacs, or the hundred thousand (at least) bright red tulips planted on the median the whole length of Park Avenue. One day the apple/pear trees dropped their blossoms, and the streets were covered with white petals. They looked like confetti from a city-wide wedding until the doormen brought out their hoses and flushed them all away.

I spent about 2½ weeks in New York. Every day I met with people – nineteen different people by actual count – mostly family and old friends, but sometimes business meetings. Both my brothers, and an old friend, were all in new relationships – I checked out their choices, and approved of each one. Bless you, my children! Let joy be unconfined! I went to the Metropolitan Museum every few days – Cézanne’s card players were there (below left), and a special exhibition on open windows as a motif in early 19C art (shown below right: Martinus Rørbye, “View from the Artist’s Window” (1825)). The Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in the old Carnegie Mansion, around whose iron fences



I had played as a child, had a bang-up double feature – on the ground floor a dazzling retrospective of the work of the Paris jeweler Van Cleef & Arpels (above left, 2d row; note the “mystery setting” of the rubies, which conceals the stone mountings); on the second floor an exhibition of the textile work of Sonia Delaunay (1885-1979), one of the founders of Art Deco, who had as good an eye for color and line and movement as any artist who ever lived (above right, 2d row).³

There was lots more to do in New York, as the chilly rain of the first week turned to softer springtime. I went to the theatre – the best thing I saw was Tony Kushner’s amusingly titled new play *The Intelligent Homosexual’s Guide to Capitalism and*

³ “Color excited me,” she later said. “I didn’t attempt to analyze what I was doing. These were things that came from inside me.”

Socialism With a Key to the Scriptures, at the Public Theater on Lafayette Street. Full of wit and ideas, as always with his work, but also very involving dramatically, and a technical *tour de force* for the actors and the director as Kushner made half a dozen characters shout whole speeches across each other, all speaking at the same time. Seeing Garrison Keillor do his radio show live at Town Hall was a thrill too – he zones into small raptures when he sings. There was a rich variety of architecture to admire on nearly every street. I ate matzo ball soup, and whitefish salad, and hot dogs on the street, and the special squirting dumplings my brother Adam introduced me to in a restaurant on Pell Street in deepest Chinatown – you maneuver them onto a Chinese spoon and then gently pierce their bottoms with a chopstick, and they leak a delicious soup right into the spoon.

Adam and his Greek girlfriend Christina and I all went to a Greek restaurant in Astoria, Queens, for a delicious Easter lamb dinner. I lived in New York for decades but had never been to Astoria – it turned out to be a terrific place, like upper Broadway but much nicer, with a small town as well as a big city feeling, and lots of ethnicities besides just Greek. I went back to my old middle/junior high school to get my records – they so browbeat me there in the 1950s I was convinced I had failed all my subjects, but it turns out I didn't actually *fail* anything except athletics, which doesn't even count. A large and jolly Seder at Christina's apartment, which spreads out like the chambers and tunnels of Badger's house in *The Wind in the Willows* – my nephew Noah, at college in Wisconsin, was eerily present (through Skype) on a laptop on the sideboard. I spent a whole afternoon in the art history reference library at the Metropolitan Museum, looking at heraldry books. I went to a sophisticated rooftop party where almost everyone present was a travel writer. On April 29 I watched the royal wedding on television – good luck to them too! Be well and happy! I wish I had a uniform like those guys.



Then the next day I flew off to Chicago, on my way to visit Noah at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, where he started as a freshman in January. That makes him a Badger too, although not the *Wind in the Willows* kind – see left. Noah is doing very well as a college freshman – much better than I did back in my day. I visited his dormitory and went to three of his classes (including History of Agriculture in Society), and met some of his friends, and sat in when he did his radio show on WSUM-FM, the student radio station founded in 1921 (The Snake on the Lake!). Of course it is a scramble to get everything done – what college student, especially a freshman, does not scramble? But he seems to

complete the scrambles on time, which is more than I was able to do even as a junior (all right, even as a senior).

The university campus is very spread out, more like a suburb than the compact urban campuses I was used to. But everyone seems to get around without a problem on buses, and bicycles, and sturdy young legs. No one seems much over about 25 – it was a thrill



to be around so much youthful energy. Hundreds of pretty girls and handsome boys (or so they seemed to me, nearing 67 – I was the oldest person in every class, older even than the professors, and the age of Noah’s classmates’ *grandparents!*). Wherever you looked, about half of them were wearing smart bright red Wisconsin T-shirts or hoodies. Later I bought one myself, to show solidarity. I drove back and forth from my hotel to Noah’s dormitory, the classroom buildings,

and Madison restaurants using a GPS, which led me unerringly to the right place without my needing to have any idea where I was. Such an improvement over boring old maps!

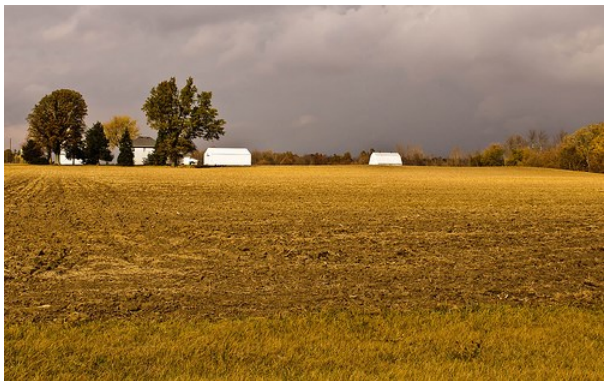
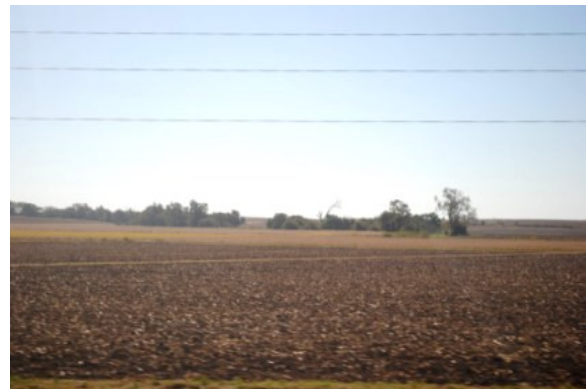
I had originally planned to fly from New York to Milwaukee and drive to Madison from there. But getting to Milwaukee from New York is easier than getting from Milwaukee to San Francisco – the flights I was offered all seemed to demand that I change planes in half an hour or spend a restless night in Akron. So I flew into Chicago instead, which meant that I had to return my car in Chicago, which in turn meant that I was able to take a couple of days at the end of my trip to pick up some more counties, not possible in Wisconsin as I had already been to all 72 counties there. I plotted a course which would allow me, in two days, to bisect an unvisited swath extending almost all the way from Omaha to Columbus. While I would only gain 19 new counties (in Illinois and Indiana), it would make the remaining parts of that swath, now divided, more easily doable. So after I left Madison I headed south on the Interstate, my GPS aiming me at LaSalle, near where the new counties would begin.



Familiar late 19C brown brick downtowns in LaSalle and Peru and Spring Valley – ornate cornices and brave false fronts. (Shown at left: Plymouth, in Marshall County.) At least half the storefronts were vacant. Out in the countryside there was new green on the trees, but frost was still remembered in the air. Flat fields, dark brown earth with furrows just visible – these had to be last season’s furrows because weeds and stubble told that the fields had not yet been replowed. A few yellow wildflowers, a dusting of purple gentian, and some gaudy redbuds, but spring had not

come to northern Illinois as it had to New York. Metal silos and farm structures.
PUTNAM, MARSHALL, WOODFORD, LIVINGSTON, MCLEAN, DEWITT, CHAMPAIGN,
VERMILION.

Past the state line in Indiana things looked different, as they sometimes mysteriously do across north-south borders which should make no difference (for example VT-NH and ID-MT). Indiana in the Wabash Valley was more springlike than the same latitude in Illinois. Both were flat, but there were lots more flowers, and the trees were fuller, and the weeds in the fields rose two or three feet high in some places (as a farm boy I *do* know the difference between weeds and a planted crop). Illinois was much browner and more severe, the verges cropped much shorter – it was like the difference between an army haircut and the untended ringlets of a poet. Farm buildings were more likely to be wood than metal. It was just softer, gentler, lusher, less disciplined. Compare the top two images (Illinois) with the bottom two (Indiana). Maybe you had to be there.



Though the Indiana outback: WARREN, FOUNTAIN, MONTGOMERY, TIPPECANOE. In small towns the tree branches, heavy with songbirds, met over the roadway. Back in the fields the sky looked huge over the flat earth, full of silver clouds tarnishing to black, portending rain which didn't come. At a town line in Fountain County a sign read "Welcome to Hillsboro, home to 600 happy people and a few old soreheads." I drove

past vast wind farms, turbines 250 feet high laid out in long rows, but in so many rows that they seemed to be scattered at random. I drove through stubbled cornfields, looking for a place to cross the Interstate which ran through them like an angry river. The tarnished silver of the sky turned to puffy white clouds on changeless Wedgwood blue. I saw an eagle rise from a secluded copse. WHITE, BENTON, JASPER, NEWTON, and then back into Illinois: IROQUOIS, FORD, KANKAKEE. And then it was over (2163 counties now, fewer than a thousand to go), and I drove back to the Chicago airport, and home.



And here I will stay, snug by the sea, until next time.

David

May 2011



P.S: My paper *Arthur Szyk: Heraldic Artist* was published in December by the Arthur Szyk Society, 12 pages illustrated in beautiful color. Arthur Szyk (1894-1951) [pronounced *Schick*, like the szaver] was best known for his patriotic and anti-Fascist polemical works, and for his works on Jewish themes such as the recently reissued *Haggadah*. But he was also one of the most talented and original heraldic artists of the 20th century. If anyone on this mailing list would like to have a copy of the paper, let me know and I will send you one.