

Growing up slowly in a fast-paced world:

The biography of an average guy.

By T. C. O'Haver

I was born in Atlanta, GA, at the Emory University hospital, in 1941. My family didn't stay in Atlanta for very long; my father worked for General Motors Cadillac division, southeast region, and we lived in several cities in his region. We always had a Cadillac "company car" in the driveway, at a time when they had loads of chrome and discrete little tail fins in the back. My mother and father were both raised in Tampa, FL; they had married young and my mother had never worked outside the home. My father traveled quite often for his work and sometimes my mother and my sister Patsy and I came along for a few days; I remember with fondness the passenger trains, cozy sleeper cars, and friendly Pullman porters, and the big city hotels where we stayed, with their monogrammed stationary paper and pens and inkwells.

My father, having been trained as an engineer at Georgia Tech, imparted to me an interest in mechanical and electrical things. I have a memory of the two of us building a crystal radio set, which involved winding a length of fine copper wire around a cylindrical Quaker Oats cereal box; I was amazed that it worked to pick up some local stations. Another memory of a different sort was related to our southern heritage. While we were living in Memphis, TN, we had a black housemaid who worked for us for some years and was very nice to my sister and me. She normally drove herself, but one day must have had car trouble and needed a ride home. My Mom drove and asked if I wanted to ride along. It was a longer drive than I expected, to a part of the city that I had not been to, and I noticed, without comment, that the homes there were different somehow, smaller, and perhaps shabbier. I was probably 7 or 8 years old, and I didn't think deeply about the causes, but it did leave a memory.

In 1950, when I was nine, my father died suddenly, and my mother sold the house and moved my sister and me back to her mother's home in Palma Ceia, in west Tampa. It was nice there. Every summer the aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends would gather for a week at a rented beach house on one of the many beaches on Florida's west coast. The grownups would visit, tell stories, cook, and drink, and we

kids would play, and swim, and collect shells, and get sunburned. There were always lots of friends of the family around and lots of stories, and laughter, and drinking, but not, in my memory, drunkenness.

There were many relatives living in Tampa, on both sides of the family. My mother had three siblings, who still lived in Florida at that time. There was Aunt Fran and her husband Jimmy, a sportsman who lived in Bradenton and had a pickup truck and a dog and probably a gun rack. He loved to tell stories about hunting and fishing. He worked for International Harvester and always brought those huge tractor inner tubes for our beach get-togethers each summer. They had three children. Then there was Bud, whose given name was Thomas, who married a librarian and had no children but loved playing practical jokes. And there was George, the youngest, who had been a Navy flyer and who married a nice woman with gray hair that everyone noticed. They loved Gilbert and Sullivan and knew all the words to sing along. They had two children and lived in a house on a lake near Gainesville, FL.

My maternal grandfather, who was a Dwyer and had Irish roots and worked for the railway, had died before I was born, and my grandmother, Corrine, found work in a millinery shop in downtown Tampa. She had been raised in Quebec and spoke French as a child. I remember her dressing up every weekday in a tailored suit and a hat, usually with a veil. I always wondered about the purpose of the veil; a satisfactory explanation was never provided. My mother, sister and I often met her for lunch downtown; my favorite was the Morrison's cafeteria, where I learned the phrase: "Your eyes are bigger than your stomach".

My father had various aunts and uncles living in Tampa, but I did not remember his father and mother. I was told that his mother had died quite young and that his father had given him up to be raised by an aunt with her children, who also lived in Tampa, near Tampa Bay. We visited them quite often. There was also another aunt, who by the time I met her, was living in a retirement home, where we visited her occasionally. To a child my age, she seemed formidable and gruff, perhaps due to the place where she lived, which as a child I remember only that it had long hallways with non-slip rubber runners that smelled like old tires.

Later in life, I learned that a distant relative had traced the genealogy of the O'Haver surname back 7 generations to 18th century Germany and Ireland, to a

Joseph Christopher Ohaver (b. 1728 Germany), who bought land in 1771 near Frederick, MD. There is evidence that the name had originally been Haver or Hever and had been “Irishized” before coming to America. In my youth, I always thought that that surname was rare, since it never showed up in the phone books (remember those?) of the towns we lived in. The Internet changed that. Now I know that there are many hundreds of O’Havers and OHavers all over the eastern part of the country.

It turned out that my father’s family was Baptist and my mother’s family was Catholic, and on alternate Sundays I was taken to services in both of those churches by relatives. At a certain point, I was given the choice of which I preferred. I thought of the Catholic services with their elaborate architecture and vestments, colorful statues, and nuns singing the Gregorian chant, then I thought of the Baptist with their plain-as-salt churches and members standing up and testifying in public. I did enjoy the protestant vacation Bible school, with their crafts and KoolAid and cookies, but it was no contest; I went Catholic.

Religion came up in another context, in the Boy Scout manual that I had as a child. In it there was a section about the importance of faith and reverence, accompanied by three uncaptioned drawings of religious services: one was a Catholic church, the second was clearly Protestant, but the third was a puzzle for me; it had an exotic look that I could not recognize. Not until years later did I realize that it must have been a Jewish synagogue. I don’t remember knowing any Jewish people growing up, but there was an older couple living across the street from my grandmother’s house who kept to themselves and always placed a single blue light in every window each Christmas season. Could they have been Jewish? I’ll never know. In 4th grade I did have some school friends with probably eastern European roots. One invited me into his house one day, where I met his mother, cooking in the kitchen, engulfed by the most delicious, fragrant, and spicy aromas I could imagine, and certainly far beyond the realm of my culinary experience at home. Could they have been Polish, or maybe Hungarian? Unfortunately, I didn’t know enough about the world to ask, and I wasn’t invited for dinner.

In the years after my father’s death, my mother struggled to get a job. It was the 1950s and jobs for women were limited and she had no work experience. But she was able to get a job demonstrating kitchen appliances in the housewares

department of the old Maas Brothers department store in Tampa, and later worked as a salesperson in an antique store, a job that she really enjoyed. Eventually we were able to buy our own house, in the same general area of Tampa.

After our mother remarried, my sister Patsy and I were sent to Catholic schools, I to the all-boys St. Leo's Preparatory School in San Antonio, FL, and to Jesuit High School in Tampa. My first cousin, the son of my father's brother, was also a student there and was about a year older. I remember that on a class hike through the woods one day, I became separated from the others and was lost in the woods for some time until I was rescued by my cousin. In later years, he would become a big fan of train travel and took many cross-country rail trips. Many years later Mary and I visited him when he was living in Land-O-Lakes, FL; Mary couldn't get over how much we looked alike.

Under the Benedictine brothers at St. Leo's and the Jesuit and lay teachers at Jesuit High School, I began to develop various interests and to take school more seriously. The Jesuits, I later learned, were renowned for their schools. Vaguely at first, an interest in science and engineering began to develop. Jesuit High was a school with a somewhat "classical" curriculum; there were no "shop" classes as in the public schools, but there was Latin, which, despite being a dead language, I took a surprising interest in.

Our stepfather at that time owned an electrical supply business in Tampa and had two sons from an earlier marriage. For a time, we moved into his apartment above his shop, but eventually they had a new home built on Davis Island, a nice residential Island in Tampa Bay near downtown. That was the first time we ever lived in a newly constructed house, and the smell of fresh paint and plaster always brings that time back to mind. I had a friend about my age who lived behind us there; he and I loved to explore the new home construction sites on the Island. One day we found a discarded spool of telephone wire that still had wire on it which we rigged it up between our houses so we could talk to each other using a couple of loudspeakers salvaged from discarded radios. (Years later we were to reconnect in the age of the Internet). I had also developed an interest in astronomy, and, following the directions in a library book, I built a small telescope that could see the rings of Saturn. I also tried to make a bigger telescope, but the mirror broke in an accident and I didn't have the heart to start over.

One of my oldest friends in high school, who was a senior when I was a freshman, had a job working in the school library and noticed my interest in books. He taught me how to repair and re-bind old books whose bindings had decayed – I guess the Jesuits had a thing for very old books. He was a “train spotter”, a fan of the railways and trains who, having a car, would take me out on some of this train spotting adventures. After his graduation he went into the seminary to study for the priesthood. We were destined to reconnect more than once, many years later.

Eventually my mother’s marriage fell apart and we moved to a smaller house on Cleveland St. in Palma Ceia when I was in 11th grade. That house had a little storage room in the back, behind the garage, which I was allowed to take over as a kind of workshop for my projects, in exchange for cleaning it out. My high school friends and I were interested in audio and music and electronics, and we loved to scour junk yards and dump sites for discarded radios, pinball machines, juke boxes, and the like. Eventually I got an amateur radio license and set up a transmitter in my “ham shack”. At around this time I got a cheap electric guitar and taught myself some basic chords; with some friends we put together a little band and played pop tunes and 50s rockabilly for community centers and other events. It didn’t last long. I reconnected with one of those friends many years later – he had been the best musician of the bunch and had played in coffee houses in the area – and I learned that he had made an adventuresome and long-term career as a sea captain sailing all over the world.

When I graduated from Jesuit high school in 1959, there were three full college scholarships given out to the top three students in class rank. I was ranked fourth. But luckily the student just above me was both a scholar and an athlete, and he was also offered an athletic scholarship which he accepted, leaving the academic scholarship to default to me. That was to Spring Hill College, a small Jesuit college in Mobile, Al, a 10-hour drive from Tampa. My mother drove me up there – this was an age when college kids mostly did not have their own cars – and I got settled in the freshman dorm. None of my high school friends were there; most stayed closer to home. There I met a student from Miami who became my best friend. He was a physics major, and not only an excellent student but also a musician and a popular and charismatic fellow who was very popular with the ladies. We were destined to reconnect many times over the years. (He eventually became a rocket scientist, both figuratively and literally, working for NASA). I had decided to major

in chemistry because I got an “A” in that subject in high school and only a “B” in physics. The next year, In November 1960, the first Catholic president of the United States was elected, which was a big deal on a Jesuit campus.

College was wonderful; for one thing, there were none of the bullies that were common in middle and high school. In those days everyone lived in the dorms, except for the few local “townies”. It was a mind-expanding experience, meeting and living with students from all over the country and with different ethnic backgrounds, including many students from South and Central America. If you befriended someone with a car, you might be included on a road trip to some exotic off-campus locations; I remember particularly an amazing trip one weekend to New Orleans and to the French Quarter, where we drank chicory coffee and ate beignets at the Café du Monde. The rest is a blur, if there was a rest.

I admired my teachers in college. There were all the usual college courses, including lots of philosophy and theology (a Jesuit specialty) and several years of German from a rather formidable man named Mr. Schmidt. My friends and I used to try to talk to each other in pidgin German, tossing in English words when we didn’t know the German. Sid Caesar did it much better on TV in the 1950s.

In junior year I took organic chemistry from a cultured gentleman who played recordings of classical music during our laboratory classes; essentially the first classical music I had ever really listened to. He and his wife were musicians who played in the Mobile symphony orchestra, and I used to babysit for them on symphony nights. At one point someone gave me a gift boxed set of classical music hits (this was still in the vinyl era). Most of it did not make an impression, except for the overture to Wagner’s “Die Meistersinger”, a magnificent bit of orchestral exuberance that I still enjoy hearing to this day.

I was always fond of music; my folks had lots of 78 rpm record albums of 40’s swing bands that they played all the time while I was growing up – Glen Miller, the Dorsey brothers, Benny Goodman. But contemporary popular music dominated my high school and college years, especially the folk music of Joan Baez, the Kingston Trio, Bob Dylan, and Peter, Paul and Mary, and the early rock-and-roll of Chuck Berry, Buddy Holly, and Ray Charles. But then in the middle of all that the Beatles arrived and shook everything up! I remember the entire college campus being plastered with “The Beatles are coming!” signs.

I had joined the Army ROTC on campus, for reasons that are unclear to me now, and I enjoyed the uniforms and the martial music and the tactical training. I stuck with it through summer camp in my junior year, in Fort Benning, GA. That experience was partly miserable and partly fun – mostly the parts about heavy weapons and blowing things up. But I was not destined to be a soldier; I was cut from the program the next year for having a “poor command voice”, a disability that remains with me even now. But being a chemistry major, I was evidently more valuable continuing my education than as a PFC draftee, and so I was never called up during the Vietnam era as some of my friends were.

As my college graduation approached in the spring of 1963, I began to wonder about what was next. A chemistry-major friend of mine, who was two years ahead of me, had decided to go on to graduate school and get an advanced degree at the University of Florida in Gainesville. This was all a big mystery to me. How could I ever afford such a thing? While I was finishing college at Spring Hill, we corresponded by (postal) mail, as I followed his exploits. He told me that chemistry and other science graduate students could obtain *paying jobs* as laboratory assistants for undergraduate lab courses, helping students and grading lab reports. This could pay for tuition and enough left over for food and basic housing. By that time, I had been in one type of school or another for most of my life, so going to graduate school seemed like the thing to do; at least it sounded better than the summer jobs that I have taken in my college years – construction and postal delivery being the most memorable.

Summer jobs can teach valuable, if painful, lessons. During my college years, I did postal deliveries during holiday rush times. After my initial instruction, I was eager to get the job done, so I sorted my mail and planned my route and returned to headquarters when I was done, ready for the next batch. Rather than being pleased, however, my fellow postal workers said, in effect: “What’s the hurry, son? It’s not a race”. So much for efficiency. My construction job, working for a company in Tampa that manufactured pre-stressed concrete railroad ties, was better and more varied. Since I had my driver’s license by that time and had learned on a stick shift, I was tasked with driving the company pickup truck to make various deliveries. One day I was to pick up a flanged railroad wheel, which would be used for testing. These wheels are bigger than you might imagine when seen up close and weigh nearly 500 pounds each. It was loaded onto my truck with a crane. As I drove back

to base, I stopped for a red light at the top of a steep hill, and when the light turned green, I shifted into first and pressed the gas a little too hard. The truck lurched ahead, but the wheel, compelled by inertia, remained fixed, crashing through the tailgate as I drove out from under it. I pulled over to inspect the damage, and the lady in the car just behind me stuck her head out the window and said: “Young man, would you please move that from the roadway?” I had to find a phone, call back to base, and ask for help. The rest of that day was fairly miserable.

Graduate school was even better than college! Following the lead of my friend, I signed up to do research with a renowned analytical chemist. All my courses were in the sciences, which I liked; no more philosophy and theology. Together with several other graduate students we moved into rented quarters rather than a dorm. With a regular salary, I had a little extra money to spend. But the biggest thing was, I had a car, a 1963 VW beetle that my Mom bought me as a college graduation present. I was all set. Then on November 22, I went into the office to complete some paperwork, and suddenly all the secretaries and administrative people were crying – President Kennedy had just been assassinated in Texas! It seemed like everyone walked around in a daze. From first Catholic president to assassination in just three years.

After about two years of graduate school, all the required coursework was complete and the remaining time I spent happily working on my research and writing papers. One of the nice things about graduate school was the possibility of auditing classes for pleasure, which was a completely novel idea after all those years of required courses. My old interest in music, planted years before, lead me to audit a class in music history. What a pleasure that was. With no pressure of tests and grades, I could relax and really enjoy the knowledge and experience of the teacher. This is when my interest in classical music really began to grow. At about that time, there were music sales events on campus where hundreds of (vinyl) records of classical, jazz and pop music were piled up for sale at quite low prices. I began to build my record collection of jazz, classical, and especially Baroque, music. Of all the classical composers, Bach became and remains my favorite to this day.

At one point in graduate school several of us chemistry graduate student got together and rented a big old frame house in Gainesville that had a large front

porch and French doors leading to a spacious living room. We thought it would be a great place for parties, which it was. To save money, we planned to cook for ourselves, taking turns shopping and working in the kitchen. I volunteered to cook, more based on optimistic expectation than of previous experience. I did learn quite a bit, such as that people like fried food better than anything, that pork liver is cheap but not the same as calves' liver, and that any liver is not a popular choice. The house was sparsely furnished, and we thought we might improve that. One day we came across a local bar that was remodeling and selling their piano, a baby grand with a padded bar replacing the usual top. Even though none of us really knew how to play, we bought it for \$200, including the piano top that was in storage. It was a fun addition to the house, despite smelling of stale beer for the first few months, or perhaps because of that. After graduation I bought out the others' shares of the piano and took it home in a rented trailer, with plans to refurbish it. That old piano stayed with me for years, always with the explanation that I planned to learn piano restoration when I retired. That never happened; we finally paid to have it removed in 2019.

As we approached the late 1960s, I was busy working on my graduate degree while many of my friends were becoming involved in the protest movements against the war in Vietnam. I could feel that history was being made, but I was too focused on my work to be a part of it. By that time, I had pretty much decided to stay in academia and seek a professorship somewhere after graduation. I couldn't imagine a better job, although of course the majority of adults I had known in my life up to that time were teachers or professors, so my experience was admittedly rather limited. I filled out a couple of applications for available positions in my field of research.

In October 1967, while I was writing my dissertation, my research director's wife set me up with a blind date with one of her elementary education student teacher candidates, who also planned to graduate the next year. The espoused reason for the match was that we were both Catholic. Up to that point, none of my dates or girlfriends in high school, college, or graduate school had really gone anywhere. I was nerdy, not a good dancer, not a great catch by most measures. But I did have a good education and I might have decent job prospects. So, when I went to pick up this girl for a first date, I was dumbfounded to see this beautiful young woman, named Mary Pelaez, who seemed to be quite happy to be with me. We went to a

movie – a comedy, where, I later learned, I laughed out loud unexpectedly. Several other dates quickly followed, and before long we settled into a promising relationship. It seemed that my choice of religion years before was paying off. Within weeks, I drove her to Tampa to meet my mother. In December I asked her to marry me and she accepted, but we waited to tell the families because we didn't want them to think it was a rush job. Mary was from Hialeah, FL, and her folks were Cuban, though she was born in New York. Of course, being raised in Tampa, I was a little familiar with Cuban culture, and especially Cuban food; Ybor City, the historic neighborhood of Tampa, was a popular place for everyone to go for authentic Cuban and other Spanish restaurants. My mom often fixed black beans and rice and other Cuban dishes. My stepfather had Cuban roots. Not long afterwards, I met Mary's family, who also seemed to be pleased with the arrangement. They ran a successful formalwear business in Hialeah. Her mother, Gloria, was a force of nature and very interested in everything. She embraced technology with gusto, even setting up an early satellite TV system and a VCR recorder to tape shows. Mary and I planned to be married in a local Catholic church there the next summer.

In the spring of 1968, I received an invitation to interview for a tenure-track assistant professorship position at the University of Maryland in College Park. I had never been that far north; in fact, I had to look at a map to remind myself what the neighboring states of Maryland were. I was pleased to see that the University was close to Washington, DC, which certainly must be an interesting place to visit, and not far from Baltimore and other big cities; even New York City would be only a few hours' drive. Maryland had mountains, a seashore, and a very large bay. And in the spring, I soon discovered, the weather is cool and crisp and the whole place is in bloom with flowering trees unlike anything I'd ever seen before. The interview went well, and I was offered the position, which I accepted.

Meanwhile, Mary had attended a job fair in Gainesville, where she was surprised to see a booth from Montgomery County, MD, of all places, where they were looking for new elementary teachers. She asked them if that was close to the University and learned that it was just in the adjacent county. They offered her a job on the spot. The pieces were all falling into place.

That summer, after graduation, I received a call from the chemistry department at the University of Maryland. They were looking to fill a summer school freshman chemistry teaching spot and they asked me if I was available to come up three months early on a contract basis. I agreed, thinking that I could use that time to get settled and find an apartment before our marriage. Fortunately a fellow graduate student from our group and his wife had already been living there for a year, working for an analytical instrument company based in Silver Spring, MD, and they generously offered to put us up until we found a place to stay. We drove up together, spending one night on the road in a motel in separate rooms - by today's standards an unnecessary bit of fastidiousness. We found an apartment close to the University, after which Mary returned home to prepare for our wedding. For me, teaching summer school was a good place to start a career; many of the students had failed that class before, so I didn't mind spending most of time going over the basics in detail. Sometimes being young and inexperienced helps. In August, with a bit of money in my pocket, I returned to Florida.

Our marriage in August 1968, was filled with family and friends. The reception was held at Mary's folk's house in Hialeah, with Mary and her mom fixing the food. We spent our wedding night at the Fontainebleau hotel on Miami Beach, then honeymooned in the Bahamas.

Moving all our stuff up to Maryland together – clothes, books, record albums, stereo and speakers, and wedding gifts - would have overtaxed my VW beetle, so we rented a small truck. I drove the truck and Mary followed in the VW, and we had a pair of walkie-talkies to stay in contact. This was not a problem until we got to the Washington beltway at the Springfield interchange, where we got separated in the heavy traffic and took different exits. We didn't have roads like that in Florida at that time. It took us a while to get that sorted, and I still find that interchange confusing to this day.

Starting our careers and our lives together in a new part of the country was exhilarating, but it was also a very troubling time in our country, with the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy that spring and summer and all the anti-war protests. On my way to my very first class that fall, walking across campus looking for my assigned classroom, my eyes began to burn; it was

tear gas from the National Guard troops on campus trying to control a group of students who were protesting the Vietnam War and occupying one of the buildings.

Mary and I both benefited from the support of our older colleagues at work, many of whom became lifelong friends, and we settled in quickly. Since we still had only the one car, we worked out a routine where one of us would drop the other off at work. We lived in apartment buildings for the first five years, before we started looking for a house. One of our great pleasures in those days was exploring Washington and surroundings: The Mall, the museums, the memorials, Georgetown, Alexandria, the international restaurants, Baltimore, the mountains of Western Maryland and Virginia, and the Eastern Shore. This was all new to us. We visited New York City and stayed in the historic Algonquin hotel and saw our first Broadway show and ate hot pastrami in a deli that had quarrelling old men for waiters. Another highlight was a camping road trip through upstate New York to Montreal, Quebec for the "Man and His World" exhibition that had followed the 1967 World Expo there; we carried a tent and everything else stuffed into our little VW Beetle.

It would be five years before we started a family and began to look for a house, focusing on the area between our workplaces. Christopher was born in January 1973 and Robert in April 1975. We had settled on a nice little split-level house in Kemp Mill, about a 20-minute drive to either workplace. It had a yard for the kids to play in and for us to have a garden for the first time. We eventually put in a rose garden and a little vegetable garden. Within the first week there we noticed that on Friday evenings, many families could be seen walking together, all dressed up. We thought this was unexpectedly formal; we had not realized that there was an Orthodox synagogue just two blocks away.

Mary had decided to go back to work after the baby, so we arranged for in-home day care, which worked out very well. When the kids were old enough, they attended a co-op pre-school, and I scheduled my times working there in between my classes at the University. When they went to public schools, one of my jobs was fixing the boys' lunches: a sandwich, a small bag of chips, fruit, and a sweet. Sometimes I added a little note.

There were other young families with kids in the neighborhood, and we got to know three of them. They had some kids younger and some older than ours, so we could

swap children's clothes and toys and other things no longer needed. Around 1972 they invited us to join a dinner group that they had formed, which came to be known as the "Gourmet Group". The idea is that we would plan a formal dinner four times a year that would rotate between the four homes, and each family had a rotating assignment to prepare and bring the appetizer, main dish, vegetable, dessert, and wine. At first the rule was that you could not fix anything you had made before, and the themes of the meals were planned by the wives beforehand. The first rule encouraged innovation. This saved the cook's honor if the recipe misfired, as it memorably did with the cold cherry soup, the caviar mold, and the rotisserie-grilled duck that caught fire when no one was watching and burned the wings completely off. But we had many great meals, including a Williamsburg-themed feast that included a Christiana Tavern Game Pie made with rabbit and venison, with a traditional English trifle for dessert. In later years we added weekend excursions to B&Bs or country Inns. Memorable ones include the Ashby Inn in Paris, VA, Antrim 1844, in Taneytown, MD, The Inn at Little Washington, and several vineyards in Virginia. And in 2000 we all took a Mediterranean cruise together. This same group has continued to this day, for over 45 years, enduring the sad passing of two of the wives, and was interrupted only by the Coronavirus epidemic of 2020.

In later years, the other families moved on to larger homes in the upscale neighborhood of Potomac, and in about 1980 we too moved to a larger 3-story home in the Stonegate neighborhood, with a deck overlooking a wooded lot, again choosing a location close to our workplaces. We had always been relatively frugal and preferred to have only one car most of the time. But with two incomes, we were comfortable, and we were not spending a lot on fancy vacations or cars or private schools or other luxuries. So, in the early 1980's when the IRS issued rules that allowed employees to contribute to 401(k) plans through tax-deferred salary deductions, we started regular and gradually increasing contributions, which now, 40 years later, provides about half of our retirement income.

Mary was teaching 4th, 5th, and 6th grades at Fairland Elementary in eastern Montgomery County. When home computers came out in the late 1970s, we were enthusiastic early adopters, thinking that there must be some useful educational applications. By the mid-1980s many of the local schools were buying computers and I helped Mary set up a student computer lab of Macintoshes networked to a

printer, to be used for student writing projects. When the Internet became available in the 1990s, we set up a web site featuring the students' work, with the idea that virtual "publication" might increase students' incentive to do their best work. The site became very popular, was viewed by thousands all over the world, and won some early awards.

Over the years we have had many interesting interactions with international visitors and people with diverse backgrounds. Our next-door neighbors in Stonegate were a fascinating couple who spent their winters in Maryland and their summers in Geneva, Switzerland. They were working for the U. S. State Department as Russian-English interpreters. He had been born in Estonia, emigrated to the US as a young man, served in the US army, and later became the chief interpreter for the SALT and START talks (Strategic Arms Limitation/Reduction Treaty) and they both had worked for several U. S. administrations. They had two sons who were raised speaking English, Russian, and French. From 1982 to 1983, they rented their home to a Swiss child psychologist from Nyon who had a fellowship at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda for two years. He brought his wife and two young children and an English *au pair*. We helped them get settled and became good friends, often enjoying a meal or a glass of wine with them. It is from them that we learned the Swiss tradition of raclette, which we have made a regular part of our entertaining, especially at Christmas. When they returned to Switzerland, we promised to stay in touch and to visit them (which we did right after we retired in 1999).

One time in the late 1980s we hosted a Fulbright scholar from the University of Kazan, Russia, who came to visit my laboratory for a few weeks. He was friendly and spoke good English. To help him save money, he stayed with us and we had meals and many interesting conversations together. At one point we compared our family finances in detail and learned that his greatest expense was food whereas ours was housing. We fed him typical American food, which he found interesting and mostly good; he had never seen fresh asparagus or corn on the cob. We also helped him with shopping; and when he returned home, he took gifts for his family: jeans for his wife, a Barbie doll for his daughter, mix tapes of heavy metal rock music for his son (prepared helpfully by our sons), and for himself an IBM clone personal computer.

Other visitors we had in our home over those years included some proud East Germans and a nice couple from Romania. At the time we had a personal computer with a dial-up modem connected to some pre-internet online services. Our visitors were all interested in this but very concerned. Did I have permission to log on to these sites? Who might be watching us? Could we get into trouble?

From a technological point of view, the late 20th and early 21st century have been an amazing time to live. My first experiences with electronics were with vacuum tubes, which were replaced by transistors in my college years, again replaced by integrated circuits in my graduate school years, much of which eventually morphed into digital computerized form after the 1980s. For a long time, all domestic light bulbs were based on the incandescent bulbs originated by Thomas Edison, long after his audio and motion pictures technology had been obsolete; now they are almost completely replaced by newer technologies. I remember when I first heard of the proposed development of a tower-based cell phone system, and of the global positioning satellite system; I thought them interesting but wildly impractical. How wrong I was. And although I took an early interest in the Internet, I did not realize where it would go commercially. The synergistic merging of these technologies produced results far greater than their individual abilities, for example the way that Uber merges the private automobile, smart phones, GPS, and the Internet into a business that requires no physical plant and few permanent employees, and yet provides a valuable service. That benefitted us particularly on a trip to Paris in May 2018, where Mary and I used Uber to get around easily; it handily solved both the language problem and the money problem.

Faculty positions at universities are based on three things: teaching, research, and professional service, and I tried to participate in all three. Over the years I got the expected class assignments, committee work, promotions, and several grants to fund research and the development of new courses. I had a small but excellent group of graduate students and we published lots of papers and gave many talks at national meetings. In the late 1970's, an optical equipment manufacturer based in Connecticut approached me about developing a commercial version of one of my research prototypes; that led to a very interesting period of consultation and collaboration and the development and marketing of two devices based on my work. It was great fun working with the engineering, manufacturing, and marketing people, which was a completely new experience for me.

Another highlight were the international invitations in the early 1980s, as up to then I had never done any international travel, except to Canada. In 1980 I was invited to give a series of talks in London, Edinburgh, and the Netherlands, and in 1981 I was invited to Hitachi in Mito, Japan, and to Sophia University in Tokyo. I found Japan and Japanese culture really fascinating. In 1982 I took a sabbatical year to work at Strathclyde University in Glasgow, and later Mary and the boys flew over to spend that summer with me. We stayed in a nice little flat in Virginia Street, in the tobacco district, a few blocks from the University. We didn't need a car; I walked to work each day and Mary and the boys explored the city and much of the west of Scotland via bus or train. It was truly a wonderful time for all of us. Then in 1985 I was invited to Beijing, China, to the Chinese Academy of Geological Sciences and to the First Beijing Conference and exhibition on Instrumental Analysis. The last one was especially interesting because my talk was interpreted in real time into Chinese as I spoke, an interesting and somewhat unnerving task. China at that time was not highly developed, which made the whole experience more exotic and memorable. Later, when Mary and I toured China in 2019, it was a completely different world.

Family activities have always been important in our lives. In the early days we did a lot of camping with the boys in the Maryland and Virginia state parks. All our families on both sides were still in Florida, so we normally took our summer vacation trips down there to visit Mary's family in Naples and my mother and sister in Tampa and to enjoy the beaches. One of the family activities that we all enjoyed was to spend a week in a rented houseboat on the St. John's river in northern Florida, with me, Mary, Chris, Robert, my mom and sister, and her daughter; seven of us altogether. It was comfortable, with electricity, air conditioning, a small kitchen, a BBQ grill, a huge cooler filled with ice, a two-way radio, and a TV/VCR. We even towed a small motorboat, which Chris and Robert liked to take out for exploring and fishing. Some years after that, Mary and I took my mom and sister on a Caribbean cruise on Holland America for a week – our first cruise up to that time – which we all enjoyed.

When it came time for our two sons to be thinking about college, Chris decided on the University of Maryland at College Park, where he was entitled to free tuition. He elected to live in the dorms and in shared apartments rather than at home, and he took a double degree: BA in studio art, and a BS in computer science. Robert preferred a smaller school, so he decided on St. Mary's College of Southern

Maryland, about 3-hour drive, where he majored in biology, swam on the college swim team, played in a band, and made many life-long friends. After graduation, they were both anxious to start their work lives and to buy their own homes as soon as possible. Chris got married and bought a house in Bowie, MD. Robert bought a house in popular downtown Silver Spring. We are very proud that they have steady, well-paying jobs and own their own homes, but still have stayed within a half-hour drive of us. One of our greater pleasures in life is to see our two sons getting together for fun activities, such as boating or fishing trips.

As the decade of the 1990s came to an end, we began to think about retirement, after 30 years of professional service. By then Mary had taught at three schools and in the summer enrichment programs for gifted students and had set up computer labs in two schools. I had had an average academic career; I directed the research of 25 graduate students, taught or developed seven courses, wrote about 100 published papers, and gave over 200 talks and seminars in six countries. But retirement would require planning. So, we both took a class on retirement financial planning sponsored by the University. This was very eye-opening; it taught me a lot I did not know and showed us the wisdom of having started an early 401(k) plan when we did.

One of the first thing we did after retirement in early 1999, was to test out the possibility of staying in Florida for all or part of the winter, to be closer to our Florida families, although being away from our longtime home and out friends in Maryland for that long seemed daunting. So, at first, we rented a condo for just two months, in the historic district of old Naples. We enjoyed that so much we increased our stay to three months the next year.

In September of that year, we decided it was time to make a long-delayed visit to our Swiss friends who had been our neighbors in Maryland in the 1980s. That turned out to be a fabulous trip; they acted as tour guides and took us all around the country, to Lake Geneva, Lausanne, Montreux, Neuchatel, Yverdon, St. Ursanne, Porrentruy, Bern, and through the Alps on the Simplon car-train to Zermatt and up the Gornergrat to see the Matterhorn. Other highlights included a trip to the opera festival in Avenches that is held every year in June or July. There, we sat on the stone seats of an old Roman amphitheater, surrounded by French-speaking Swiss with baskets of wine and snacks, listening to Verdi's *Nabucco*, an

Italian opera about the Israelites and the Babylonians, acted out by sword-swinging warriors running through the aisles! What an experience. So much history, so much culture!

A few days later, our host said that we were running low on wine and we should go buy some. I was thinking of a quick trip to the nearest liquor store, but instead we headed west, toward the French border and crossed into southeastern France, which, looking at a map, I realized was the Burgundy region. More specifically, it was Beaujolais, where they make a famous light red wine. We spent the day driving through what I called “wine label towns”: Brouilly, Morgon, Mâcon, Montrachet, Pouilly, Fuissé, Meursault, stopping whenever we saw a farmhouse near the road with a “degustation” sign, meaning “tasting”. Our host would chat up the winemaker, taste a couple of wines, and buy a few bottles. This continued, happily, until we decided that it was too late to drive back home, so we would spend the night on the road and do some more the next day. But the first several places we tried were all booked up, and finally we realized that it was a big holiday in France. The only thing we could find was basically a truck stop, which was very basic, noisy, and cramped, but it was available and cheap. As we left the next morning, the proprietor told us that breakfast was included. We walked through a door, and there was a dining room laid out with crisp white linen tablecloths and napkins, hot coffee, and fresh croissants and butter! The French have their priorities. On the way back to Switzerland, our trunk full of wine, we stopped at Cluny Abbey, a Benedictine monastery first built in the year 910, destroyed in the French Revolution and later rebuilt.

In September 2001, we flew to southern France with another couple from our gourmet group and rented a farmhouse for two weeks, just north of Aix-en-Provence. With a rented car, we planned daily road trips to the surrounding countryside. It was a wonderful trip, with many visits to charming towns and their fabulous farmers markets. One day we headed east along the Riviera through Cassis, Cannes, Grasse, and Saint-Paul-de-Vence, stopping at the Foundation Maeght modern art gallery in the hills just north of town. Returning to our car afterwards, we heard on the radio that a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center in New York and that the White House was being evacuated! We immediately turned around and headed back via the A8 autoroute. Reaching the first toll gate, we were surprised that the operator there, instantly recognizing that

we were Americans, excitedly expressed his sorrow and concern. We received the same expressions from many French citizens over the next days. The scenes shown of French television were truly frightening. We would have cut our trip short and returned to the USA right away, but all flights were cancelled. Eventually we were able to phone all our kids back home and verify that they were safe. As luck would have it, flights were restored by the end of our rental, and we returned to Dulles airport on our regularly scheduled flight the day it reopened.

By 2003, the rent for our place in Naples had risen so much that we decided that it would be better in the long run to buy something. I had used a spreadsheet to work out various alternative future financial plans: should we remain in Maryland, renting or buying a Florida home, or change our residence to Florida, or keep or sell our Maryland home, considering the tax consequences, etc. We checked with the loan officer and our bank, and it seemed that buying a condo and changing our residence to Florida would work well for us, financially and familywise. We focused on the fast-growing North Naples area, specifically considering the closeness and walkability of nearby stores and restaurants, rather than the architecture and layout of the condos themselves, which all seemed to be rather similar. At one point we stopped at a shopping center called *Naples Walk*, where there was a nice new Publix supermarket, several restaurants, two pharmacies, and the Collier County Library one block away, figuring that any residential development we could walk to from there would be a good candidate. We found two very near: *Pipers Grove* and the *Orchards*. We walked into both, talked with some residents, and found that they liked the area and their development. On the way back we stopped at a real-estate office to inquire about available units and discovered that there were none for sale at that time, in either development. The very next day Mary was looking at the local newspaper and noticed the name “Piper’s Grove” in the “For sale by owner” want ads section. No wonder it was not in the listings. We called the number, and the man who answered said that today was his day off and if we wanted to see the unit, he was home. We did, we liked it, and by the end of the day we had a signed contract. We have been living there since.

Over the years we have been saddened by the deaths of too many family members, loved ones, and friends. It is the unavoidable burden of growing older. Mary’s brother Mario died in 2001. My mother died in December 2006, at age 91, and my sister died too young in April 2014 at age 68. Mary’s mom died at age 99 in

September 2015. One of our Gourmet group couples lost their young son in a car accident, and two have lost their wives. By now almost all the uncles and aunts we loved growing up have passed. We have lost good friends, colleagues, old roommates, and neighbors, all seemingly too soon. We miss them all.

When I retired from the University of Maryland in 1999, I decided that I needed an active outdoor hobby. As our Maryland home had a ½ acre lot that was all wooded, I decided to take up landscape architecture and ornamental shade gardening as a hobby. I took a class in landscape horticulture from Montgomery College, given at the nearby Brookside Gardens, and began to learn how to identify trees and bushes and to clear our back woods of undesirable species. The original old deck on our house had started to decay, so we had it replaced by a custom-designed two-layer deck, which gave us for the first time a direct stairway to the back woods. We started adding crushed stone paths, stacked slate walls, and small ponds for water plants and goldfish. Eventually we had a deer fence installed around the garden to keep out the deer, who were eating everything in sight. Each year we would add another section or re-make an older section. Over the years the garden served as a great place for outdoor parties and get-togethers with friends, co-workers, and former students. During the global pandemic of 2020, this garden would be a refuge, providing privacy, social distancing, and an opportunity for healthy exercise. We stopped eating out, visited local farmers' markets, cooked all our meals at home, and took advantage of the curbside pickup option of local stores.

In my retirement I also wanted to remain professionally active in some way. I was always a better teacher than researcher, so I started a kind of on-line volunteer scientific outreach consulting project helping science workers with data processing problems and I began writing a handbook on the mathematical and computer techniques to process scientific data. Its development is described in the afterword of [my book](#) (page 458). Over the years, the project has become popular, has attracted over 2 million visits on the Web, and has received rave reviews. (<https://terpconnect.umd.edu/~toh/spectrum/TOC.html#comments>).

Mary and I had always wanted to do more traveling, but in our working years, with the kids living at home, it was difficult to manage. So, after 1999, we began a period of intensive travel, both domestically and overseas. We took road trips to many states and national and state parks in the USA and to Canada, and we went on

cruises and land tours to more than 60 countries around the world. Most of our trips were land tours conducted by Overseas Adventure Travel, which limits the number of travelers to 16, uses very well-trained in-country guides, and emphasizes cultural aspects, with home visits and a lot of person-to-person activities, rather than museums and public buildings.

It's hard to say which was our favorite trip. Obviously, Egypt stands out for its incredibly ancient and beautiful tombs in the Valley of the Kings. The terracotta warriors in Xi'an in China were amazing, especially watching the museum workers who were patiently piecing together tons of jumbled fragments in the pits. In Mongolia we were surprised by the friendliness of the local nomadic people, who invited us into their yurts and fed us interesting, if completely unfamiliar, food and drink. Snorkeling with the sea lions in the Galapagos Islands was unforgettable. We loved the austere beauty of Iceland. Westminster Abbey in London was memorable for the tombs of so many great people. Paris, where we spent two weeks in May sharing an AirB&B in Montorgueil with our Swiss friends, was of course beautiful, especially Monet's gardens just north of the city. In Berlin I was impressed by how the Berliners have confronted their tragic past: the art on the Wall, the Allied museum, the Holocaust memorial, the rebirth of Jewish Berlin, and the names of those murdered by the Nazis placed in front of their onetime homes. But I think that of all the places we've been, the one place we might consider returning to is Africa, just to see those magnificent animals thriving in their natural habitats.

(Travel photos: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/GqZy9bZUVZxwKY8e9>)

Because Mary's family was from Cuba, we have made four trips there, two with a private guide, one with Road Scholars, and one cruise that was supposed to circumnavigate the entire island but was forced by a powerful storm to spend three days moored in Cienfuegos Bay. Our first trip was an adventure: just Mary and I, my sister, a friend of ours who loved to travel, and a private guide. Mary's dad, who everyone calls "Papi", had two brothers and a sister still living in Cuba, but he had lost track of his relatives there since the 1980s, so we had no addresses or phone numbers. We knew only that they lived on a farm near the town of Central Australia, an old sugar town about 90 miles from Havana. So, we went to the town square, looked for the oldest person we could see, and Mary asked them if they knew the Mejias family. On the third try, we got a useful hint, and with the help of

some friendly local people and after driving around for a while on unpaved and unnamed country roads, we finally found them. We learned that Papi had two brothers still living, but that his sister had died some years before. We met and were warmly welcomed by the two brothers, their wives and assorted children and grandchildren. We brought pictures of Papi and his family, some printed out to leave with them and many more on an iPad. We also brought a bag of simple gifts that we had learned were in short supply there: common medicines, first aid items, toothpaste, duct tape, etc. One of the ladies said that she had not seen a Band-Aid in over 30 years! Before we left, his younger brother recorded a message on our iPad which we played for Mary's dad when we returned. A few years later we returned to visit them again, but by that time his older brother was unwell and bedridden. He died a short time later.

Our future plans are to keep the Maryland house as a summer residence as long as we enjoy it and are able to do the work of maintaining it and the garden. When it becomes too much, we'll sell the house and either move to Florida full-time or find a condo in Maryland to spend the summers. It's not over just yet.