

*Notes for*  
**Nested Scrolls**  
*A Writer's Life, by Rudy Rucker*

**Book #31**

Worked on these notes briefly in Spring, 2003 and Winter, 2005.  
Resumed the notes, Summer, 2008.  
Notes last revised on April 26, 2011

Notes word count 45,622  
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## Book Plans

### Word Count

Here's the recent counts.

*The Hacker And The Ants* 92,000, *Freeware* 97,000, *Saucer Wisdom* 85,000, *Realware* 105,000, *Bruegel* 138,000, *Spaceland* 91,000, *Frek and the Elixir* 163,000, *The Lifebox, the Seashell and the Soul* 158,000, *Mathematicians in Love* 110,000, *Mad Professor* 87,000, *Postsingular* 89,100, *Hylozoic* 91,000

Started Chap 1 on Sept 15, 2008. Dates mark initial finish of each stage.	Chap #	Word Count on the Date in Col 1	Days into the book	Final Chap Word Count. Average is 8193	Chap Draft Words/Day	Book Words / Day	Estimated Days To Reach 100,000 Words
Sept 20, 2008	1	2898	5	2898	580	580	167
Sept 30, 2008	2	11003	15	8242	811	734	121
Oct 20, 2008	3	23027	35	12197	601	658	117
Oct 27, 2007	4	31037	42	8401	1144	739	93
Oct 30, 2008	5	35697	45	5283	1553	793	81
Nov 2, 2008	6	44241	48	8232	2848	922	60
Nov 6, 2008	7	50894	52	7545	1663	979	50
Nov 12, 2008	8	61101	58	8757	1701	1053	37
Nov 17, 2008	9	70525	63	10109	1885	1119	26
Nov 28, 2008	10	85460	74	13000	1358	1155	13
Dec 7, 2008	11	94567	80	9536	1518	1182	05

**Table 1: Word Count tracking for the First Draft.**

*October 28, 2008.* Since I segued into writing this book without such a big formal decision as usual, I never got around to setting up my usual Word Count table until today, near the end of Chapter 4. So I had to guess at when I finished the first three chaps.

*September 10, 2009.* I just revised the book for Version 2. I split most of the chapters in two, and added on some more chapters, ending up with 24 chapters of lengths ranging from about 3,500 words to 5,000 words each. The present length is 111,846 words. At this point, given that the book is all but finished, there's not much point in trying to create a fresh Word Count table to match the final form.

### Memoir or Novel?

I've gone through a number of concepts for this book. Originally, I started these notes with a memoir in mind, making some entries in Spring 2003, and Winter, 2005. In Summer, 2008, I was casting about for my next book project, and, for lack of a better starting point, I resumed these notes again.

This is due to be my 31st book. And if it's a novel, it'll be my 19th novel.

\*\*\*

July 28, 2008.

I'm toying with the idea of casting my memoir into a novelistic format—like I've done in the past with my transreal SF novels—e.g. *White Light*, *The Secret of Life*, or *Saucer Wisdom*.

I worked out a correspondence between my life and my novels in some detail in an interview for *Hayakawa SF Magazine* around 1998 (see my [online interviews](#).) Originally I left out the *Ware* novels and some of the others, but I think I can force them all in. I could even put in the unpublished fragment *Twinks* with Rudeboy Rockwell from 1982-1984, but never mind that.

Novel Title	Novel #	“My” Character’s Name	His Age	Period of My Life
Frek and the Elixir	15	“Frek Huggins”	13 - 14	1959 – 1960
The Hollow Earth	8	“Mason Reynolds”	14 - 16	1960 – 1962
The Secret of Life	6	“Conrad Bunger”	17 - 21	1963 – 1967
Spacetime Donuts	1	“Vernor Maxwell”	21 - 26	1967 – 1972
Postsingular	17	“Jayjay Jiminez”	24 - 26	1970 – 1972
Hylozoic	18	“Jayjay Jiminez”	26 - 28	1972 – 1974
Mathematicians in Love	16	“Bela Kis”	25 - 27	1971 – 1973
White Light	2	“Felix Rayman”	26 - 32	1972 – 1978
Software	3	“Sta-Hi Mooney”	30 - 31	1976 – 1977
Realware	12	“Phil Gottner”	30 - 32	1976 – 1978
The Sex Sphere	4	“Alwin Bitter”	32 - 34	1978 – 1980
Spaceland	14	“Joe Kube”	35 - 37	1981 – 1983
Master of Space and Time	5	“Joe Fletcher”	34 - 38	1980 – 1984
Wetware	7	“Stahn Mooney”	38 - 40	1984 – 1986
Freeware	10	“Tre Dietz”	34 - 40	1980 – 1982
The Hacker and the Ants	9	“Jerzy Rugby”	40 - 46	1986 – 1992
As Above, So Below	13	“Pieter Bruegel”	16 - 44	1992 – 1997
Saucer Wisdom	11	“Rudy Rucker”	46 - 51	1992 – 1997

**Table 1: My Novels As Memoirs**

## Title

March 26, 2003

*Memoirs of a Crazy Mathematician*. The title that hit me on the Esalen beach. But I've never liked being called “crazy.” Can I stand to do this to myself? There is this public interest in crazy mathematicians these days. *Good Will Hunting*. *A Perfect Mind*. But, no, I just don't like saying I'm crazy. And, from the other direction, I feel a little uneasy calling myself a mathematician.

*Mathenaut*. One problem with *Mathenaut* is that I already used *Mathenauts* as the title of an anthology I edited. Also it's a word invented by Norman Kagan, and not by me. It was my title on my Autodesk business card.

*A Mathematician's Journey.* Sounds too goody-goody. And I'm not really all that much of a mathematician. A crazy mathematician, maybe, but not a real mathematician. If I think of Stan Ulam's *Adventures of a Mathematician*, I feel I'm no mathematician at all. Not compared to Ulam.

*Formless Form.* To express the underlying central notion that mathematics studies the varieties of possible forms. The perfect Esalen title, and it would sell about two hundred copies.

*Everything is Something Else.* "Your point being — ?" What I had in mind here was my series of fads about what Everything Is: sets, curved space, fractals, etc.

*Everything is What?* Pushing the same idea.

*What is Reality?* Same theme, maybe too Sixties. I got this phrase from some voices yelling in the background at a high-school pep rally on one of the Firesign Theater records. But I kind of like it.

*Seeking the Gnarl.* This has the virtue of being my own personally-coined catchphrase. Downside is that I've already put out collections of my work called *Seek!* and *Gnarl!* Another problem is that I don't feel that "seeking the gnarl" is truly what my life has been about. Seeking the gnarl just something I picked up in the late Eighties and early Nineties. More perennially, I've been seeking the One, or if not the One, seeking Enlightenment.

July 29, 2008.

For a day I was thinking of making the book a new transreal novel with the working title, *Weena Wesson*, but I'm pretty sure I want to change that.

*Kentucky. Fallout. Yellow Dust.* Maybe *A Writer's Life*? That's right on the transreal border between fact and fiction—which is, nah, too confusing, or even off-putting. *The Branecaster* is good, but I used up that word in *Frek and the Elixir*. *Daydreamer* is nice, but, oh-oh, Ian McEwan used that for a kids' book title in 2000.

*Dreamlight.* Naah, been used.

How about some names from deeper in my interest zones. *Wave Nodes. Turing Patterns. Standing Waves. Node Patterns. Turing Spots. Scroll Nodes. Nested Scrolls.*

I like that last one. *Nested Scrolls.* Searching Amazon for that phrase, I find it's not a title, but it does appear in—two of my books: *Mad Professor* and the *Lifebox* tome, apparently the same passage in both books, tsk.

\*\*\*

August 5, 2008.

The last few days I've been liking *Natural Books* or *The Natural Book* as the title instead of *Nested Scrolls*. I think *The Natural Book*. There will in fact be a variety of "natural books," but, for the purpose of a title, it's better to just refer to one of them. And it might as well be that there is in fact one specific *überbook* that Jim Oster gets involved with. *The Natural Book*. A bit like Borges's *The Book of Sand*.

\*\*\*

August 6, 2008

Today I'm back to liking *Nested Scrolls*. *The Natural Book* sounds like a biology or geology guide. There is, of course, the example of Alan Watts, *The Book, On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are. Books Everywhere.*

Or how about *The Prime Mover*. I could focus on Jim Oster’s fantasy that the world’s existence depends on him. Note that I probably would not want to present this as being true. It’s just that fantasy that I’m trying to get over.

\*\*\*

*November 11, 2009.*

Note that in the discussion above, I was at times thinking of a novel and at times thinking of a memoir. Having split these projects into two separate books, I revisited the memoir title issue on November 11, 2009.

Dave Hartwell is now buying the book for Tor, and he thinks the Sales Dept will want to change the title from the probably too allusive *Nested Scrolls: The Memoir of a Cyberpunk Philosopher*. Terry Bisson was ribbing me about this title, too. Dave said that for marketing purposes, they’d even like to have my name in the title—as in the recent SF writer memoir, *Hi, I’m Jack Vance*.

At the very least the title ought to be a single phrase that suggests that it is indeed a memoir. For about ten minutes I was thinking of calling it *Rucker’s Memoir*, but that’s really too flat.

Other titles I’ve thought of over the last few days:

*The Coffin Scroll*. From the Egyptians. But too morbid.

*My Life*. Whoops, Bill Clinton used that one.

*Seeking the Gnarl*. A little stale by now, given how much I’ve used the phrase.

*My Story Arc*. As a novelist I like this, but the terminology is unfamiliar to many, and maybe too delimited. It’s a little like *My World Line*, a memoir title used by the physicist George Gamow.

*Life is a Novel*. Catchy, but probably too confusing, as some people will then think the book *is* a novel. Also I don’t really think *life is* a novel.

*Life Is*. I do like this one. And it subtly encapsulates the fact that I’ve always been on a quest to find some fundamental explanation for everything, cf. my big table on “Everything Is” in the final section of *The Lifebox, the Seashell and the Soul*. And I like the non-judgmental and accepting aspect of the title, also the suggestion of an eternal Now.

*Rudy the Elder*. In recent years—given that I myself have a son with same name as mine, and given the kinship that I feel to Bruegel—I’ve taken to occasionally calling myself Rudy the Elder. It kind of expresses something about where I am in my life these days—aging, established, but approachable enough to be referred to by my first name. So that’s where this title comes from. *Rudy the Elder*. Elder than hell. I also like the allusion to my favorite Mad Magazine artist, Will Elder.

## Pop’s Dates

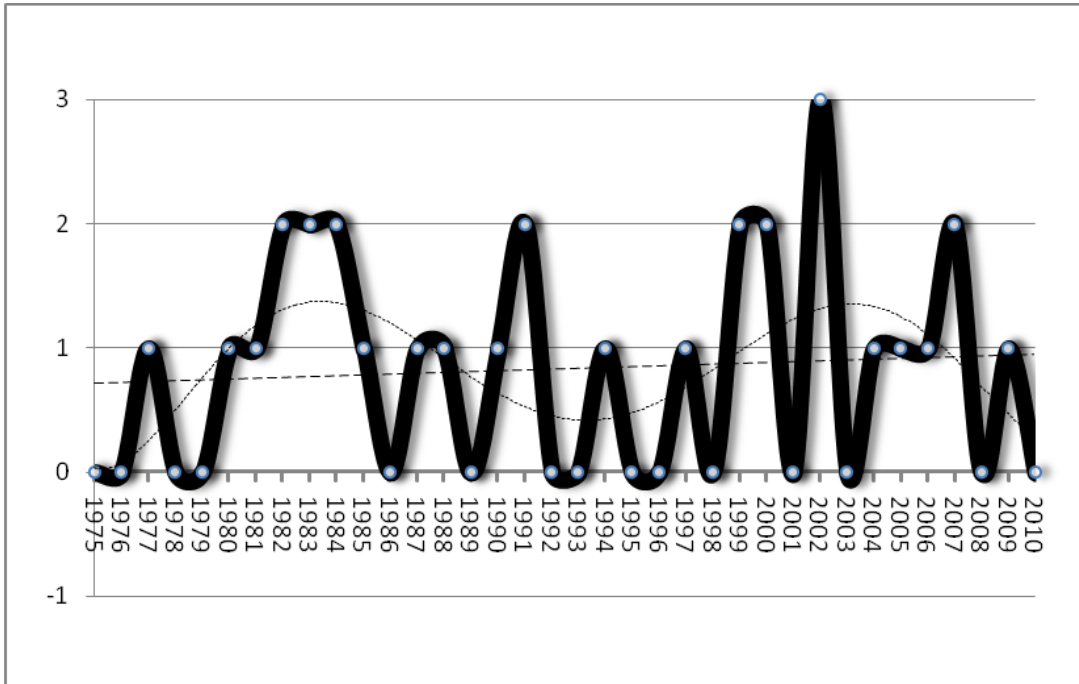
Timeline of my father’s life. Blank lines separate the decades.

1914	0	Born in NYC, October 1.
1932	18	Finishes High School, Bala Cynwyd, PA.

1936	22	Graduates Virginia Military Institute.
1936	22	Starts work at Atlantic Steel Castings in PA.
1939	25	Marries Marianne von Bitter in Germany.
1941	27	Son Embry, Jr., born. Father dies.
1943	29	Moves to Louisville.
1946	32	Son Rudy born.
1950	36	Rucker Corporation goes bankrupt. Starts Champion Wood
1954	40	Begins to study for ministry.
1960	46	Ordained a deacon of Episcopal church.
1963	49	Pastor of St. Aidan's, Alexandria, VA.
1969	55	Moves to Reston, starts Episcopal Congregation.
1974	60	Coronary bypass surgery.
1975	61	Compiles 300 WEEKS OF SUNDAYS in Maine.
1976	62	Retires from ministry.
1978	64	Moves to Louisville, leaves wife.
1979	65	Travels to Europe with Priscilla Ames.
1981	67	Opens Lake Anne Grocery.
1984	70	Seventieth birthday, writes his memoir, BEING RAISED.
1989	75	Embry Rucker Homeless Shelter named after him.
1991	77	Ex-wife Marianne von Bitter dies.
1992	78	Mild stroke.
1993	79	Bad stroke, enters nursing home.
1994	79	Dies, August 1.



## Publication Rate



I copied this figure from my *Notes for Hylozoic*.

The dark heavily line is just a smoothed off line through the points.

My “linear trend line” (the nearly level dashed line across the lower part graph) is slightly slanting up! The wiggly dotted line is a 6th-order polynomial approximation to the curve, and is a different kind of “trend line.” The polynomial trend line looks somewhat different for different order polynomial approximations—since this one is based on a degree six polynomial it “has” to have five max-min points (the curve wants to curve up at the left and right ends).

Interesting chart—at least to me. Looking at the polynomial trend line, it seems that my writing life has two acts. (But do keep in mind that if I was using an 8th-order polynomial curve, I could just as well get three acts.)

I see a big burst in the early years; that’s when I was freelancing in downtown Lynchburg; I had two books a year for three years in a row.

Things slid back when I started teaching at SJSU in 1986, and I was in a trough in the mid-nineties. I was drinking too much and smoking a lot of pot, and I was spending a lot of my energy on programming. Intermission.

After I got into recovery in 1996, I got a second wind. I was still programming a lot (writing the *Pop* game framework in fact), but with sobriety my writing amped up anyhow. I had a good run since 1996, helped a bit by my retirement from teaching in 2004.

In the period 1996-2002, I published eight books in six years, even better than my run of six books in the four years 1982-1986.

## *Early Sketch of Chapter Topics*

Here’s some chapter topics I might include in a memoir:

### **1. Eden. Age 0-12. 1946 – 1958.**

Early memories from the fringes of suburbia in Louisville, Kentucky. Did I have any profound math-type thoughts as a boy? Or was I zoned-out on Benadryl?

*Fade In.* The earliest memories simply presented as little cameos, a bit like at the start of *Portrait of the Artist As A Young Man*, but I think more of them and a bit longer ones. First memory: fingerpainting the bedstead with my own shit. Next: Being lifted up to a man sitting on a tractor. Walking in the rye field. The Keith's hayloft. The giant snapping turtles from the pond the developers drained.

Age 5. *Fade In.* Walking through the rye field. The Keith girls on the farm near us, gathering us into their spooky dank stone spring-house, telling us a ghost story about the little ... white ... hands. Sitting on my mother's lap and Muffin the dog at our side. In the silence I can hear the Earth turning.

### **2. On My Own. Age 12-17. 1958 – 1963.**

My year (age 12) in Germany where I realized I wasn't weak or dull. I was a larva. I learned to cope on my own. Imagining the pine pollen in the rain puddles in Germany to be fallout from an atomic war. Worrying that I had worms. Painting myself brown with cocoa to play the black boy in the Huck Finn skit. The annoyingly insistent carpentry teacher, wanting me to be licking the cocoa off my skin, urging me, "Ami: schlecken!"

I could wind this up with my burst spleen and its removal (age 14) and my car crash (age 16) — metamorphosing from egg to larva.

On a hike with some fellow students at a boarding school in Germany. I imagine the pine pollen in the rain puddles in Germany to be fallout from an atomic war. I get in a fight with a boy, and am anxious at the sight of him sharpening his knife. My friends promise we'll stave him off. He doesn't do anything.

Adolescence in Louisville. Wanting to be part of the monoculture. St. Xavier High school. My math and science teachers: Mr. Viol, Brother Emeric, Brother Antonio, Br. Columbus. I liked science fiction stories about the fourth dimension. I read Allan Watts on Zen. I was good at mathematics, I liked how clear it was. Niles Schoening.

### **3. Springtime. Age 17-21 . 1963 - 1967.**

Swarthmore College. Discovering beer and marijuana. Flatland. My math classes. Reading the beatniks, admiring Andy Warhol. Not getting drafted was a big deal. And the blossoming of my life-long love affair with my wife.

### **4. Marriage and Math. Age 21-26 . 1967 – 1972.**

Marriage.

*Metamorphosis.* In college the larva pupated; wrapped itself in a cocoon. And in grad school I emerged as the butterfly that I am. Focus on the grad school years.

I'm a newlywed in grad school, discovering math, Zap Comix, Pynchon, hippiedom. Listening one evening alone to the Zappa record *Chunga's Revenge*, I'm inspired and begin making notes for a book about the fourth dimension.

Grad school. Studying for the first time, back to understanding mathematics. Professor Bumby. Meeting the guru: Kurt Gödel. Gaisi Takeuti. Ellentuck and the First Digit Problem. Gödel. Came to think **everything is mathematics and logic**.

The night that Zappa record *Chunga's Revenge* seemed to speak to me, 1971.

Hearing whole Zappa songs in my head the car, no harder than understanding set theory.

The White Light acid trip vision, Memorial Day, 1970. The sweetness of the Sixties.

Creating Wheelie Willie.

The birth of our first daughter and our son.

### **5. Fatherhood and the Fourth Dimension. 26-32. 1972-1978.**

With my wife and the three kids in Geneseo. G's birthday party. R in his carriage. I's birth, and the experience as relating to the fourth dimension and synchronicity.

Geneseo. Calculus. Geometry. My Dover book, *Geometry, Relativity and the Fourth Dimension*. The Hinton cubes. Also teaching 4D, the notion of synchronicity. G, R & the 4<sup>th</sup> D comes out, also *Spacetime Donuts in Unearth*. Coming to think **everything is curved space**.

Cross-country skiing. Dave Kelly. Lecturing on philosophy of mathematics with Bill Edgar. Denied tenure.

The last Christmas with the grandparents in Geneseo. The pleasant physicality of lying on the rug like a dogfather in his den, with the kids crawling on me, poking, wrestling.

### **6. Infinity and Science Fiction. Age 32-34. 1978 - 1980.**

Heidelberg. Lecturing more on logic and infinity. Wrote most of *Infinity and the Mind*. Came to think **everything is a set**. Also wrote *White Light* as a transreal exploration of infinity. *Software* started as a time-travel book, was also inspired by von Neumann's work on self-replicating automata. Wrote numerous stories.

Life and science into fiction and fact. Back-to-back in Heidelberg, seminal works in two new SF subgenres: *White Light* (transreal), and *Software* (cyberpunk). And I start writing *Infinity and the Mind*. In Heidelberg, working on *White Light*, I have a dream of finding wonderful polyhedral crystals in the shale on a mountain slope I'm climbing.

In Zermatt my imagining the birds calling "Genius, genius" to me after I saw the raging river stop. (I actually found the old scrap of paper describing this vision today!) Getting the contract for *White Light* from Ace. The Brighton Seacon.

### **7. Cyberpunk and Transrealism. Age 34-40. 1980 - 1986.**

Lynchburg. Finished *Infinity and the Mind*, got the final outline at a religious "retreat." The pervasive TV evangelism. Wrote *The Sex Sphere* from European memories and in reaction to the namby-pamby surroundings. I gave a bad performance at a bad job, was fired. Started a punk band, The Dead Pigs, as conceptual art. Started hearing from Bruce Sterling. SF master Robert Sheckley's visit. The cyberpunks visit: Sterling, William Gibson, Lew Shiner. *The Fourth Dimension, Master of Space and Time, All the Visions, The Secret of Life, Mind Tools, Wetware*. More stories. The most creative years of my life. I formulate the notion of transrealism. **Everything is science-fiction.**

Not that Mom's life was all about being a home-maker. She was an artist for her whole life, producing scores of paintings — mostly landscapes. In her later years, she took up pottery, turning out cartons and cartons of lovely cups, bowls and plates.

It was no joy for Mom to entertain parishioners whom she might find dull or tacky. Writer in Lynchburg, 1983 - 1986. Roland, the Vaughans, my career starting to happen, the birth of cyberpunk. The boat race, poling from L'burg towards Richmond. Talking in a field to that ex-MP guy John— what was his last name?

At the end of my stay in Lynchburg, three young artists from Richmond come to see me, as if sent by Eddie Poe. One of the boys has drawn a tesseract unfolding.

The trip out West.

### **8. Hacking the Valley. Age 40-43 . 1986 - 1989.**

*The Great Work*. Retooling in Silicon Valley, getting up to speed, working three jobs, the Cyberthon. Falling in with the Mondo crew. 1986.

SJSU. I begin teaching computer science courses. Letting the computer chip into my heart. Mandelbrot set hackers, Rollo Silver. I met Wolfram in 1984, also Margolus and Toffoli. Assembly language Cellular Automata programs. Befriended by John Walker, CEO of Autodesk, Inc., at the Hackers Conference. We co-write a software package *CA Lab: Rudy Rucker's Cellular Automata Laboratory*, released 1989. I think **everything is a cellular automaton**. Slowly I write *The Hollow Earth*, drawing memories of Lynchburg. I turn to the historical setting partly in rebellion at cyberpunk as it hadn't brought me any money, partly because I'm obsessed with Edgar Allan Poe.

### **9. Chaos. Age 43-46 . 1989 -1992.**

I begin working at Autodesk. I co-write *James Gleick's Chaos the Software*. I'm also hanging out with the *Mondo 2000* crew, editing *A User's Guide to the New Edge*. I begin to see **everything is a fractal** and, what is very nearly the same, **everything is chaos**. I'm laid off from Autodesk, and I write *The Hacker and the Ants* as memories of working in industry.

### **10. Artificial Life. Age 46-50 . 1992 - 1996.**

I finish an *Artificial Life Lab* package I began at Autodesk. The craze for virtual reality, a.k.a. cyberspace. Demoing my fractal Chaos software at the [Cyberthon](#). I'm back to teaching at SJSU, at first it feels a bit like a "dull level wilderness" after the energy of being in industry. I get the CAPOW project and work on cellular automata with my students. Write *Freeware*, probably my most whacked-out book ever. Alcohol and pot is an increasing problem for me, I begin to feel like an animal in a zoo. I join AA in 1996.

### **11. Past the Millennium. Age 50-56 . 1996 - 2002.**

*Realware* examines the question of what you'd ask for if you could have anything you want. Memories of Tonga. I write *Saucer Wisdom* and *Spaceland* as two takes on the notion of the Millennium. *Saucer Wisdom* toys with the notion that there really are aliens, was kind of a scary book to write, a weird Nabokovian roman a clef. I am teaching games programming in my SJSU classes and finish *Software Engineering and Computer Games*.

### **12. The New Century. Age 56-58 . 2002-2004.**

On our sabbatical trip in Europe, 1998, I got into a big historical research, *As Above, So Below: A Novel of Peter Bruegel*. A sense of history. I went back to Brussels in Fall, 2002, and lectured on Philosophy of Computer Science. Wolfram's notion that **everything is**

**a computation.** Nick Herbert's opposing notion of the non-computational quantum mind. Speculations about what's coming ahead.

I retire in 2004 at age 58. In one of the last computer graphics classes I taught, I had a nice image of the perspective matrix changing the size of the world.

Figuring out what computation means. Grasping the gnarl of natural life.

### ***13. SF Master. Age 58-64. 2004-2010.***

*Big Sur Cow.* Living like a cow on the Santa Cruz hills, chewing the grass, staring at the clouds and the sea? Writing like a vine growing pumpkins? Waiting for death? Degrees of serenity.

## ***Preliminary Chapter Notes***

Originally I had a set of preliminary chapter notes in the working memoir document itself, but on October, 21, 2008, I decided to keep them here in this *Notes* document. The memoir document was getting a little cumbersome with the notes in it, and having the notes in the document made it hard to track the actual word length of what I'd written on the book itself.

I created these preliminary notes by pasting in some stuff that was originally in these *Notes*, also some stuff from my [Autobio Note](#) online that I wrote up for *Contemporary Authors*, Gale Press. I don't have a *complete* set of those preliminary notes here because, as I say, initially they were in the memoir document itself (then called *Nested Scrolls*), and by the time I moved the long notes, I'd already massaged the notes for chaps 1-4 into full chapters, as follows:

- 1: Birth
- 2: Child [Age 0-8, 1946 – 1954.]
- 3: Schoolboy [Age 8-13, 1954 – 1959.]
- 4: Teen [Age 13-17, 1959-1963.]

And here are the preliminary notes for chaps 5-12.

### **5: Lover [Age 17-21, 1963 – 1967.]**

Swarthmore College. Discovering beer and marijuana. Flatland. My math classes. Reading the beatniks, admiring Andy Warhol. Not getting drafted was a big deal. And the blossoming of my life-long love affair with my wife.

I loved my four years at Swarthmore, and made some of the best friends of my life — most importantly, I met my future wife Sylvia Bogsch. I encountered Sylvia on March 21, 1964, on a charter bus taking students from Swarthmore to the Washington, DC, area. She was beautiful, sophisticated and intelligent. I liked her smile and her laugh. She seemed to understand and appreciate me more than anyone I'd ever met in my life. We talked about Pop Art, electric eels, and the game of pretending your finger is a scythe reaching out the bus window to mow the landscape. We dated through the rest of my time at Swarthmore, and the week after I graduated, we were married in her parents' then home town of Geneva, Switzerland, at the American Episcopal Church, with none other than my father officiating. "The best day's work I ever did," Pop would say in later years, beaming at us. Mom loved

Sylvia; indeed, if Sylvia and I ever disagreed, Mom would tend to take Sylvia's side against me.

Getting back to my college days, it was great to be around so many smart, quirky people at Swarthmore: people like myself. I didn't work very hard at my studies, and with the stiff competition I got mediocre grades — I think my overall college average was an exact C. Instead of studying, I was walking around the grassy campus, talking to my friends, reading popular books, and enjoying the chance to be with girls — remember that both my elementary and secondary schools were all-male.

Although I longed to major in philosophy or literature, my father urged me to study something more technical. "You can read all those books on your own," he insisted. "Be a Renaissance man!" I decided to major in physics and invent an antigravity machine, but due to not taking the right course sequence, I ended up having to major in mathematics. This was agreeable, as mathematics comes easily for me. I always liked the fact that, in mathematics, there are so few brute facts to memorize. Everything follows logically.

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One ongoing problem was that Mom developed diabetes around 1962, and had trouble controlling the disease. She was punctilious about her insulin injections and her diet — too punctilious. Periodically her blood sugar would drop so low that she'd have frightening insulin reactions. The effect was if she'd suddenly be very drunk; we'd try and force orange juice on her, but sometimes she'd refuse it. Occasionally my father or I had to give her a glucagon injection to bring her back.

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Peyote trip

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One of my closest Swarthmore friends was a boy named Gregory Gibson. He shared my interest in writing and in the beats. We liked to quote passages from William Burroughs's *Junky* and *The Yage Letters* to each other, and we spoke of Burroughs as *Der Meister*, affecting ourselves to be apprentices in some celestial academy of beatdom. Part of the appeal of Burroughs was that his work was often so close to science fiction — *cool* science fiction. Two problems I saw with Burroughs's writing were that his surreal routines never extended more than a few pages, and that he had a tendency to open up a parenthetical statement with a "((" and fail to deliver the closing ")".

Greg and I shared other literary interests as well: Hemingway's *In Our Time*, *Catch-22*, and Thomas Pynchon's *V*. One wonderful rainy morning, Greg read the whole of *The Miller's Tale* to me in Old English, doing voices and adding glosses comparing the characters to our friends. We were also devotees of the now all but forgotten "black humor" writers Terry Southern and Bruce Jay Friedman.

Greg and I sometimes wrote things together, taking turns on my portable Olivetti. I recall a scabrous black humor pastiche, "Confessions of a Stag," which we composed on a Ditto master so that I could mimeo off copies for our friends. In our small circle, this work was a solid *success d'estime*. But publishing it in the campus literary magazine *The Roc* was out of the question. *The Roc* did however print a literary vignette I wrote about my experiences working as a construction worker in Alexandria during the summer months.

Greg and I also shared a love of drinking beer, and when our junior year rolled around, we began experimenting with pot. I liked it a lot. I hadn't looked at any genre

science fiction for quite a few years, but now I came across a novel by Philip K. Dick: *Time Out of Joint*. For the first time I began to see the outlines of a beatnik science fiction, of a literature that was ecstatic and countercultural, but with logic and rigor to its weirdness.

Greg summed up my budding notion in a letter he wrote me a few years later while we were trying to write a science-fiction novel together. “The cool thing to do would be to write a science fiction book that’s about your real life.”

## 6: Mathematician [Age 21-26, 1967 – 1972.]

Marriage.

*Metamorphosis*. In college the larva pupated; wrapped itself in a cocoon. And in grad school I emerged as the butterfly that I am. Focus on the grad school years.

I’m a newlywed in grad school, discovering math, Zap Comix, Pynchon, hippiedom. Listening one evening alone to the Zappa record *Chunga’s Revenge*, I’m inspired and begin making notes for a book about the fourth dimension.

My heartfelt letter to Johnny Carson about the concepts of “infinity” and the “fourth dimension,” both of which I felt he’d mentioned (albeit indirectly) on his show.

Those who didn’t live through those times tend not to understand how strongly the males of my generation were radicalized against the United States government. They wanted to kill us, and they called us cowards if we wouldn’t let them. My hair was shoulder-length by now, and strangers would scream at me from cars.

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Grad school. Studying for the first time, back to understanding mathematics. Professor Bumby. Meeting the guru: Kurt Gödel. Gaisi Takeuti. Ellentuck and the First Digit Problem. Gödel. Came to think **everything is mathematics and logic**.

The night that Zappa record *Chunga’s Revenge* seemed to speak to me, 1971. Hearing whole Zappa songs in my head the car, no harder than understanding set theory.

The White Light acid trip vision, Memorial Day, 1970. The sweetness of the Sixties. Creating Wheelie Willie.

The birth of our first daughter and our son.

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After college, Sylvia and I were married, and we both attended Rutgers University, where I would get a Ph. D. in mathematics, and she an M. A. in French literature. Above and beyond any mere academic tasks, Sylvia bore us two children there: Georgia and then Rudy, Jr.

My doctoral work was in set theory, the branch of mathematical logic which deals with different levels of infinity. I delighted in studying this field as to me it felt like mathematical theology — and I still had my fascination with mysticism. This interest was brought to a head on Memorial Day in 1970, when a friend appeared at our doorstep with a dose of LSD for me. He himself had taken the drug the day before, and hadn’t enjoyed the effects. But despite his warning, I took my medicine, eager to be a true part of the Sixties. There was no evading the ego-death. My mind blew like an overamped light-bulb, and I was immersed in white light. God. The One. “I’m always here, Rudy,” a voice told me. “I’ll always love you.” I never really recovered from that experience — and I mean this in a good way. For one thing, my fear of death was greatly reduced.

There wasn't much point taking psychedelics again. Although I made one or two half-hearted attempts, drugs would never again get me to that same place of transcendent illumination. But I'm expecting to see the White Light again on my death bed.

Another big Sixties thing was the politics. Our elected government was very seriously bent on sending me and my friends to die in Viet Nam. What with a student deferment, a fortunate lottery number, and a faked asthma attack, I didn't find it terribly hard to dodge the draft. And of course that made me a traitor and a bad citizen. It broke my heart to see less-fortunate guys my age being slaughtered. Underground comics seemed perfectly to capture the doomed, drugged spirit of the day. I was a passionate devotee of *Zap Comix* and the work of R. Crumb. With the government out to kill us, there seemed no longer any reason to be civil or respectful towards the establishment's values.

The high point of my graduate studies at Rutgers had to do with the campus's proximity to Princeton and the Institute for Advanced Study, where the reclusive genius logician Kurt Gödel was in residence. All of the most fascinating and difficult results I was studying bore Gödel's imprint, and I thought of him as a supreme guru. I was doing some interesting, although not earth-shaking, work in set theory, and I'd given a talk at Rutgers on a recent unpublished manuscript of Gödel's that purported to solve the century old Cantor's Continuum Problem about different degrees of infinity.

My thesis adviser Erik Ellentuck was visiting at the Institute, and I was attending a set theory seminar there. I'd applied for a post-doctorate position at the Institute, and Gödel invited me to come in for a conversation with him. Meeting Gödel was a very big deal for me, a blessing, a stroke of good fortune — the initiate's journey to the Master's cave. I've never since been in the presence of so overwhelmingly great a mind. I wrote in some detail about our encounters in my non-fiction book *Infinity and the Mind*, and Gödel inspired the character G. Kurtowski in my novel *Spacetime Donuts*.

Two effects of meeting Gödel were that I was emboldened to take mystical philosophy quite seriously and that I began studying Einstein's work on relativity theory — Gödel had interests in both these fields. Gödel strongly believed that the perceived passage of time is an illusion, that we are in fact eternal patterns in spacetime. Like my vision of the White Light, this teaching also reduced my anxiety about death.

Although Gödel enjoyed talking with me, and let me visit him again, I didn't get a post-doc at the Institute. I was bitterly disappointed. And finding a teaching job proved difficult. My thesis work, although publishable, wasn't compelling enough to land me a position as a high-powered logician; and for more general kinds of teaching jobs, my expertise in the rarified field of mathematical logic was not an asset. I received exactly one job offer: assistant professor of mathematics at what was then called the State University College at Geneseo, New York.

## **7: Father [26-32, 1972-1978.]**

And meanwhile, while all this was going on, Sylvia bore us a son: Rudy Jr.

Thesis defense. Nort. "They found a big hole in his thesis. Rudy didn't take it too well. He broke down in front of everyone, poor guy."

Reading Borges and *Gravity's Rainbow*.



With my wife and the three kids in Geneseo. G's birthday party. R in his carriage. I's birth, and the experience as relating to the fourth dimension and synchronicity.

Geneseo. Calculus. Geometry. My Dover book, *Geometry, Relativity and the Fourth Dimension*. The Hinton cubes. Also teaching 4D, the notion of synchronicity. G, R & the 4<sup>th</sup> D comes out, also *Spacetime Donuts* in *Unearth*. Coming to think **everything is curved space**.

Cross-country skiing. Dave Kelly. Lecturing on philosophy of mathematics with Bill Edgar. Denied tenure.

The last Christmas with the grandparents in Geneseo. The pleasant physicality of lying on the rug like a dogfather in his den, with the kids crawling on me, poking, wrestling.

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When my father turned sixty he had a heart attack and a coronary bypass operation. The technology of procedure was still crude, and it had a devastating effect on him. Overnight his personality changed. He grew distant and depressed. He'd point to the vertical scar on his chest and wince. "They opened me right up."

Later I would model the character Cobb Anderson in my novel *Software* on Pop during this period of his life. My character Cobb is a man with a bad heart whose body is replaced by a robot copy of his flesh body, with his memories being transferred from his discarded brain to the computer mind of the robot. At first my character doesn't even realize the transfer has taken place, but then he notices a little maintenance door in his chest.

My parents' marriage became increasingly strained. Pop was drinking heavily. And nearly every holiday meal was preceded by one of Mom's dramatic insulin reactions. At age 62, my father retired from the ministry and left my mother for another woman.

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In 1972, Sylvia and I settled into Geneseo with our two young children, and soon we were blessed with Isabel, our third child. Initially we rented a small house at 41 Oak Street, which would later be a setting for my novel *White Light*. The costs of living were low enough that we could live off my salary, with Sylvia spending most of her time with the kids. In some ways this was a difficult time for her — filled with isolation and chores. In other ways it was a good time; the children were wonderful to be with, and she got deeply involved in painting. Sylvia developed a special sharp-edged, cartoony style, colored in warm tones. We were proud when she had a hanging of her works in one of the local business's windows. The college-town aspect of tiny Geneseo meant that we had a full social life, with none of our new friends living more than two or three blocks away.

One of the courses I taught at Geneseo was called Foundations of Geometry. The standard textbooks for the course seemed boring to me, and I developed the notion of writing up my own notes on the fourth dimension to use as a text. I think that, having spent five years studying mathematical logic and the related philosophical field known as the foundations of mathematics, the word "Foundations" in the course title served like a checkered flag to me, a signal to start my engine and step on the gas.

I'd first heard about the fourth dimension in high-school from my friend Niles, who lent me a library copy of Edwin Abbott's *Flatland*. As chance would have it, Pop bought me a copy of this same book in paperback at the Swarthmore drugstore at the start of my freshman year. I'd read a number of science-fiction stories that mentioned the fourth dimension — I think particularly of the classic mathematical SF tales that appeared in the

Clifton Fadiman-edited volumes *Fantasia Mathematica* and *The Mathematical Magpie*. Under Gödel's influence, I'd been reading books on relativity theory. And I was wondering how to reconcile the notion of the fourth dimension as an odd unknown spatial direction with the notion of the fourth dimension as time. While at Rutgers, I'd begun trying to work out some ideas about the fourth dimension in a special notebook, mostly by means of drawings. I recall showing my 4D notes to my father. He was puzzled. "Where are you going with this?"

In the period 1973 to 1976, I expanded and rewrote my 4D notes to use as handouts for the Foundations of Geometry course, under the working title, *Geometry and Reality*. At first I mimeographed the notes for the students, and then, as I got more organized, I had the Geneseo bookstore photo-offset the notes and sell them as a text. The students seemed to enjoy my little volume, so I showed it to some of the textbook salesmen who haunt a professor's office.

Their companies deemed my book too quirky, too popularized, too untextbooklike. But now I'd gotten the publishing blood-lust. I hit on the idea of sending my book off to the publisher that was keeping in print so many of the esoteric mathematical and philosophical books that I enjoyed: Dover Books. Back in Louisville, Mom had regularly ordered Dover books for me on all sorts of obscure topics.

Dover quickly agreed to publish my book, suggesting only that I give it a title more indicative of the contents. So it became *Geometry, Relativity and the Fourth Dimension*. Eager to cloak my shaggy young self with academic respectability, I identified myself to my unseen editors as "Professor Rudolf v. B. Rucker." They paid me, I believe, a thousand dollars for perpetual rights to publish the book. This struck me as real money. Although I was also getting a couple of my set theory papers in print, academic publishing was slow going, with no sense of there being an actual readership, and with no checks in the mail. The idea of being paid to write popular science books seemed very good to me.

Shortly after *Geometry, Relativity and the Fourth Dimension* was published, a woman editor from Dover turned up at my door. She was in Geneseo to deliver one of her children to the college. She was surprised how young I was; the "Rudolf v. B. Rucker" ruse had convinced the Dover editors that I must be an aging, German-accented scholar. We had a good laugh, and she remarked that mine was one of the few non-public-domain books that Dover was publishing. "We have a saying at Dover," she said. "The only good author is a dead author."

I'd never lost sight of my dream of being a literary author, and all the while in Geneseo I was writing poems, my way of wading into the field. David Kelly, a poet-in-residence at SUNY Geneseo was an encouraging influence. We often partied together in traditional bohemian style. Another influence during this period was the poetry of Anselm Hollo, whom Greg had told me about. I never bothered sending my poems out to magazines, but I'd join in the periodic faculty poetry readings, handing out my works in mimeographed form.

Greg summed up my budding notion in a letter he wrote me a few years later while we were trying to write a science-fiction novel together. "The cool thing to do would be to write a science fiction book that's about your real life."

In 1976, Sylvia and I went to see the Rolling Stones play outdoors at the Rich Stadium in Buffalo, New York. It was the Stones's Bicentennial Tour. Given that the Stones have been touring ever since, it's a little hard to remember how important they seemed back then, how of-the-moment, how radical. I almost wept to see Mick and Keith in person — two leaders I was willing to follow, two public figures in whom I could believe. The day after the concert I was so energized that I sat down at my red IBM Selectric typewriter and started writing a beatnik science fiction novel: *Spacetime Donuts*.

I composed the book in the style of my father telling a story after a meal: I made it up as I went along. But I had a particular science idea to present, and this guided my journey. The idea was that if you shrank to a small enough size, you'd end up being bigger than our galaxy. The notion of finding galaxies within our atoms is of course something of a cliché. But my notion of bending the size scale into a circle was more unexpected. I hesitate to say that I was the *first* to suggest the notion of circular scale as, over the years, I've found that essentially every possible idea can be found somewhere in a pre-existing piece of genre science fiction — the corpus of SF is our own homegrown Library of Babel.

*Spacetime Donuts* included another element, the notion of a cadre of people able to plug their minds directly into their society's Big Computer. This in some ways prefigured William Gibson's epochal novel *Neuromancer*, in which console cowboys jack their brains into a planetary computer net called cyberspace. Another overlap with what came to be called cyberpunk SF was that the characters of *Spacetime Donuts* took drugs, had sex, listened to rock and roll, and were enemies of the establishment. The early sections of *Spacetime Donuts* were loosely based on my experiences in graduate school, and the hero's love interest was modeled on Sylvia.

I was initially unable to sell *Spacetime Donuts* as a book, but there was a new SF magazine called *Unearth* which was willing to serialize it. And so I was off and running as a real science fiction writer. It was an incredible rush to see my name on the lurid cover of a digest-sized pulp magazine.

The economy was in a recession at this time, and Geneseo was eager to eliminate faculty positions. Some of the senior math faculty disliked me — I probably had the longest hair of any professor on campus; I'd allied myself with our chairman, who was embroiled in a losing departmental power struggle; and I had a bad habit of too openly speaking my mind. The fact that my Geometry course notes were being published as a book gained me no traction, and my fledgling science-fiction success was but a provocation. In 1978, I was out of my first job.

## **8: Transrealist** [Age 32-36, 1978 – 1982.]

So Sylvia, Georgia, Rudy, Isabel and I decamped to Germany. We were anxious; I remember Georgia asking me, "Do they have Halloween in Germany?" and I told her, "Every day is Halloween in Germany." In a kidding way, of course, not in a mean way. I liked pretending to trick the kids, and letting them figure out the joke. For instance, later, when we lived in Lynchburg, I told them that Jerry Lewis and Jerry Falwell were the same man, only wearing different makeup and clothes. I loved hanging around with the kids, talking with them, sharing in their wonderfully fresh view of things, getting down on their level. To me, they were better company than grown-ups.

When we got to Germany, it turned out that Gert Müller, my grant supervisor, was very *laissez-faire*. He gave me a nice quiet office in the modern building of the Mathematics Institute and told me to do whatever I liked. I worked away on Cantor's Continuum Problem for a few months, reading most of Cantor's philosophical writings in German.

I was lecturing on logic and infinity. And I wrote most of *Infinity and the Mind*. Came to think everything is a set.

And I started writing SF. I wrote a number of stories, and I wrote *White Light* as a transreal exploration of infinity. Working on *White Light*, I had a dream of finding wonderful polyhedral crystals in the shale on a mountain slope I'm climbing.

Providentially, I was offered a visiting position at the Mathematics Institute at the University of Heidelberg, funded by a grant from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. I was perpetually applying for grants in those days, and this one happened to score. My research was to be on the same Cantor's Continuum Problem that I'd discussed with Kurt Gödel.

While in Heidelberg I also started a non-fiction book entitled *Infinity and the Mind*, dealing with some of the same issues as two Heidelberg SF novels. I've often worked by alternating between writing science fiction and writing popular science. Since I tend to invent new things in my popular science rather than simply repeating what's well-known, there's a nice interplay with the thought-experiments of my science fiction.

But sometime early in 1979 I despaired of making any mathematical progress and wrote the novel *White Light* instead. And I gave it a subtitle lifted from a paper by Kurt Gödel: *What is Cantor's Continuum Problem?* As I recall, I started writing the book in longhand while I was alone with the kids for a long weekend, with Sylvia visiting relatives in Budapest.

*White Light* was my first book written fully in what I came to call my transreal style. That is, the novel described, more or less accurately, my life as an indifferently successful academic at a small college in upstate New York. That was the "real" part. The "trans" part was that my character, Felix Rayman, leaves his body and journeys to a land where Cantor's infinities are as common as rocks and plants. I fused beat autobiography, science-fictional adventuring, and science-popularizing mathematical rigor. The book's title was, of course drawn from my memorable acid trip. Other influences were the *Donald Duck* and *Zap* comics that I loved so well — *White Light* has both a chapter featuring Donald and his nephews, and a chapter where objects start talking, as they sometimes do in R. Crumb strips.

I finished the manuscript for *White Light* late in 1979, and after a few false starts, I managed to place it with Ace Books in the US, and Virgin Books in England. I made the Virgin connection by attending my first science-fiction convention, Seacon in Brighton — recall that I was living in Heidelberg at the time. The atmosphere at mathematics conferences had always been rather frosty. There weren't enough jobs to go around, and newcomers weren't particularly welcome. But the science-fiction folks were, like, "the more the merrier." It was great. Some guys from London got me high on hashish, I met a man who was editing a new line of books for the Virgin record company, and I got my hands on a copy of Philip K. Dick's *A Scanner Darkly* — a hilarious, sorrowful transreal masterpiece.

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Among my German mother's ancestors was the famous philosopher Georg Hegel. I remember the relationship under the rubric, "three greats," that is, I'm Hegel's great-great-

great-grandson. When my mother left Berlin, she brought with her Hegel's schoolboy diary — a treasured family memento. Written mostly in Latin, the little book covers the period 1785 to 1787, when Hegel was fifteen to seventeen years old. Eventually my mother lent it to some scholars who translated it into German. In my favorite passage, Hegel is excited about a rumor among the local peasants that an army of dead souls had ridden by the night before. Shades of a UFO sighting! As it turns out, the peasants had been deceived by the lights of passing carriages from a late party.

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*Software* started as a time-travel book, was also inspired by von Neumann's work on self-replicating automata.

In 1983, I'd describe my ideas about this new way to write science fiction in an essay, "A Transrealist Manifesto," which appeared in the *Bulletin of the Science Fiction Writers of America*. The word "transreal" was in fact inspired by a blurb on the back of my Seacon copy of *A Scanner Darkly* to the effect that Phil Dick had written "a transcendental autobiography."

Over the years, I'd write several transreal books rather directly based on my life, and even the more freely-invented books would often use characters and scenes inspired by the people I knew and the things I saw. Case in point: Dennis Poague, the younger brother of my friend Lee Poague, a fellow untenured professor at Geneseo. Dennis was a wildman, a free spirit who always said exactly what he was thinking. He was relatively uneducated, but he had a brilliant, undisciplined mind. In some ways he was my Neal Cassady, serving as inspiration for the character Sta-Hi Mooney who appeared in my next novel, *Software*. The theme behind *Software* was that one might be able to extract a person's personality from their brain, and it might then be possible to run the extracted human software on some fresh hardware, for instance on a robot resembling the person's former body.

I finished *Software* during the second year of my grant at Heidelberg, and had no trouble selling this to Ace Books as well. The world software was new in the early 1980s, and my idea of copying a person onto a robot was fresh as well. The book gained power from the intensity of its father/son themes and from the colorful anarchism of my robot characters, whom I called "boppers," and endowed with bizarre beat rhythms of speech.

The book has an unforgettable cyberpunk scene where some sleazy biker types are about to cut off the top of a guy's skull and eat his brain while he's still alive.

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Sept 1981. Arfie. [Excerpt from "Memories of Arf" in *Seek!*]

We looked in the classified ads and found an ad: *Free Puppies*. I called and got directions and the place was in the boonies north of Lynchburg. We had to drive on smaller and smaller roads to get there; it was a farm, with lots of bare red dirt. The farmer's dog had done *it* with two different males and had given birth to a litter of six puppies on July 3, 1981, though later we always like to say that it had been the Fourth of July.

Five of the puppies were black and shorthaired, one was orange and white and had long hair. He liked to lie on his back when you petted him; the farm-wife liked him best, she said she always brought him inside to pet while she watched TV. We all practiced petting him, and he eagerly rolled over on his back to offer us his stomach. The farmer gave him to us. On the drive home we agreed to name our new puppy Arf, a.k.a. Arfie.

At first I thought we'd keep him in a box down in the basement, but he whined so pitifully that the children got him promoted to the kitchen. We all took turns walking him around the little neighborhood streets of Lynchburg. A lifelong characteristic of Arf's soon became evident: he didn't like to come when you called him. At all. Ever. Although, according to Sorrel, if you squatted down very low and clapped he was likely to come a-runnin'.

We had a big house, and Arf spent a lot of time inside with us. There was a wide pie-slice-shaped step where the carpeted staircase turned: that was Arf's special spot. He could sit there and be aware of whatever was going on upstairs or down.

As well as his special stair-step and his doghouse, Arf liked to spend a lot of time under our front porch. This was a four-foot-high space about forty feet long, with bare red dirt on the ground. Arf liked it in there because it was cool and shady in the summer, and he could dig up the ground as much as he liked without getting scolded. The children liked it under there too, for about the same reasons. Arf dug himself several large crater-like depressions to lie in, and Tom liked to fill these pits up with water from the hose so that there would be a really good supply of mud. Later we had a discarded mattress that made its way under the porch, and Ida would sometimes try to camp out down there with her friend Lalla — until they would get scared and mosquito-bitten and come inside.

One problem with Arf being outside a lot was that he would roam all over the neighborhood, and into neighborhoods further and further beyond. He liked to explore, sniff other dogs' old pee-marks, and make his own pee-marks. And of course if there was a female dog in heat, he wanted to go there. "Arfie ran away 'cause a girl dog had heat," as Ida would put it.

And run away he did, hundreds of times. Not that he was ever *lost* — if we waited a few hours, or at most a day, he would always come home, sometimes looking a bit exhausted and wrung-out. We never found out for sure if he successfully fathered any puppies, although some Lynchburg friends claim they see Arf lookalikes to this day. I hope so.

Once we saw Arf doing *it* with a poodle in front of our garage. It was surprising how little time it took, maybe forty seconds. But those interludes were of key importance to Arf, and it was more or less impossible to keep him from roaming. Especially in the springtime, he'd sniff at the air in a certain way, and you knew that he was going to make a break for it.

One joyful time Arf tricked the dogcatcher in one of those new neighborhoods. The dogcatcher phoned Audrey to say that he had Arf and that she should come get the dog and accept a ticket, but when Audrey got there the dogcatcher was holding a collar and no dog. Because of *habeas corpus*, he couldn't give Audrey a ticket! Audrey brought the collar home, and there was Arf on the porch.

This seemed like a good development. I spent some time trying to teach Arf that he should always run away from the dogcatcher. We sat down together in the driveway, and I moved two little rocks around on the ground to stand for Arf and the dogcatcher. "Dog-catcher come. Arf run away! Dog-catcher bad. Arf run away!" Arf almost looked like he understood, but then he started sniffing at my hands to see if there was food in them.

Arf didn't just roam because he was looking for dogs in heat, he also roamed because he liked to follow the kids to school. Tom and Ida used to walk five blocks to Garland-Rhodes Elementary school, and Arf liked to follow them every day. The kids would die of embarrassment when, now and then, Arf would manage to get inside the school and go

tearing down the halls looking for them, with his feet skidding and kids running after him and teachers yelling. Tom and Ida said they would sit stiffly at their desks, pretending they didn't know Arf at all. We had a friend with a fenced yard right by the school, and sometimes he would get Arf and keep him out of trouble there until the kids got out of school.

The children loved to spend time petting Arf. "I like confiding with Arf when the world seems against me," as Tom put it. "He's always soft," said Sorrel, "He's fluffy!" "If you're ever sitting on the ground, Arf comes up and sticks his nose in your face to see what you're doing," observed Ida. "The nerve!" Audrey liked taking him for walks, she was proud of what a cute puppy he was, and of how everyone would comment on him. She particularly admired his high-held feathery tail; she liked to call him "Plume." And she relied on him to defend the house when I wasn't around.

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With my grant expiring, it was time to find another job in the U. S. Once again, I received but one job offer, this time from Randolph-Macon Woman's College in Lynchburg, Virginia. Sylvia, the kids and I were happy to be back in the States, but the Lynchburg of 1980 took some readjustment. For one thing, it was the home town of the then-famous TV evangelist Jerry Falwell. Far from being populated by beatniks, hippies and university types, Lynchburg seemed filled with rednecks and preppies.

Finished *Infinity and the Mind*, got the final outline at a religious "retreat." The pervasive TV evangelism. Wrote *The Sex Sphere* from European memories and in reaction to the namby-pamby surroundings.

There were but three people in the Mathematics Department, and the chairman and I never saw eye to eye. He disliked that I didn't collect and grade homework on a daily basis. I found out that I was fired. What with losing two teaching jobs in a row, I had a lot of punk sentiment.

I started a punk band, The Dead Pigs with some other terminated faculty. I was the singer, even though I can't really sing — but I can't play any instruments either. It was exciting, and fun to be doing something non-intellectual for a change. But, as per usual with punk bands, we self-destructed fairly fast. I was unhappy and Sylvia was unhappy too. It was a tough time, an emotional low point.

Whenever Sylvia and I had a temporary falling out, my parents always took her side.

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The kids acting like animals with the Xmas carolers.

Georgia would have occasional fights with Rudy, calling him an upstart barbarian

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Going to Maine with my parents.

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As if descending from Olympus, no less a figure than my boyhood hero Robert Sheckley appeared to bless my venture. He was touring the country in a camper van with his then-wife Jay Rothbel Sheckley. He knew where I lived because I'd recently sent a story to *Omni*, where he was for a time the fiction editor. (Although Sheckley bought my story, his higher-ups wouldn't print it.) Sheckley parked his van in our driveway for several days, plugging into our electricity and water. My mother was visiting as well, and it was fun to see the two of them together, almost flirting with each other. Sheckley had read *White Light*, and said he liked it exceedingly.

Sheckley's visit. Jay Sheckley tells me to read William Gibson's "Johnny Mnemonic" in *Omni*.



## 9: Cyberpunk [Age 36-40, 1982 - 1986.]

I started hearing from Bruce Sterling, he'd reviewed Spacetime Donuts and White Light in a free paper in Austin. Late he began publishing a zine called *Cheap Truth*.

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July 82, new office downtown.

I rented an office for fifty dollars a month in an abandoned house at 1324 Church Street in downtown Lynchburg, right next to the offices of the building's owners, some friends who ran a small graphics design company.

It was a good spot. Art is basically a subversive activity, best carried out in a clandestine manner.

Somehow I got a contract for a new nonfiction book for Houghton-Mifflin titled *The Fourth Dimension*—I think I sent them a letter of inquiry cold. I had accumulated more ideas on this topic and was ready to treat it again.

I was selling some articles to a popular science magazine called *Science 83* (they changed the last digit of their name every year). For one article I got to interview the wonderful mathematics writer Martin Gardner, and he lent me a box of rare books on the fourth dimension. After the artist David Povilaitis illustrated one of my *Science 83* articles, I privately engaged him to illustrate *The Fourth Dimension*, which did much for the appeal of the book. I was in the writing business and I was proud of myself.

I'd write six books in four years. *The Fourth Dimension*, *Master of Space and Time*, *All the Visions*, *The Secret of Life*, *Mind Tools*, *Wetware*. Not to mention all the stories and science articles. These were the most creative years of my life. It was an exhilarating time, but I was also very unhappy. I was on an emotional roller coaster. I was like a piano that's had its wires tightened up to the point where the surrounding frame is about to snap.

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Rudy sick, he comes into the office with me, he brings his plastic toy soldiers, and his battery-operated Japanese robot, and he puts the soldiers in a circle around the robot and turns on the robot, and it's an SF flick right there.

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I was proud to be self-employed. I was out in the adult world, I'd escaped the infantilizing crib of academia. I was making some new friends, local businessmen my age—an art gallery owner, a couple who ran two women's clothes shops, another couple who sold belts and leather hats at art fairs, a photographer, a designer. Some days I've have a nice lunch with one of them at a pub called the Eagle, located in a corner of a former bank. Bucky and Jack Glenn.

The Vaughans, Abramses, Baldwins, Carringtons.

Wendy's Island. Ordering takeout Chinese food.

Roland

The back streets of Lynchburg. "Black people's neighborhood, no whites allowed."

A black guy in the 7-11 counting out change to pay for something, mostly pennies, he says, "Look at that, my money turned brown."

Free pass to the Plaza movie theater in 1983 as the manager was an SF fan.

Drinking with the Vaughans, going to the Texas Inn for hotdogs. Pissing off the cliff, reckless of falling off.

Henry comes by my office on his 40th birthday. "I thought I'd feel grown-up or something. But it's just another day."

"My Pop always says that he still doesn't feel like a grown-up."

"Some of them were already grown-up in high-school."

"Not us."

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Sylvia switched over to teaching at Seven Hills School, a private girls' academy in Lynchburg, not far from our house, and a much preppier scene. She ended up teaching French and Latin. Georgia was going there as a student, and she was in Sylvia's Latin class, chattering and passing notes to her friends the whole time.

Sylvia and I had reached the point of conversing with each other by writing letters back and forth between our house, my office, and maybe her workplace. If we talked face to face about our relationship, we'd start fighting, especially on the weekends when we'd usually be drinking. But we were trying so hard to piece things back together. She was so level-headed and loving and sensible in those letters, doing her best to hang onto me. She really didn't want to let me go. I was lucky.

The arguing with S spiked at Halloween, 1982. The Dead Pigs had a reunion at a big party in the house of this older guy Jack(?) who lived near the campus. After the party we had such a big fight that I went to stay with my friend Greg in Massachusetts for a few days. I put my Selectric in my suitcase and some Clash records. I felt emotionally bankrupt.

Greg talked to me about me thinking I had an "idiosyncrasy credit," that since I was a writer I could do anything I liked. Like a character in a play. But he saw me as a suffering human being. I realized that all my books, all my neat ideas and my contacts—they didn't mean anything if I couldn't live my life. To be an artist, I didn't have to rip my guts out—nobody wanted me to—it wasn't going to make me any hipper or a better writer to kill myself.

"We're young men in search of answers," said Greg. "Except we're not young anymore...and there aren't any answers."

And after that, things finally began getting better. I gave up smoking pot for a month, and we went for a few sessions with a marriage counselor.

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Dec 6, 82. G after Christmas dance. "Tyler said my dress was soft," said Georgia, thrilled and almost unbelieving that her uncouth date could manage to say something nice to her.

Dec 11. "Central Teaching of Mysticism" talk at Mary Molyneux Abrams's "commencement" party.

Jan 83. I finish the 4D book. P. K. Dick is dead. I meet him at a party I go to with the Vaughans. He's the garbage king. "I've furnished my whole house with stuff people throw away."

Feb 83, I get Sylvia the black and white 1956 Buick. The snowstorm. Watching *Animal House* at Pop's. On the way back, while we're driving through Ruckersville, Virginia, where my ancestors were in the 1700s, Sylvia takes a copy of Allen Ginsberg's

Howl out of our glove compartment and begins reading it aloud. “Angel-headed hipsters longing for the connection to the starry dynamo of night.”

I realize that Sylvia is a warm body that needs love.

Feb 83. Platt getting Susan Allison to mail out *The 57th Franz Kafka*.

March, 83. I finally start work on *Master of Space and Time*. Phil Dick Award. *Software* was honored with the first Philip K. Dick prize for the best paperback novel of the year. My SF has that same off-kilter, subversive quality that Phil’s did.

Tom Disch was there. I had my college artist friend Barry Feldman pose as me at the door. He’d always wanted to be famous. Nobody knew what I looked like. He stood by the store shaking hands and signing books. I stood across the room, drinking and hanging out with Sylvia, Eddie Marritz and his wife, and my Houghton-Mifflin editor Gerard Vanderleun.

I run into the kid who played guitar for us in the *Dead Pigs*. He’s selling popcorn in the movie theater. “Those were the best times of my life.”

April 83. Trip to Ames. I see Dennis there. “I’m gonna get a back-hoe and dig lagoon in Lee’s front yard. We’ll grow Indonesian land crabs in there. They’ll eat anything! They’re carnivorous. We’ll open up a Crab Shack.” I meet Povilaitis in Chicago.

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I had a memorable visit in Sept, 1983, from Bruce Sterling, William Gibson, and Lew Shiner. After Balticon. *The Sex Sphere* had just come out.

They’d started a new movement in science fiction which would come be known as cyberpunk. They were a bit younger than me — I was thirty-seven by now. They’d read all my books and they looked up to me. I was thrilled to join forces with them, it felt like being an early beat.

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There was a big “Lynchburg Yacht Club” party at the boathouse in Sweetbriar — the Yacht Club being an imaginary social club invented by our tummler friends David and Nancy, and comprising simply the circle of people we partied with. We were all excited about the big event, and Sylvia even sewed me a new Hawaiian shirt, traffic-yellow with fans and cerise designs, billowing and lovely. Sylvia wanted me to take her rowing, but I got drunk, went swimming naked with Mike, acted dumb — sad to think of Sylvia sewing that beautiful shirt for me, and then me not taking her rowing.

One positive thing about that night was that I met my favorite poet Anselm H., who was writer-in-residence at Sweetbriar. He was drunk, too. We loved each other at first sight, and were fast friends from then on. Fellow beatnik alkies.

One of fate’s kind gestures had brought my literary idol Anselm to the Lynchburg area as a poet-in-residence at Sweetbriar College, and we immediately recognized each other as kindred spirits. Meeting Anselm rekindled my interest in poetry, and I put together a Xeroxed chap-book of my poems called *Light Fuse and Get Away*, calling myself Carp Press after a line in Rene Daumal’s book, *A Night of Serious Drinking*: “I have forgotten to mention that the only word which can be said by carp is art.” I later reproduced these poems along with my stories and essays in a small press omnibus, *Transreal!*

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At the 1985 National SF Convention in Austin there was a panel called “Cyberpunk.”

I met the other canonical cyberpunk, John Shirley, that summer when we were both staying with Bruce and Nancy Sterling in Austin, Texas. I recall driving a rented car around

town with John, with him riffing off my book *Software*, leaning out our car window to scream at other drivers, “Y’all ever ate any live brains?”

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Pop was settling into a peaceful life with Priscilla in Reston. He was working on accepting himself just as he was. He liked quoting Popeye. “I yam what I yam.”

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After getting the Philip K. Dick award for *Software*, I signed on with a literary agent, Susan Protter. She found me a good two-book deal with a new company called Bluejay Books. They published my transreal three-wishes novel *The Secret of Life*, and my jokey classic SF novel *Master of Space and Time*. And then they went bankrupt.

As *The Secret of Life* was such a personal book, it was very important to me. By way of preparing for it, I first wrote a ninety-foot scroll called *All the Visions*. I’d always savored the legend of Jack Kerouac writing *On the Road* on a roll of teletype paper. So as to emulate the master, I got a roll of copier paper, rigged up a holder for it, and pounded away for a couple of weeks. I was still using my red IBM Selectric. There was really no hope of selling *All the Visions* to a large publisher, but eventually a small press put it out as a back-to-back double volume bound with *Space Baltic*, a book of poems by Anselm Hollo.

On the commercial front, I got a deal for another nonfiction book with Houghton-Mifflin; this was for *Mind Tools*, a survey of mathematics from the viewpoint that everything is information. My agent knew an editor at Avon Books, and she got them to reissue *Software* along with my newly-written sequel, *Wetware*, perhaps the most cyberpunk of my novels.

*Wetware* was the first of my books that I wrote using a word-processor; the previous dozen were all typed, with much physical cutting and pasting. I wrote *Wetware* at white heat, in about six weeks. The book has considerable snap and drive, and it earned me a second Philip K. Dick award. I made a special effort to give the boppers’ speech the bizarre beat rhythms of Kerouac’s writing—indeed, I’d sometimes look into his great *Visions of Cody* for inspiration.

The money wasn’t coming in fast enough. Although my books were selling and getting good reviews, none of them were big hits, and my advances weren’t great. The kids needed braces, and their college tuition fees loomed on the horizon. Professional writers have to spend all too much time worrying about how to sell their work. It gets old. After four years of freelancing, I was ready to look for another teaching job.

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I could always count on Arf to come on hikes with me, even if nobody else in the family wanted to come. One day in particular I remember, everyone was mad at me, and I floated down the James River alone with Arf in rubber raft. That day, for some reason he spent a lot of time sitting like a person, with his butt down, and with his back leaning against the fat ring of the raft. I guess the thin rubber bottom of the raft was too unsettling. I took my favorite photograph of Arf that day, a profile shot of him staring off across the water, with his ears cocked and his eyes alert. He had a long, handsome muzzle with a beautiful black nose.

The boat race, poling from L’burg towards Richmond. Talking in a field to that ex-MP guy John— what was his last name?

Several teams traveled down the James River in hand-made flat boats. In the nineteenth century, these bateaus were used to transport tobacco to Richmond, and as it

happened, one of the first builders of a bateau was an ancestor of mine named Ambrose Rucker, who lived north of Lynchburg near, yes, Ruckersville, Virginia.

Back in my office, At the end of my stay in Lynchburg, three young artists from Richmond come to see me, as if sent by Eddie Poe. One of the boys has drawn a tesseract unfolding.

## **10: Hacker** [*Age 40-58, 1986 - 1994.*]

[I pasted in some stuff from my journal document *Diary I* here, also excerpts from my essays “Welcome to Silicon Valley” and “Cellular Automata” that appeared in *Seek!*]

April, 1985. Going to meet Stephen Wolfram and Norman Packard at the Institute for Advanced Study, also Margolus and Toffoli at MIT, to write an article.

Stocky, tousled, and seeming a bit older than his years, Wolfram speaks with the directness of a man who knows what he is doing.

I ask him what engineers think of his method of modeling turbulence with CAs. “Some say it’s wrong, and some say it’s trivial. If you can get people to say both those things, you’re in quite good shape.”

Up at Boston University, Charles Bennett and the Hungarian computer scientist

We’ve been talking all afternoon and Stephen Wolfram is tired. On the computer screen in front of us, patterns are forming. We are watching the time-evolutions of various one-dimensional cellular automata. Some of the patterns are predictable as wallpaper, some are confusingly random, but just now there is one that strikes a pleasing balance between order and chaos. It’s shaped like a pyramid, with red and blue down the sides, and with a symmetrical yellow pattern in the middle — a pattern vaguely like an Indian goddess.

“What’s the number on that one?” asks Wolfram.

“398312,” answers Norman Packard, Wolfram’s associate at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton.

“This is the way to do scientific research,” I remark. “Sit and watch patterns, and write down the numbers of the ones you like.”

“Oh, this isn’t for science,” says Wolfram. “This is for art. Usually I just talk to scientists and businessmen, and now I’m trying to meet some artists. Wouldn’t that last one make a good poster?”

Peter Gacs are using two-dimensional cellular automata to model biological notions. Unlike a solid-state computer, a human brain is filled with random noise. How is it that we manage to remember things, and to think logically, when all of our mental patterns are constantly being bombarded by extraneous stimuli? Bennett and Gacs tell me they have found a CA model for the process, and they show me the screenful of boiling red cottage cheese. Despite the boiling, the cheese stays mostly red: this is the persistence of memory. Gacs says something very interesting about the device that produces the display.

“With the cellular automaton simulator, we can see many very alien scenes. We have a new world to look at, and it may tell us a lot about our world. It is like looking first into a microscope.”

Toffoli and Margolus, and they look unconcerned. What they care most deeply about is science, about Edward Fredkin’s vision of explaining the world in terms of cellular

automata and information mechanics. Margolus talks about computer hackers, and how a successful program is called “a good hack.” As the unbelievably bizarre cellular automata images flash by on his screen, Margolus leans back in his chair and smiles slyly. And then he tells me his conception of the world we live in.

“The universe is a good hack.”

An editor at *Science* 85 found cellular automata too esoteric, so eventually the article actually appeared in *Isaac Asimov’s Science Fiction Magazine*.

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This time around, I got lucky. A mathematician friend of mine was working in the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science at San Jose State University (SJSU) south of San Francisco, California. I happened to be complaining on the phone to him about how broke I was, and he told me that they had an opening, and that several of the faculty admired my book *Infinity and the Mind*. I flew out for an interview, and gave a talk based on *Mind Tools*. Given that I’d been thinking about this material for a year, my talk was well-prepared; one of the faculty later told me it was the best interviewee talk they’d ever heard. I got the job offer on my fortieth birthday.

What was really chafing on me the most was my strong sense that I was missing out on a great intellectual revolution: the dawn of computer-aided experimental mathematics. Fractals, chaotic iterations, cellular automata — it was everywhere. I clicked over the final switchpoint when I went as a journalist to Princeton and to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to interview computer scientists for an article about cellular automata. Those guys were having so much fun, looking at such neat things, and making up such great theories about what they saw! I decided to become one of them.

If you’re a mathematician, becoming a computer scientist is not so much a matter of new knowledge as a matter of new attitude. Born again. Willing to commit to the machine. By way of preparation, I wrote *Mind Tools*, a book which surveys mathematics from the standpoint that everything is information. So when I got the chance to interview for a job in the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science at San Jose State University, I had thought enough about computers to give a good talk on information theory. They hired me and I started teaching there in the Fall of 1986.

Most people in the East don’t know where San Jose is. Put your right hand so the palm faces down. Think of the left edge of your arm as the coast of California. San Francisco is the tip of your thumb. The space between thumb and forefinger is San Francisco Bay. The thumb’s first knuckle is Palo Alto. San Jose is at the bottom of your thumb, near the bay. Silicon Valley is the thumb’s second joint, between San Jose and Palo Alto. There’re a lot of roads and a lot of traffic. And for the first seven years I lived there, it never rained.

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The last night in Lynchburg, June 1986, listening to “Heroin” from *Lou Reed Live*, the house empty and echoing, all our worldly goods in the rental van at the curb, kind of laughing with our friend Mike Gambone over the negativity of the song, but at the same time loving the swoop of its sound and the imagined glamour of the lifestyle—although, of course, in reality, I was moving my family to California to take a job teaching the then-new subject of Computer Science.

Sylvia was fed up with Lynchburg by now, and the kids, though somewhat anxious, were excited to be moving to California. We rented a big Ryder truck and headed across the

country; Sylvia driving our station wagon with two of the kids, and one kid riding in the truck with me and our beloved collie-beagle dog Arf. I rotated to a different kid each day. It took about a week, a wonderful adventure. We felt like pioneers.

Graceland.

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*The Great Work*. Retooling in Silicon Valley, getting up to speed, working three jobs, the Cyberthon. Falling in with the Mondo crew. 1986.

SJSU. I begin teaching computer science courses. Letting the computer chip into my heart. Mandelbrot set hackers, Rollo Silver. Assembly language Cellular Automata programs.

Assembly language is a very stark and simple language — a bit like Basic — with about a hundred elementary commands. What makes assembly language tricky is that in order to use it properly, you need to have a very clear image of what is going on inside the specific family of machines you are writing for (our course is for PC clones). You have to interact with the machine a little before you can get an assembly language program to run. I got the textbook: Dan Rollins, *8088 Macro Assembler Programming*, and I couldn't understand what it was about at all. The only computer I'd used at this point was an Epson machine I bought for word-processing. I didn't know that 8088 was the name of a processor made by Intel. I didn't know that you say it "eighty-eighty-eight" and not "eight-thousand-and-eighty-eight" or "eight-oh-eight-eight." If I were the type to panic, I would have done so.

Fortunately, there was another mathematician-turned-computer scientist at SJSU who was teaching Assembly Language, and his class met the period before me mine. I went to his classes and wrote down everything he said, and then I would teach that to my class. I enjoyed sitting in his class like a student again, soaking up info for free.

In the summer of '87, I persuaded SJSU to buy me a CAM-6 "cellular automaton machine." This was a chip-laden card you could plug into a slot in any DOS-based personal computer. It had the effect of making my computer screen become a window into incredible new worlds. The CAM-6 made patterns that looked alive. And fast? Imagine globs of oil oozing around on your screen like a light show. Sixty updates a second!

So in the fall of '87, I was ready to go to some computer conferences. I went to the first workshop on Artificial Life, in Los Alamos, not quite sure what it was. Artificial Life turned out to be such a great concept. I mean, forget Artificial Intelligence, let's do Artificial Life. Simple programs that grow and get more interesting as time goes on. Programs that eat computational energy! It was great at the Los Alamos conference. It was the first time I'd ever felt comfortable at an academic conference. We were all interested in the same thing: evolving artificially alive systems. And it was exactly what I'd been writing about in my SF novels *Software* and *Wetware*. Really happening at a government lab!

The town of Los Alamos is very weird, like a Twilight Zone movie set. They have a little museum with full-scale white-painted models of Little Boy and Fat Man. It made me just a little anxious why the government would be interested in Artificial Life. But I'll trust those artificially alive robots of the future to get free — just like the boppers in *Software*.

Befriended by John Walker, CEO of Autodesk, Inc., at the Hackers Conference. We co-write a software package *CA Lab: Rudy Rucker's Cellular Automata Laboratory*, released 1989. I think **everything is a cellular automaton**.

Cellular automata came to seem rich enough to symbolize everything: society, the brain, physics, whatever. The whole thing with a cellular automaton is that you have a tiny program that is obeyed by each pixel or screen cell. With each tick of the system clock, the cells all look at their nearest neighbors and use the tiny program to decide what to do next. Incredibly rich patterns arise: tapestries, spacetime diagrams, bubble chamber photos, mandalas, you name it. Each pattern is a screenful of info, about 100,000 bits, but the pattern is specified by a very short rule, sometimes as short as eight bits. The “extra” information comes from time flow, from the runtime invested, from the logical depth of the computation actually done.

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The California housing costs were insanely higher than we’d imagined. But culturally we felt like we’d come home. As my new department combined two disciplines, I was offered the choice of teaching either mathematics or computer science. I decided to go for computers, even though I knew next to nothing about them. For her part, Sylvia retooled and got a Master’s degree in teaching English as a second language (ESL). We had to scramble pretty hard for a couple of years, but soon she’d found a good job teaching French and ESL at Evergreen Community College, and I was teaching all kinds of computer science courses at SJSU.

I very much enjoyed working at San Jose State — both the Math and the CS departments (now no longer combined into one) have a very pleasant atmosphere, and the students are lively and interestingly diverse. It’s one of life’s ironies that, after my strenuous efforts to avoid being sent to fight in Viet Nam, a large number of my SJSU students were in fact Vietnamese. I wouldn’t go to Viet Nam, but Viet Nam came to me.

New opportunities kept cropping up. I was like some Darwin’s finch with a beak evolved for cracking open a special kind of seed. While there’d been no seeds of the proper type in Lynchburg, they were all over the place in the Bay Area.

Some Berkeley freaks named Queen Mu and R. U. Sirius were editing a radical magazine called *Mondo 2000* — they hailed me as a representative of the new style of SF. I wrote some reviews and short articles for *Mondo*, and eventually I helped them put together an anthology called *The Mondo 2000 User’s Guide to the New Edge* — which was featured in a *Time* magazine cover story on cyberpunk.

I found many writer friends in California: Pat Murphy, Michael Blumlein, fellow cyberpunk John Shirley, Richard Kadrey, and the antic Marc Laidlaw. Marc and I wrote a few science fiction surfing stories together and referred to our shared technique as Freestyle SF.

By dint of teaching computer science courses of every level, I acquired some expertise. Programming was close enough to mathematics to be congenial for me. And I relished the interactive and experimental nature of computer work. I took to lugging my heavy IBM AT computer to parties to show fractals and cellular automata to my friends. All sorts of computer types came out of the woodwork; many of them fans of my work and eager to meet me. One of them, John Walker, happened to be the founder of a booming Sausalito corporation called Autodesk, and before I knew it, he’d hired me on.

So now I had three jobs: writing, teaching, and programming for Autodesk. Inevitably, my rate of literary production slowed down.

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Slowly I write *The Hollow Earth*, drawing memories of Lynchburg. I turn to the historical setting partly in rebellion at cyberpunk as it hadn't brought me any money, partly because I'm obsessed with Edgar Allan Poe.

I composed a tale of a country boy who leaves his farm, travels down the James in a bateau, meets Edgar Allan Poe in Richmond, and travels with him to Antarctica and the Hollow Earth.

While doing the research, I read pretty much everything by Poe, drawing particular inspiration from his novel, *The Journey of Arthur Gordon Pym*, which describes a sea voyage to the walls of ice around the Southern pole, with the implication that there is a huge hole to be found there, revealing Earth's interior to be a hollow as that of a tennis ball. I came to identify with Eddie Poe — he once wrote of being possessed by an “imp of the perverse” that impelled him to do deliberately alienating and antisocial things. I've always had a streak of that myself. To round out my book, I used the hoaxing Poe-like expedient of pretending that *The Hollow Earth* was a manuscript that I found in the library of the University of Virginia.

In the years 1989 to 1992, I took half-time and then full-time leave from teaching so as to do more work at Autodesk. I helped design three software packages, doing a lot of the coding, and writing the manuals. These packages were meant to be like books, but interactive, and were based on programs illustrating new aspects of science. One was on cellular automata, one on chaos, and one on artificial life. The sales were reasonably good, but the profits from these relatively low-priced packages were negligible compared to Autodesk's income from their flagship product, the drafting program AutoCAD. When the company's stock price dropped, I was out of that job and back to teaching full-time at San Jose State. Fortunately they'd saved my position for me.

The Autodesk experience was fodder for a new transreal novel, *The Hacker and the Ants*. Here a hapless programmer becomes embroiled in a plot cooked up by his evil boss — a character loosely inspired by my ex-employer John Walker. Fortunately Walker has a good sense of humor, and he was quite fond of my book; although he did post on his website a phantom extra chapter for my book that wraps things up in a way more flattering to “his” character. He's one of the brighter people I've met, and to this day I let him vet each of my new manuscripts for scientific errors. Many of my programmer friends feel *Hacker* is the best existing fictional depiction of the Silicon Valley life.

I returned to the *Ware* world in my phantasmagoric novel *Freeware*, one of my funniest, most outrageous books.

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1988 Phil Dick award for *Wetware*.

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I begin working at Autodesk. I co-write *James Gleick's Chaos the Software*. I'm also hanging out with the *Mondo 2000* crew, editing *A User's Guide to the New Edge*. I begin to see **everything is a fractal** and, what is very nearly the same, **everything is chaos**. I'm laid off from Autodesk, and I write *The Hacker and the Ants* as memories of working in industry.

I think of a guy I met at the Almaden IBM research lab near San Jose, around 1988, and we'd been in his office talking, and then we walked outside together and were looking at a wooded ridge-line similar to this one, and he was telling me that the patterns were—I don't remember exactly what—some manifestation of a type of fractal or Fourier series that he was studying. He thought everything in the world was a reflection of what he was doing in his

lab. But he was thinking this with a complete lack of irony, which is dangerous. I wonder what ever became of him.

I gave a great Christmas talk on cellular automata at that lab around 1988 as well. I'd just gotten a CAM-6 cellular automata accelerator card, and I shoehorned it into an early IBM PC and connected it to this monster projector they had in the lab. Nobody had projectors like this back then, so it was incredibly exciting to be projecting the enormous images.

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September 1992. Laid off from Autodesk

I finish an *Artificial Life Lab* package I began at Autodesk. The craze for virtual reality, a.k.a. cyberspace. Demoing my fractal Chaos software at the [Cyberthon](#).

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Fall 1993, Back to SJSU. I'm back to teaching at SJSU, at first it feels a bit like a "dull level wilderness" after the energy of being in industry. I get the CAPOW project and work on cellular automata with my students.

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*September, 1988.* Mom's stroke. I visit her at the hospital in Hartford.

"I'd go down to the rehab room with her. The people there were in terrible shape. A boy with a fresh bandage where his foot had been. A woman learning to walk with an artificial leg. A man with a cut in his head like the gash of an axe, learning to stand up again. All so slowly, like plants, the life still there, never giving up, taking the steps to recover from the most devastating wounds."

"The very last day I had to be at the airport at 6:30 so woke up early enough to go see her one more time. She was awake, lying there in the faint dawn light, her head on her pillow, her hair just like always, smiling up at me, all her fine wrinkles. She looked so incredibly beautiful. She looked like a Rembrandt, but incalculably more precious."

Then Pop showed up and we went to play golf at Pebble Beach. Pop talking about the meaning of life in the same eager interested way as always, like a big boy.

Rudy Jr. has a job putting together computers. He likes heavy metal. He has such zest and gusto---life is spread out before him like a huge wonderful banquet, endlessly fascinating and filled with unlimited opportunities.

*1990.* Visiting Georgia at college in her senior year.

*Thursday, July 26, 1991.* Mom's funeral was last Tuesday; she died around 3 AM on the Sunday morning a few days before that. The last night, Saturday night, Isabel and I were the last ones in the family to visit her at her nursing home. She'd been in a coma for a week with no intravenous for five days and for the first time her breathing was irregular. She'd take five or twelve regular breaths and then not breathe for a beat and then take a big sighing breath. That big sigh, how it breaks my heart to think of it, when she died a few hours later, she must have given a big sigh like that, a last sigh.

The next morning Embry and I went to the funeral home to have a last look at her, we didn't want to at first, but then realized we had to, that we needed to. After some formalities the funeral director led us downstairs, she was on a narrow roller bed that was at an angle to the wall, the sheet was up to her chin. She was so very white. Embry and I, her two sons, her two only children, looking at her, and I, the younger, the spontaneous one, stepping forward and touching her cheek and her forehead. She was so cold, no living person is ever that cold.

Her ashes were put in an octagonal cherrywood box and buried in a little corner by two low brick walls right in the lawn of St. Francis in the Fields, the church I grew up in, the church where Mom took me to nursery school, kindergarten, first through third grades, the church where I was confirmed and Pop was ordained, the church Embry still goes to. A little corner of the old churchyard. The old Louisville friends were there at the funeral, her old friends, aged and decrepit.

I keep not being over it, it upsets me so. I'm so tired of being the head of a family, we just spent a week at the beach, with the kids and their friends, and then Sylvia's brother and family as well, all of them taking and taking from me... It was so much easier so many years ago when it was only me and Mom, and I would sit on her lap and she would hug me and kiss me. I'm tired of being a man, and my mother is gone.

*August 1, 1994.* Pop dies.

I held a grudge against my father for his having left my mother, and our relationship was never again as close as it once had been. Over the years my parents' health declined, and eventually they both died of strokes. The very last time I saw Pop, we quarreled.

"It just ends in tears," my mother used to say when we boys would do something reckless. Life ends in tears.

This has taken the wind out of my sails. Knocked my pins out from under me. Knocked the breath out of me. Snipped a part of the world-worm I'm connected to. He's already cremated. I'm just beginning to grieve. I feel very unstable, I need to just be calm and be good to myself. Don't rage.

Judith Gajary just called. She'll be there at the funeral. I was so glad I started crying as we hung up. "I'm an orphan."

Nice to hear a warm Hungarian voice I can express emotion to.

A number of people made speeches, they kind of went past me, some of them were like by politicians, all were praising Pop, but not the sandy freckly Pop I knew as my father. They read a couple of poems. I don't think they used the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer Burial Office, which seemed kind of odd. The man officiating was a Presbyterian minister. At some point the climax arrived, and two undertakers in suits rolled back the Astroturf and put the box down in a pre-dug hole with a dry clayey pile of Virginia dirt next to it. There were two worn planks by the hole to keep it from crumbling. A fly or a bee was on one plank moving around. A leafy stem of chickweed was waving at the edge of a hole. A tiny ant was running around on the plank. I could see a little grasshopper on a sprinkler head near the plank. They put Pop's box in the hole. I stood up to watch. Then a white woman sang Amazing Grace and it was over.

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In 1991, a small press published *All the Visions* as a back-to-back double volume bound with *Space Baltic*, a book of poems by Anselm Hollo.

I write *Freeware*, probably my most whacked-out book ever.

Freeware: Jan 1994 - Feb 1996.

Alcohol and pot is an increasing problem for me, I begin to feel like an animal in a zoo.

## 11: Writer [Age 48-56, 1994 - 2002.]

July 25, 1995, Santa Fe “I decided to try to quit drinking I guess 3 weeks ago. Last week I happened to read Stephen King’s THE SHINING, about an alcoholic writer who goes on the wagon and goes crazy and starts thinking he’s drunk anyway and tries to kill his family. Great reading choice. King does so much interior dialogue, its so corny but so effective. Do a little more of that for Randy Karl, build up to the demented climax better. (I ended up drinking again after a few weeks.)”

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I turned fifty.

I realized that I was tired of drinking and getting high. What had once seemed to be a path to bohemian adventure had become a ball and chain. So I got some help, and I’ve been clean and sober ever since. The best thing about being sober is that I feel more comfortable in my own skin. And it makes for better relationships with the most important people in my life: Sylvia and children.

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In the period 1996-2002, I published eight books in six years, even better than my run of six books in the four years 1982-1986.

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*Realware* examines the question of what you’d ask for if you could have anything you want. Memories of Tonga. I write *Saucer Wisdom* and *Spaceland* as two takes on the notion of the Millennium. *Saucer Wisdom* toys with the notion that there really are aliens, was kind of a scary book to write, a weird Nabokovian roman a clef. I am teaching games programming in my SJSU classes and finish *Software Engineering and Computer Games*.

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1997-2001. See “[Software in Hollywood](#).” In the Nineties, *Software* was under option to Phoenix Pictures for ten years, and went through ten scripts. But the film was never made. Master and Space of Time was under option to Michel Gondry for awhile, but that fell through as well. I try not to put much emotional energy into speculating about what Hollywood might or might not do with my work. If a film is ever made, great, but there’s no point letting a long-shot dream dominate my life.

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I’d had a slight worry that sobriety might impair my courage to write or lessen my flow of inspiration, but far from it. Indeed, the pace of my writing production has picked up. I have more time available for productive activity, and I’m better able to plan and control my projects. I feel my work is stronger than before.

Despite all this, the first book I wrote after my recovery was, perhaps thanks to my imp of the perverse, one of my oddest books of all: *Saucer Wisdom*. The book evolved in a strange way. *Wired* magazine wanted to start a line of books, and they were interested in having me write a work of speculative futurology. I sent them some ideas that they liked, but then the editors wondered if I could find a thread to tie my disparate predictions together. I suggested that I frame the book as if I’d learned my facts about the future from a man who’d

actually been there. My time-traveler was to be Frank Shook, a crackpot UFO abductee who's been given a tour of the next three thousand years by his alien captors.

My old friend Gregory Gibson was visiting me at the time, and I took him along to the pitch meeting with the *Wired* editors. On the drive from San Jose to San Francisco, Greg and I cooked up the scheme that he would present himself as actually being Frank Shook the saucer nut. Greg has a full beard, wears his hair very long, and has a piercing glare. At the pitch meeting, with four editors present, Greg made a few tense, distracted remarks, and then stalked out, muttering that it was too painful to be talking about his experiences to so many of us at once.

There was a stunned silence. I had the deal. After a bit, I let on that Greg really had been hoaxing them, but the editors didn't quite want to let go of the illusion. It was decided they'd present the book as a factual *Communion*-style true-life adventure starring the characters Rudy Rucker and Frank Shook. I was a little worried about what this might do to whatever credibility my name has, but I was willing to grit my teeth and go through with it — not only in hopes of sales, but also as a way of thumbing my nose at conventional notions of respectability. Eddie Poe would have done no less.

I had a bit of trouble writing the book, I even got a little paranoid that the aliens — if they existed — might show up to harass me. To further roil my psyche, Greg was leaving voice-mail messages for me in the persona of Frank Shook. Finally I got control of the book by turning it into a particularly close-to-the-bone transreal novel — as well as being a work of futurology.

Unfortunately, the week I sent the final manuscript to *Wired*, they canceled their whole line of books. Susan Protter got them to let us keep most of the substantial advance, and I sold the book again to Tor Books. My Tor editor David Hartwell didn't have the stomach for mounting a "*Saucer Wisdom* is really true" hoax — and I was relieved. Tor instead marketed the book as a nonfiction science book about the future. It may be that it would have done better if it had been presented as a novel. In any case, it bombed, and my advances went down for the next several books.

On another front, the independent publisher and editor John Oakes put out essay and story anthologies by me entitled, respectively *Seek!* and *Gnar!* I based the pair of titles on a personal motto I'd devised during my years of programming in Silicon Valley: "Seek the Gnarl." The books work together as a demonstration of my theory and my practice: *Seek!* describes my notions about how to find interesting things to write, and *Gnar!* displays the results. Some of this work also appeared in my earlier collection *Transreal!*

I wrapped up my *Ware* series with a fourth novel, *Realware*. I cast the book as a sweet love story, and included a scene with a character hugging his estranged father and seeing him off to something like Heaven. I felt as if I were finally laying to rest the specter of my last painful conversation with Pop. One of the virtues of writing is that you get the chance to revise your past.

All this time I was teaching CS courses at San Jose State, primarily graphics, object oriented design and software engineering. Over ten years, I developed an intricate framework of C++ code that my students could use to create three-dimensional computer games of their own with a minimum of effort. I called my code the Pop framework. The Pop framework and my lecture notes led to a textbook: *Software Engineering and Computer Games*. To my mind, games are currently the most interesting area in computer science, combining nearly

every aspect of the field. But at this point they're much too stiff and difficult a medium to permit free artistic self-expression.

Although it was rewarding to see my students making games, the code maintenance and overall computer drudgery was starting to get to me. As a reaction, I turned to the sixteenth century and wrote a historical novel about my favorite painter: Peter Bruegel the Elder.

On our sabbatical trip in Europe, 1998, I got into a big historical research, working on *As Above, So Below: A Novel of Peter Bruegel*. A sense of history. This involved trips to Antwerp and Brussels and to Vienna, where most of Bruegel's paintings can be found in one amazing room of the Kunsthistorisches Museum. In addition, I took an oil-painting class with Sylvia, so that I'd have a better feel for the craft I was describing. Even after the book was done, I continued painting a bit. I enjoy the process; it's refreshingly different from writing and programming.

To me, each Bruegel picture is like a novel, rich with characters and emotions, with artifacts and events, all set against wonderfully realistic natural landscapes. I identify very deeply with the man. He loved both the fantastic and the specific; he depicted otherworldly drolleries and everyday life. His work was often viewed as vulgar or obscure, and he had only a modest success in his lifetime.

I put everything I had into *As Above, So Below: A Novel of Peter Bruegel*, and I hoped it would have a wide mainstream success. But despite excellent reviews in the trades, my book was ignored by the newspapers and magazines, and sales were indifferent. I found this extremely disappointing.

Also in 2002, I reprised the theme of the beleaguered Silicon Valley native in my novel *Spaceland*, which is a thematic sequel to Abbott's *Flatland*. Not many people are aware of it, but *Flatland* was set on December 31, 1999, and I set *Spaceland* then as well. Joe Cube, a middle manager at a computer company, receives a Y2K visit from a being from the fourth dimension.

In both *As Above, So Below* and *Spaceland*, I created my characters out of whole cloth. As I get older, the idea of modeling my characters on myself and my friends seems less and less like a viable commercial proposition. Most readers aren't interested in old people!

## **12: Still Kicking [Age 56-63, 2002-2009.]**

When my father was on his last legs, he said, "What was I so worried about all those years? What difference did any of it make?"

9-11. EADEM MUTATA RESURGO. Prof. Bumby.

"Eadem mutata resurgo," continued Onar. "Do you know it? The inscription on the tomb of Archimedes, beneath a drawing of a logarithmic spiral. The same, yet altered, I am reborn.

For my twenty-fifth book, I decided to write a fat science-fiction novel, an epic galaxy-spanning adventure. I'd never tried to hit the long ball before. To get in the spirit, I read Tolkein's *Lord of the Rings* for the first time. I wanted to write something that I could have read aloud to my own kids, and I made my hero a twelve-year-old boy named Frek.

Frek goes on a quest for a potion to restore the ruined ecology of year 3003 Earth: the title is *Frek and the Elixir*.

In order to organize my long book, I decided to employ a technique of object-oriented software engineering, that is, to base my work's design on a well-tested pattern. I made a close study of Joseph Campbell's, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* — another book I'd never happened to read before. Campbell identifies seventeen possible stages of the universally recurring monomyth, and I decided to write one chapter for each stage. In the event, *Frek and the Elixir* grew so long that I compressed two pairs of stages into single chapters, making fifteen chapters in all.

I went back to Brussels in Fall, 2002, and lectured on Philosophy of Computer Science. Wolfram's notion that **everything is a computation**. Nick Herbert's opposing notion of the non-computational quantum mind. Speculations about what's coming ahead.

In 2002, while I was working on *Frek and the Elixir*, I took a semester's sabbatical from SJSU, finding a position in Brussels as a guest of the Flemish Academy of Arts and Sciences. Sylvia joined me for about half of the time. A house believed to have been Bruegel's studio and dwelling place still stands in Brussels. I received my first printed copy of my Bruegel novel, and that night I walked alone past the master's old house in the rain. I felt that his spirit was at my side. He said he liked my book, and I was glad.

Also while in Brussels, I learned that there had been a "Ruckers" family of harpsichord-builders in Antwerp in the sixteenth century, and that one of them, Andreas Ruckers, had belonged to the same guild as Peter Bruegel! It's probable that the Peter Rucker who came to America in 1690 was from the Antwerp clan.

So I got on the Brussels Metro to the train station to catch the night train (7 PM - 9:45 AM) to Vienna to visit B's 12 pictures there. And on the metro I get into this SF trip that Bruegel's alive inside me, looking through my eyes. I've "twinked" him as I used to say — this being a word I made up to mean thinking or praying or somehow summoning up a replica-model of another person in your own head. And I'm looking with Bruegel eyes at the subway platform. The diabolical magic moving stairs, is this Hell? Yet the people look the same, albeit very strangely clothed. The sight of a train so odd & the columns holding up the roof, a girl is sitting & singing — beautifully — for money and for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time I deny a beggar, though the Bruegel inside me wants to go over to her, the only living lovely thing in this human ants-nest subway dungeon.

I follow signs for the train station — supposedly reachable from the subway stop — and end up in half-finished construction (there's a lot of that in Belgium, they seem to be slackers). The sun is setting, light on a glass building, no sign of green, just pipes and stone and glass and asphalt and for a minute I'm so into being Bruegel that I'm utterly lost and confused.

The sabbatical semester proved to be so heady a taste of freedom that, in the end, it made me unwilling to stay in academic harness.

I felt like A Square from the book *Flatland*, returning from his trip into the higher dimensions, settling back into the dull level wilderness of his old world.

In the spring of 2004, I retired from teaching. The endless hours of keyboarding and mousing were getting to me. The California state budget was a mess, and our teaching loads and committee obligations were going up. I felt like I was beginning to repeat myself in my

lectures. And I longed to spend my remaining years on what I love most: writing and traveling.

As a farewell to computers, I wrote a substantial book about computation and reality. I'd meant to write this work much earlier on, but I'd gotten in too deep to have enough time or perspective. You might say that I went native on the Silicon Valley story. But now, with my teaching load gone, I had the time to step back and figure out what I'd been doing for the last eighteen years.

I'd written a first draft of the book in Brussels, where I was teaching a course on for the philosophy department at the University of Leuven. I'd jokingly entitled these lecture notes *Early Geek Philosophy*. Hoping for a better-than-usual advance for my tome about computation and reality, I engaged the prominent science-book agent John Brockman. He helped me work out the proposal, and we adopted the title, *The Lifebox, the Seashell, and the Soul*. As of Fall, 2004, I'm putting the finishing touches on the book. I'll probably add a long, explanatory subtitle: *What Gnarly Computation Taught Me About Ultimate Reality, the Meaning of Life, and How To Be Happy*.

Like many writers, I spend too much time fretting about the relative success of my books. But I also work at being grateful for what I have. After all, the vast majority of people don't get published at all. My books are printed and find a substantial audience; I get money and respect in return. I'm lucky to have the ability to write.

I revel in the craft of writing; I like being able to control these little worlds where things work out the way I want. My emotional makeup is such that it doesn't require any special exercise of willpower to stay focused during the weeks and months that it takes to turn out a book. Writing is simply what I like to do. If anything, it could be that I'm a bit compulsive about my writing, preferring it to the uncertainties and disappointments of daily life. It's no accident that so many of my heroes leave the ordinary world for adventures in fabulous other lands — for the real me, those other lands are my books.

Even so, writing is hard, and after each book is finished, I wonder if I'll manage to write another. So far, I always do. But I can imagine the day coming when I feel comfortable setting down the pen for good.

I'm currently preparing to write an SF novel about a woman and a couple of mathematicians; kind of an isosceles love triangle. As for the future, I sometimes think of going back and writing another historical novel about a Lowlands painter; this time I'd tackle Hieronymus Bosch. I'd enjoy writing a sequel to *Frek and the Elixir*; I like being in that universe. And then there's the tantalizing prospect of the books I haven't even thought of yet.

Another future project I think about is writing my memoirs. I have hundreds of thousands of words of journals that I've been keeping for the last twenty years — I might either draw on these as source material, or find some way to publish the journals as is.

A grandiose approach would be to create what I call a "lifebox," that is, a large data base with all my books, all my journals, and a connective guide/memoir — with the whole thing annotated and hyperlinked. And I might as well throw in some photographs — I've taken thousands over the years. With some programming help, I could endow my lifebox with interactive abilities; people could ask it questions and have it answer with appropriate links and words. The result could be a construct that's within hailing distance of being a simulacrum of me.



A finished lifebox might take the form of a website, although then there'd be the thorny question of how to get any recompense for the effort involved. A commercial alternative would be to market, say, *Rudy's Lifebox* as a set of files on a portable data storage device of some kind.

And then? One of these days I may well end up where I began: fingerpainting with my own excrement. God willing, I'll still be enjoying myself.

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In addition, I took an oil-painting class with Sylvia, so that I'd have a better feel for the craft I was describing. Even after the book was done, I continued painting a bit. I enjoy the process; it's refreshingly different from writing and programming.

I retire in 2004 at age 58. In one of the last computer graphics classes I taught, I had a nice image of the perspective matrix changing the size of the world.

Figuring out what computation means. Grasping the gnarl of natural life.

*Big Sur Cow*. Living like a cow on the Santa Cruz hills, chewing the grass, staring at the clouds and the sea? Writing like a vine growing pumpkins? Waiting for death? Degrees of serenity.

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2004. I dramatize my god-as-novelist notion in my novel *Mathematicians in Love*.

## ***Proposal, February 18, 2009***

*I sent an initial version of this to Tachyon in February, 2009, and later to PS Publishing and to Tor Books. I think I fixed on this particular subtitle around June, 2009.*

A Proposal for *Nested Scrolls: The Memoir of a Cyberpunk Philosopher*  
by Rudy Rucker

Projected length 98,000 words. Projected delivery date October 30, 2009. The book is very nearly done.

*Nested Scrolls* is Rudy Rucker's account of a life spent mining the far fringes of philosophical speculation for his novels and science books.

Born in 1946, Rucker grew up in the suburbs of Louisville, dreaming of science-fiction and the beatniks. While earning his Ph. D. in mathematical logic, he had a number of life-altering meetings with Kurt Gödel, perhaps the greatest mathematician of our times, then at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. Yet at the same time, Rucker was publishing underground cartoons in his campus newspaper.

At an early teaching job in upstate New York, Rucker became involved in historical and philosophical research into the notion of the fourth dimension, and he began his publishing career with a popular book on this topic. In a move which would prove characteristic, he was also using these ideas in a series of beat-influenced science-fiction stories. Throughout his career, Rucker would work in this dualistic fashion: converting his scientific researches into SF ideas, and letting his SF stories act as laboratories for thought experiments.

Married and with three children, Rucker spent two years writing a popular book on infinity while on a grant in Germany. This period was a turning point, as at the same time he wrote his classic novel of a disaffected professor who travels to infinity, *White Light*, and his award-winning visionary novel *Software*.

As if by a cosmic joke, his next job was as a mathematics professor in the Lynchburg, Virginia, a town wholly under the thumb of right-wing evangelists. Failing to fit in, Rucker rebelled against the system by starting a punk rock band called the Dead Pigs. Remaining in Lynchburg, he dropped out of academia and wrote six books over a period of four years. His novels, *Software* and *Wetware*, won the Philip K. Dick award for the best paperback SF novel of the year. He became an integral part of the burgeoning cyberpunk science fiction movement.

By now it was the mid 1980s, and computers were ushering in a new era of experimental mathematics. Rucker moved to Silicon Valley, retooled, and became a computer science professor at San Jose State University, also working as a programmer for the computer graphics company Autodesk.

Rucker spent twenty years in the dark Satanic mills of Silicon Valley and in the lotus lands of the San Francisco Bay Area. Imagine if William Blake had worked in a textile factory—what might he have written then?

Never one to stick to formal science, Rucker helped edit the countercultural magazine *Mondo 2000*, spent time with Tim Leary and Stephen Wolfram. At the same time, authored a number of computer programs involving graphical displays of fractals, chaos, cellular automata, artificial life. He made numerous forays into Hollywood, as his novel *Software* was nearly made into a major film. And all the time he speculated about the nature of reality—and converted his discoveries into demotic science fiction novels.

*Nested Scrolls* is Rucker's coda, his summing up of what he's learned during a lifetime of revolution amid artists, philosophers, freaks and machines.

## ***Journal Index***

To some extent, I'll draw on my paper and electronic journals for my memoir, although I don't actually want to take the time to reread them all. For the electronic journals weigh in at nearly 500,000 words, and the paper journals add perhaps another 300,000!

But I will use them as a reference source.

The following index is copied from my *Diary index.doc*.

### **Paper Scrapbook Journals (1982-2004)**

My paper journals are a bit more inclusive than my later electronic journal notes, as I tend to paste drawings, souvenirs, ephemera, reviews, and a few photos into my paper journals, which are in oversized ledgers.

There is some overlap between the paper scrapbook journals and the electronic journals starting near the end of volume 3 of my paste-up paper journals

The run is as follows.

Volume	Start	Covers	End	Pages
1	August, 1982	New office in	Nov 4, 1984	170

		Lynchburg		
2	Nov 12, 1984.	Wetware, Mind Tools	Feb 5, 1988	150
3	April 10, 1988		Dec 23, 1992	150
4	Dec 19, 1992		Aug 22, 1997 (but with email and paste-ins through Dec, 1997)	220
5	Sept 17, 1997		July 5, 2001	150?
6	July 10, 2001		June 1, 2004	188

### Electronic Journals (1990-2008+)

After June 1, 2004—the day I retired from teaching at SJSU, I stopped maintaining paper scrapbook journals. This wasn't a conscious decision, it's just the way it worked out. That is, on March 25, 2007, I realized that I had gotten nearly three years behind on the paper scrapbook journals, and that I didn't have the desire to do all the cutting and pasting anymore.

What happened, is that, soon after retiring in 2004, I began maintaining the photo-illustrated online [Rudy's Blog](#), which soaked up the energy that had gone into my old paper scrapbook journals. The blog ate the paper journal.

I still maintain a separate electronic journal, posting excerpts in the blog, but censoring the entries somewhat and not posting all of them. I also create a lot of journal-like entries in the writing notes for my books. When I finish a book, I post a slightly edited version of those notes as a PDF file on my [About Writing](#) web page.

Note that most of the entries in the Electronic Journals prior to June 3, 2004, were in fact printed and pasted into the paper scrapbook journals.

For instance, the pasted-in material from electronic journal Series 1 starts in near the end of Paper Scrapbook Journal 3. But, again, starting on June 3, 2004, I didn't print out the electronic journals.

I would like to leave a complete record of my electronic journal so as to avoid the intrinsic volatility, unreliability, and potential unreadability of digital storage. So at some point, I hope to print a complete run of the electronic journal notes, although first I'd want to edit them for the public eye. And, by the same token, I'd like to scan the paper journals. But maybe I'll never get around to these chores.

Here's a summary of the electronic journals. I didn't reread much of them for the memoir, but the individual tables of contents for the electronic journals were some help in figuring out my time-line.

Series	Title	Dates	Yrs & Mos. Months.	Word Count	Words per Month
1	Addicted	May 5, 1990 - January 2, 1996	5 yr + 8 mo. 68 mo.	96,147	1,414
2	Sober	June 9, 1996 - September 15, 1999	3 yr + 3 mo. 39 mo.	80,131	2,054

3	The Millennium	December 8, 1999 - September 4, 2002	2 yr + 9 mo. 33 mo.	88,234	2,674
4	The Brussels Illuminations	September 5, 2002 - August 23, 2003	1 yr. 12 mo.	60,926	5,077
5	I Retire	August 28, 2003 - February 28, 2005	1 yr + 6 mo. 18 mo.	80,492	4,470
6	Death's Door.	February 28, 2005 - August 30, 2008	3 yr + 6 mo 42 mo.	81,979	1,952
7		September 4, 2008 -	yr + mo.		

## ***Scraps***

### ***Blossom Petals***

*From As Above, So Below.*

“Look,” said Mayken, taking hold of the plum tree and shaking it. She’d shaken this tree every spring for as long as she could remember. “It’s snowing.” The sweet-smelling white petals drifted down onto her upturned face and Peter kissed her. He was very affectionate tonight, every bit as excited as she.

“I love having them fall on me,” said Mayken after the kiss. More than snow, the petals had always made her think of weddings. It was hard to believe her time was almost here. She and Peter shook the trunk some more; there seemed to be no end of blossoms upon the thickly branched little tree. Mayken felt open and happy, she felt as if the petals were falling right through her heart. Peter hugged her, his arms strong around her, his lips smooth and warm in the midst of his beard.

## ***Unused Passages***

### ***My Family***

My wife and I are fortunate enough to have grandchildren—we can see our parents in them, and ourselves, and our children.

### ***Why I Hate History***

All the history classes I ever took were about memorizing battles, rulers and dates. Only in my twenties would I learn that history could be about things that actually mattered to me: mathematical ideas, literary movements, scientific theories, philosophical concepts, and styles of art.

### ***Mike Dorris***

Both Mike and I would eventually become professional writers—he became quite well-known for his novel, *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water*, and his non-fiction book, *The Broken Cord*, about It was only after these publications that I began reading that Mike’s father had been a Modoc Indian. Yet he never mentioned this to me when we were friends. It may have been that, in the Kentucky of the early 1960s, it struck Mike as wise to blend into the white

monoculture. Or it may have been that he began falsely claiming a Native American ancestry for reasons of his own.

In later life, our paths diverged, and I only ran into him once—when he came out to California for a book tour. He seemed distracted and unhappy. Several years later I heard the terrible news that, plagued by depression and family troubles, he'd killed himself. Hard to fathom.

### ***German worms***

Near the end, I formed the notion that I might be infected by parasitic worms—merely because I'd heard some of the other boys talking about worm infestations. So I snuck off to visit a doctor, who reassured me and sent me on my way.

### ***Flying Model Planes***

By the way, some twenty-five years later, I gave my son one of those motorized tether-planes for Christmas—this one was plastic, and it came preassembled. We were in fact visiting with Embry and his family, but lest Embry get his hands on the plane, Rudy Jr. and I took it to a supermarket parking lot where I insisted on being the first one to fly it. It dove into the ground and, being plastic, smashed to irreparable bits without anyone even having to jump up and down on it. And fifteen years after *that*, I gave Rudy Jr. a radio-controlled glider plane, and I kept my hands off it, and he managed to fly the plane quite successfully a number of times. It was much cooler than a motorized plane, swooping around like a crow. But then, as a treat for my own birthday, he let me have a go at flying the glider—with the usual results.

### ***Willy's Canteen***

And the canteen of bourbon that Willie F. fetched for me when he was pledging for my high-school fraternity Chevalier.

### ***Embry Crashes the Fiat***

Near the end of the summer we totaled the Fiat in an accident brought on, in my opinion, by Embry's racetrack-style double-clutch driving moves, although he would say it was the timid other driver's fault for freezing in the middle of the road when she saw our Fiat hurtling down the hill towards her like a guided missile. People still weren't wearing seatbelts. I flew out of the car and hit my head on the woman's car window. Another gap in my consciousness, another intimation of death—but nobody was seriously hurt. A local doctor with a deformed lip showed up and sprinkled something like talcum powder on our cuts and abrasions. A sulfa drug.

"If he's a doctor, why can't he fix his lip?" said Embry.

We stopped by a US military hospital and got a little more treatment. Some the young soldiers hanging around outside mistook me for a German, and started yelling insults at me. It was disturbing to see American chauvinism from the outside, and sense their conviction that they were in the right—even when occupying a foreign country.

### ***Don't Need Drugs To Write***

I never really saw drugs as an aid to creativity. Yes, if I was high, I might temporarily feel *happier* or more *excited* about what I'd written. But the writing wouldn't actually be any

better. My sense is that the odd ideas have been welling up in me from the very start. It's too reductive to suppose that the way to imagine something strange is to take a certain kind of elixir. That would make life too easy!

### ***The Continuum Problem***

The different levels of infinity are called alefs, and we number them so that the sequence of levels goes alef-zero, alef-one, alef-two, alef-three, and so on. It turns out that the smallest infinity, alef-zero, is the size of the set of all counting number, that is, the size of the set  $\{1, 2, 3, 4, \dots\}$ . Another infinite set that we're interested in is the set of all the points on a continuous line. The size of that set is known as *the continuum*.

In 1873, Georg Cantor, the father of set theory, proved that the continuum has to be strictly larger than alef-null. And this leads to the so-called continuum problem. Is the continuum the same as alef-one? Or is it maybe alef-two? Or something else?

By the time I started studying set theory we knew, thanks in part to Gödel's earlier work, that there was no way to solve the continuum problem on the basis of any currently accepted axioms for set theory. But Gödel had said several times that, by pondering the nature of infinity, he hoped to unearth some new axioms that would solve the problem.

### ***Sue***

One time, in 1976, all bundled up on the sledding hill, Georgia took it into her head to start loudly calling Rudy by the name of Sue. This was to embarrass him in the eyes of some strangers who were also sledding there. Rudy tried to slug Georgia, but with his short arms, and all the clothes they were wearing, he couldn't do much damage.

### ***Mr. Vickers***

After a couple of years in Geneseo, we managed, with our parents' help, to buy a three-bedroom house. The man we'd been renting from was a miser, and he refused to pay us back our deposit on our rental cottage, even though we'd worked for days tidying his house into mint condition. Later his wife would empty out his bank account and leave him. And then he hung himself in his garage, to be found by the mailman. But all that happened after we left town.

### ***Every Day is Halloween***

Georgia asked me, "Do they have Halloween in Germany?" and I answered, "*Every day is Halloween in Germany.*"

I've never been one for reliably giving a straight answer. I like pretending to trick the kids, and letting them figure out the joke. But sometimes that doesn't work.

### ***Brooks***

Brooks turned me onto Elvis Costello and Patti Smith, and he also talked me into buying a ten-speed bicycle.

### ***After RMWC***

I'd escaped the infantilizing playpen of academia for the adult world.

### ***Susan's Outrage***

Once Eddie Marritz and I showed up high at Susan's office. She was exasperated with our fecklessness.

"What is it with you people that you gotta take every drug in the world just to get up and ride the subway?"

### ***CAs***

A CA functions by dividing a line or a square or a cube into little cells. Each cell contains a state—which you might represent as a color. You can input some particular pattern into the space of cells, or you can fill the cells with random starting values. Once the CA is running, it repeatedly updates the states of all the cells. In the update step, each cell looks at its own state and the states of its nearest neighbors, applies some simple rule to this information, and then calculates the cell's next state. Strange, life-like patterns emerge.

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My final stop was MIT, where I met Norman Margolus, one of the designers of the cellular automaton machine. Like Wolfram, he dreamed of explaining the whole world in terms of cellular automata.

Margolus talked about computer hackers like himself—and how a successful program is called "a good hack." As the unbelievably bizarre cellular automata images flashed by on his screen, Margolus leaned back in his chair and smiled slyly.

"The universe is a good hack."

### ***Where is San Jose?***

Even though San Jose is a large city, and the heart of Silicon Valley, the burg gets very little respect. Most people don't know where it is. If you think of the San Francisco Bay as the space between your thumb and forefinger, then San Francisco is at the tip of your thumb, Palo Alto is the thumb's knuckle, and San Jose is the bottom of the thumb. Silicon Valley is the part between San Jose and Palo Alto. And, by the way, it's not really a valley at all.

### ***Yoga in CA***

For that matter, you can flop down and go into yoga poses wherever you like, and people just step around you.

### ***Gratuitous Attack on Wired Magazine***

They're larded with fawning portraits of the greedhead businessmen who descended like locusts to eat the dreams of Silicon Valley. Their science articles are all but content-free. And I've always had trouble telling their ads from their articles.

As Isabel sometimes remarks when I go off on rants like this: "Bitter much?"

### ***College vs. High School***

Visiting the kids on their campuses made us a little nostalgic. Seeing college afresh, I realized how unusual it is to have so many bright, creative people in one place. Large domains of adult life are much more like high school, with petty rules, exclusive cliques, and dumb people in charge.

### ***More About Micronesia***

When Embry and I came back up from the falls, was raining, and the sleeping woman was up and at 'em. She'd pulled her skirt up a couple of feet to cover her breasts. We give her the two dollars for visiting the falls, she was talkative and friendly.

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### ***Things To Use***

*People what to hear more about what it's like to be a writer:*

Writing is a fractal, you write at the levels of story arc, scene, word....mine a rap about for this from my *Writer's Toolkit* document.

Writing is like math, you work out the implications from a starting condition. A sorites.

Writing is a way to be in a world that acts the way you want it to.

*People want to hear what it's like to be a mathematician:*

*People want to hear what it's like to be a programmer:*

### ***Writing Journal***

#### ***March 26, 2003. Hiking in Big Sur, Waiting for Inspiration.***

I keep wondering what to do next, now that *Frek and the Elixir* is all but done. The rewards for my SF novels are so meager. I feel like giving up on SF. I can't face the tedium of writing a popular science book about computation, though. And I don't think there's a market for enlightenment books. If the reception of my Bruegel novel had been less tepid, I'd say do my novel about Bosch's life. Right now any of these writing plans feels like jacking off into a used rubber.

Maybe polish and publish my journals? Write a third comic Silicon Valley novel, a bit less SF-ictional than before, possibly centering on Wolfram's *New Kind of Science*? But then I'd have to (ever more inaccurately) try and imagine young people.

Maybe a non-book about computer science. Aphorisms. *Everything I Need to Know My Computer Taught Me*.

Or forget about writing entirely. Paint. Take art classes and get better at it. Or get into computer programming again? *No way*. Maybe, yeah, paint and learn to paint like my man Jeroon van Aken a.k.a. Hieronymus Bosch.

#### ***March 27, 2003. The Memoir Idea***

By the ocean, sun going down. On the rocky Esalen beach, alone, below the house where Terence McKenna and I led a seminar five or six years ago, maybe in 1997.

I have an urge to write the *N. Y. Times Book Review* a letter defending Terence against a reviewer who, last week, said that, in Terence's last days, you couldn't tell if you were talking to him or to his brain tumor. Actually Terence was the same all the time.

A seagull looks at me, its eyes disappear when seen directly head on. I sketch him in five or six positions: staring out to sea, cawing, looking at me, looking down at his feet, glancing at the shore. Sulfur smell from the stream raging into the sea. The sea here somehow wholly unlike in Santa Cruz. It's Big Sur sea, nay, *Esalen* sea. How lucky I am to



be here. I say, "I love you," to the seagull. He bows. We do it again. Maybe the seagull is Terence.

Book idea: *Memoirs of a Crazy Mathematician*. Settling scores, taking credit. If I wrote a memoir, I wouldn't have to learn anything new, and I could talk about myself all the time. I'm old enough. Fifty-seven. That's really, really old. If the book did well, I could trundle out my collected journals. There might be new interest in the novels as well. Book as press-kit.

Patriotism is the last resort of a scoundrel. A memoir is the last resort of a writer.

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#### **April 16, 2003. The "What Is Reality?" Idea**

Here are some ideas for a nonfiction book about the meaning of computation, possibly called *What is Reality?* (Eventually this idea led to *The Lifebox, The Seashell, and the Soul*.)

Infinity = Set = Static Form. Can be modeled as (a) bitmap or voxel copy, (b) display list style higher-level representation, or (c) algorithm to generate (a) or (b).

Logic = algebra = Equations = Rules = Constraints = Physical Laws.

Computation = Simulation = Chaos (?) = Dynamic Forms.

Curved Space.

Emotions = Vibe. Can be modeled by goal weights and utility functions?

#### **May 23, 2003. The "Answers" Table.**

Still on the theme of "What is Reality?" I worked up an Answers table for a guest lecture to Ralph Abraham's "Chaos and Complexity for Non-Scientists" class. All the "Answers" I've believed.

I ended up putting an edited version of the Answers table into the last chapter of my nonfiction book, *The Lifebox, the Seashell, and the Soul*, which is what came out of the plan for a book about *What is Reality?*

I won't reprint the table in this document, as the original version of the table is [online](#) in my Writing Notes for *The Lifebox, the Seashell and the Soul*, p. 110.

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I'm still thinking about *The Answers*, about all the various things I've thought, over the years, to be "the answer." (curved space, infinity, fractals, chaos, alife, CAs, nature, God, drugs, sex, alcohol, science fiction, literature, art, music, bicycling, consciousness, quantum mechanics, pluralism...) Wolfram's *New Kind of Science* would be a chapter of this book, but certainly not the whole book.

Problem is, I'm not sure how to structure a book based on *The Answers*. The most obvious form would be a memoir, my life in science, though I question if I'm of sufficient stature for Joe or Betty Shopper to care about my life in science. What would be cooler would be a series of Italo Calvino or Borges-like minifictions.

#### **November 25, 2005. Old Papers.**

Sitting in the sun on a Folsom Street stoop, waiting for Rudy, Jr., I make notes for this entry on my pocket-scrap of paper.

Once again, I don't know what I want to write next. I finished writing my non-fiction book, *The Lifebox, the Seashell, and the Soul*, in Fall, 2004. And this summer I finished

writing my related novel, *Mathematicians in Love*—well, I’m not absolutely finished, as even now, I’m still involved in some revisions, with copy-edits still to come.

But that’s light action, and I feel like I don’t currently have a project, which is something I enjoy, at least for a little while.

It’s like being unemployed. Or retired—I retired from teaching as of June, 2004—although (antsy, antsy) I am in fact teaching a single philosophy (!) course part-time at SJSU this semester.

So now what? Do that memoir? Or maybe another novel. Let’s think about the memoir.

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Earlier this week, with *Mathematicians in Love* pretty well wrapped up, I looked at some of my papers from the 60s. The 60s college stuff seems so dumb now—back then, I thought the only interesting thing I did was to drink, so that’s what most of my college writings are about.

Or maybe it was that, back then, I normally only got up the nerve to write when I was in fact drinking. And drinking seemed so romantic, so beatnik, so outlaw, so grown-up. The writing is just ghastly, all bluster and pose. I didn’t even know I was lying, maybe. Oh, I knew I was lying, but I thought I could get away with it. I now understand that if you lie when you write, the results are unengaging. A reader can always sense a lie. I was so gung-ho to enlist in the stumbling army of the spun. One poem in particular pops out, kind of fun, me imitating Ferlinghetti’s poem, “Autobiography”: “I have done this, I have done that, I have lived” I’m writing this at age 19, right?

I’d have to reimagine college to put it in the memoir. Or hell, maybe leave it out. Meeting my future wife was a big good thing, but I already wrote most of this in *The Secret of Life* anyway — one of my less-widely-read books, hmm, does this tell you something about the *Bildungsroman*/memoir genre, Ru?

Day before yesterday I sorted a box of papers from the 70s and early 80s. The 70s stuff is about my love of pot, infinity, and the fourth dimension. My mind is opening like a flower. But in the 80s, I’m a complete addict. Fairly grim reading, although also, at times, convulsively and blackly funny in the manner of Burroughs’s letters from Tangier—there I go glamorizing myself again. But some of the things I came up with really are so ... outrageous. Like my heartfelt letter to Johnny Carson about the concepts of “infinity” and the “fourth dimension,” both of which I felt he’d mentioned (albeit indirectly) on his show.

One thing to keep in mind about these 70s papers is that in those years, with my teaching job and the young kids keeping me busy all day, the one time I was likely to write as in the evening, particularly late in the evening after everyone was in bed. And usually I’d be drinking or getting high, so that’s often something I write about. But it’s not like I was always drunk and high. Those nocturnal emissions of poesy are a very particular sample of my activities. Like the dogfather who periodically makes his way from the dog-den to a hilltop, where he howls at the moon.

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One entry I came across was from June, 1981. There was a big “Lynchburg Yacht Club” party at the boathouse in Sweetbriar — the Yacht Club being an imaginary social club invented by our tummler friends David and Nancy, and comprising simply the circle of people we partied with. We were all excited about the big event, and my wife even sewed me

a new Hawaiian shirt, traffic-yellow with fans and cerise designs, billowing and lovely. So I drive us up to Sweetbriar — I think I was the one driving, anyway — my wife, me, Mike G. and his wife, and maybe the V.s.

And I got so drunk and stoned at that party—I danced and flirted with other women, swanned over to the jazz musicians to explain synchronicity to them, refused to go rowing with my wife, went swimming naked with Mike, pissed in the lake in front of everyone, dug up mud from the bottom and threw it at people, drove home— nothing *that* dramatic, really, but overall — *ugh*. What especially made me sad, reading that old note, was to think of my wife sewing that beautiful shirt for me, and then me dancing with other women and not taking her rowing.

One positive thing about that night was that I met my favorite poet Anselm H., who was writer-in-residence at Sweetbriar. He was drunk, too, by the way, and he thought my behavior was just fine, we loved each other at first sight, and were fast friends from then on. Fellow beatnik alkies, both in recovery by now.

I could see using this evening as a scene in a novel. Writing about it might remove the sting. Maybe my character meets a saucer-alien woman at the party.

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Why *was* I so bent on chasing other women in those middle years of our marriage? My father was somewhat the same way, of course, and many men like building up their egos by trying for little conquests, but, really, it's absurd. I guess it's that you feel prematurely shackled.

In 1982, my wife and I had reached the point of conversing with each other by writing letters back and forth between our house, my office, and maybe her workplace. If we talked face to face about our relationship, we'd start fighting, especially on the weekends when we'd usually be drinking. But we were trying so hard to piece things back together.

I came across her letters from that period and in fact, re. flirting at parties, she says "you talk to all the women, I dance with other men, and that's fine, I really don't expect you to flirt with me at parties, we're always together anyway." She sounds so level-headed and loving and sensible in those letters. She was really turning on the charm in those letters, even flattering me and apologizing for fighting with me. Doing her best to hang onto me. She really didn't want to let me go. I'm glad for that.

The arguing peaked at Halloween, 1982, when I went to stay with my friend Greg in Massachusetts for a few days. And after that, things finally began getting better.

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I'm thinking I really don't want to write about certain things in my putative memoir. I don't want to write the comprehensive warts-and-all blow-by-blow cradle-to-grave account of my life — I'd rather leave that for my biographers when I'm dead. My job is to transcend the muck while I'm here to do it, while I've got my gossamer wings to beat, a glittering dragon-fly above the mud.

### ***December 2, 2005. The Dylan Memoir Model.***

So what does that leave in terms of a memoir? Oh, there's lots of other things besides the alcohol and drugs, which are so very much an over-familiar story.

I recently read Bob Dylan's *Chronicles, Vol. 1*. I was struck by what he did: he picked three turning points in his life and wrote in some detail about each of these periods:

(1) starting out in New York, (2) disillusionment and disgust after fame, (3) cutting a comeback album in New Orleans. (4) And in the fourth and last section, he goes back to the starting out in New York period.

And even when he limits his accounts to these narrow zones of time, the account is still quite superficial, with very little day-to-day in it, although oddly he'll sometimes zoom in on some period of hours when, perhaps, he was experiencing a turning point or an epiphany.

Another desideratum I could add would be to not write about any experiences I've written about before, even transreally.

I would need to narrow down onto a few representative incidents for each period. It would be worthwhile to reread *All the Visions* and perhaps not reuse anything from there. That book embodied one particular level of my life, and I peeled that off, and now I want a different level. I really don't want to be writing so much about drinking and drugs this time around. Let that stay in *All the Visions*, which was, after all, mainly about drugs. Been there. And I did college pretty thoroughly in *Secret of Life*, so I might as well skip that too.

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Today, I have to laugh, I was reading an article about the outsider artist Henry Darger, and he wrote an autobiographical note that starts with a few pages about his life, including nearly burning down a neighbor's house when he was young, and then segues into a 1500(!) page description of a tornado he saw.

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I spent the last few days transferring the contents of my three cardboard boxes, my gray metal box, and the cardboard box of "Mom's Desk" into four plastic boxes with hanging file holders. I even got some jumbo 3" wide box-bottom file holders for such bulging categories as my 1970s writings or Mom's pictures.

Now I've touched nearly everything, and I know where nearly everything is. The drunken notes seem less important now in the context of the whole thing. The marriage, the children, the teaching, the writing, the research. Being a drunk stoner was just one of the five or six things that I did. Creeping up from the dog den to howl at the moon. I forgive myself.

It's exciting to see my writing career emerge. One of the first pieces I was really enthused about was a porno story called "Confessions of a Stag" that Greg and I wrote and then mimeographed to give to our friends. It's a bit satirical, with a some of the Terry Southern *Candy* or Bruce Jay Friedman *Stern* feel. I bet hardly anyone under thirty-five has heard of those two books. Anyway, the point is that even from the start my desire has been to *épater les bourgeois*, to transgress, to be outrageous. Greg and I were in fact publishing in our own small way, but we were scared to think of it that way. "Mimeographing a parodistic porno story" was a less formal bar to hop over than "publishing in the literary magazine." I did the latter senior year as well, with a sensitive story called "Rainy Day," but the samizdat not-for-the-light-of-day "Confessions of a Stag" meant perhaps more in terms of my career — not that I'd want anyone to read it now. But at the time it was what I really wanted to write. Hopping this bar landed me within the marble temple of the Muse, where I remain an unruly occupant to this day.

I also came across a pack of papers that I brought home from I think the second grade. Sheets of one-digit sums, little dictations, a few drawings. My writing is so hilariously

sprawling. I was still tweaking my neural nets. So touching to see my little life emerging there.

There's very little written record of what I was thinking during the early years. But I found a sheaf of some fifty letters from Germany when I was twelve — I am studying those to understand Frek better.

To some extent children are inarticulate, they don't express their inner states in lasting form. They don't know how to write yet. But that doesn't mean they don't have feelings. I can recall many periods of brooding, worrying, and so on. I just wasn't writing about it yet.

I found a little notebook that Mom's mother Lily kept when Mom was born. It starts out 1916, *Marianne von Bitter*, and pressed into the first two pages are two of my dear mother's curls. Blonder than I'd expect, and very fresh-looking, as if they were snipped yesterday rather than nearly 90 years ago. I kissed them. The writing is cute, very matter of fact, in German of course.

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I've had a fever for the last three or four days, I wake up in the night about 1 AM and can't go back to sleep and then get up and read *Frek and the Elixir* for a couple of hours. I'm seeing if I can get stoked to write a sequel. As I'm thinking about my twelve-year-old character, it seemed like a cool idea to read this folder of letters I found among Mom's papers: all the letters home that I wrote during my year in Germany, April, 1958 - March 1959. Just about the entire twelfth year of my life.

Yesterday and again today, I felt so weak, feverish and tired in the morning that I just lay in bed reading these old letters. It kind of made me feel like I was having a nervous breakdown — I mean from the outside it might look that way, me just lying in bed reading letters from 47 years ago. But it was fun, more than fun, it was nourishing to my soul.

I really grew over the course of that year. Before I left, I'd been somewhat weak and beset. My brother was tormenting me in various ways. I wasn't popular at school — actually it got worse when I came back from Germany with a foreign accent and lacking that American rush-to-puberty year the others had just undergone — but maybe when I came back I didn't care as much.

Germany made me more independent, I got to have a bit more of a normal childhood. Playing in the streets with a gang of boys and a few girls — I loved that. Riding my bike to the zoo and the swimming pool with my chums. Being a regular kid, not an outcast despised by the richer kids — in Louisville I was going to the private Louisville Country Day School which was populated by snobs. (How could they already think they were better than me in the fourth fucking grade? But they did. They'd formed their alliances in the third grade, before I'd arrived.) It was good to be away from that horrible school and away from my somewhat hypochondriac mother, my distant father, and my really quite predatory brother. A new life. A free world. It was great.

It's hard to capture the tone that my letters have. I'm so matter-of-fact and frank and opinionated and heedless of causing worry. Grumbling if it's hard to write a long letter. Quick to say things are crummy or lousy. Cheerful and energetic. Always writing about my little interests: coins, stamps, kit-models, photography. I was very worried about missing my first year of Algebra in the U. S. and had them send me a book to study. I fought a lot with the other boys at first, but then won my way in.

The school, Zinzendorf Gymnasium, was rather Draconian, they were members of some minimalist puritanical Protestant sect, the “*Herrnhüter Brüdergemine*.” The first group of boys I was with had a strict counselor lady who confiscated my *Time* magazine as being pornographic (photo of a movie star in a negligee) and my *Boy’s Life* magazine as being a comic book (*Boy’s Life* did indeed have eight to ten pages of color comics). Schwester Schütze. She was high-strung, brittle and prone to screaming fits in which we boys would sit stone-faced and frightened. There was one boy she’d always particularly pick on when we took our weekly(!) shower. Dieter Gorklacher. I remember she sometimes had him come into her room in the evening — we were all glad it wasn’t us. Later I moved up into a group of older boys and it was more easy-going.

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The big three events of my early adolescence were the year in Germany, the splenectomy and the car accident. Maybe in some way each of these made me a bit more independent.

My splenectomy was in the tenth grade, maybe in the spring, 1961, I should have been just 15 then. Here I separated from ordinary people a bit more — in that I had a sensation of what it would be like to die, this in the form of the narrow escape, the general anesthesia, and the convalescence in the hospital.

The car accident very clearly imprinted death on my mind: I was knocked unconscious when I drove my mother’s little VW into a tree. I came to draped on a fence beside the tree; I’d been thrown from the car (no seatbelts on) and if I had hit the tree with my head I probably would have died. I knew at that point in my bones that death was real. It would simply be a matter of extending that period of unconsciousness.

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I see these recollections piling up in this entry. Maybe I really could write a memoir.

### ***December 5, 2005. Sixty Hits.***

I outlined a possible memoir chapter sequence in a [previous entry \(March, 2003\)](#), but I’d like to leave that one for historical value and rework the ideas today.

Re. Dylan’s idea of using only three periods — gee, only *three* periods? That’s harsh. How about a really short chapter for each year with one anecdote in it?

How about one a year? Call the book *Sixty*.

I made a start at listing some not quite randomly selected events I could conceivably expatiate upon, numbering them by age, and I used it for [a blog post](#). Instead of printing it here, however, I merged it into my [Chapter Topics](#) section.

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But, you know, I don’t feel that enthused about the memoir idea. This morning I got out one of my newly organized boxes of papers to look for some old scraps where I’d jotted down lists of early memories. And I was like, *ugh*, do I have to keep digging around in this? I’m not sure it’s good for me to be so inner-directed.

Or if I *do* dig around in my past, at least I’d rather be transmuting the material, transrealizing it, carrying out alchemical transformations. That way, instead of just being old, I’m more like a visionary sage.

Like that alchemist being led off to prison in Bruegel’s drawing...

**July 11, 2008. Back to the Memoir?**

I finished my revisions of my novel *Hylozoic*; I wrapped it up in such a way that I don't necessarily have to write a third novel in that series. Maybe someday, but maybe never. So what next? Today my thoughts are turning back to a memoir, a kind of literary autobiography.

The autobio is a project I've been putting off for years, and maybe that's okay. It's not like it would be easy to sell. But I'll think about it a little—thinking about writing projects is what I like to do.

Possibly John Oakes at Atlas Books would publish my autobio, or if not him, maybe Jacob Weisman at Tachyon Books—or if all else fails, I could just PDF it online as a Creative Commons file, not that I'd get very many reviews that way, and not that it's really worth doing if I totally have to give it away. Or maybe it would be worthwhile even then?

Here's a paragraph of a draft of an inquiry email I might conceivably send to Oakes, although now, rereading it, I'm thinking I won't send it at all.

I'm casting around for a new project now. I've been thinking I'd like to write something like a memoir. I have some thoughts on how to skew it to be artistic and interesting. Dylan's *CHRONICLES* is a great model; rather than lining up his whole life like a string of pearls Dylan goes deep into a very few episodes. Two angles I think I might use could be the Father of Cyberpunk, and witness To The Wild West Days Of Silicon Valley.

One thing that kills this particular email idea is that I seem to remember that in the not too distant past, John Oakes said he wasn't interested in contemporary memoirs in any case. And the other thing is that the thought of committing to writing a memoir turns me off.

Lost in the fog.

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This morning I reread this Notes file, which used to be called *Memoir Notes.doc*, but which I then called, *Notes for Nested Scrolls.doc*, for awhile, as I thought I was writing a novel of that name instead of a memoir.

Re. memoirs, note that I also have a 12,000 word [Autobio Note](#) online that I wrote up for *Contemporary Authors*, Gale Press. I could use that material as memoir starter dough. Rereading the *Autobio Note*, it seems pretty good. But, you know, it's in fact good enough that there's no reason I should bother to revisit the task.

Who would really want to read a memoir by me, after all? It's not like I've gotten a lot of emails from people who have read the existing autobio note online.

There should be some riddle whose answer I'm seeking by writing the memoir—or the memoir-like novel. What is reality? What's the point of my life? How can I be happy? What did I learn by writing thirty books? What's the missing book that I need to write? How is it possible to write at all? Can I create a completely pure work of literary art? What has it been like to be alive? What was the point?

**July 12, 2008. *Memoir Angles***

I was feeling a little off kilter earlier this month, and today I'm starting to feel like myself again. Off and on I have this sense of rebooting—like looking at the brake light on my car, I'm like, "Ah, yes, the brake light. An electrical filament illuminating a hard plastic lens."

All the little niggling objects are still here, all wanting their attention share. The radio remote control, the knitting basket, the glasses cases, my three pairs of glasses, my hair, my clothes, the pillow, the lamps, the food in the fridge. It's like the world is this array of male and female snaps, and I'm a plastic sheet of female and male snaps that need to be matched up with the reality array. The lights flow through me, and my piezoplastic body wriggles.

Looking around Borders Books today, I was thinking about what kinds of memoirs get published. David Sedaris and [Augusten Burroughs](#) have a whole thing going with rueful tales of personal dysfunction. Back in the 1930s, Robert Benchley, James Thurber and Dorothy Parker were doing something similar.

Another angle is to present yourself as the Witness to History—for me, this might be the Silicon Valley thing or the cyberpunk thing, though people aren't responding much to the Silicon Valley idea when I suggest it. It's like people are sick of Silicon Valley. Maybe if I could clearly cast the memoir as evocations of a bygone era—which certainly it would be. In this context, I think of the Vanished Wild West.

The point of writing a memoir would be to entertain myself, and to gain a bit more self-knowledge. To have some fun. In certain lights, doing a memoir seems easier than grinding away on another novel. But maybe not.

Mainly I want to write, and I don't care all that much what it is that I'm writing.

**July 16, 2008. *Starting to Write Again.***

I've been half-heartedly working on a catalog essay for Ralo Mayer, a thirtyish European artist having a show in one room of the Secession Museum in Vienna. He emailed me out of the blue and said the museum would pay me for 1,500 words, so I was, like, why not?

I've posted three [revised drafts of my little essay](#) on my blog, but in his most recent email, Ralo sends me a note of stern disapproval, strict and angry. Maybe it's just a language problem and he doesn't understand what I wrote? I'll write up a final version tomorrow.

Bottom line: he contracted with me to do this, and I want to get paid, and I'm about ready to stop working on it and not be hassled for revisions. He wanted some weird prose from an avant-garde SF writer, and that's what he's getting, okay?

This little catalog essay project is relevant to my thoughts of a memoir, because the essay is in the form of autobiographical note, albeit unreliable and inaccurate.

I like the notion of deceptive autobio material, although I don't particularly like the idea of trying to slant the material in any kind of self-aggrandizing or generic direction. Pointless, unexpected, random lies are better, as they're more likely to be able to manifest deep states of consciousness.

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And where to go with my own autobio plan? Can I imagine being a woman? A businessman? A teenager? Buddha? A terrorist? A track coach? A tree? An ant hill? A Latina with dyed hair and a boob job? A puppy?



Probably only my real memories are worth writing, otherwise I'm just recycling received or second-hand ideas.

I keep thinking: forget the frikkin' autobio and write some SF.

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But let's push on the memoir thoughts just a bit more. Coming back to the [Dylan Memoir Model](#), I might pick, say, five limited time periods, and delve into each of these fairly deeply. And even if I don't do an autobio, I might alternately structure a novel this way.

(1) *Larva*. My year in Germany.

(2) *Artist*. The grad school years.

(3) *Transrealist*. Heidelberg.

(4) *Cyberpunk*. Freelancing in Lynchburg, 1983 - 1986.

(5) *Wizard*. Retooling in Silicon Valley.

### **July 17, 2008. Catalog Notes for a Show by Ralo Mayer**

*(Text for a Show at the Secession Museum, Vienna, Fall, 2008. Mostly lies. As of August 2, Mayer still hasn't written me back about this—is he angry? I hope I get paid.)*

Roni Layerson (a.k.a. Ralo Mayer) sent me a photo of herself and her collaborator krööt, near "Rucker Lane" in Vienna, holding two of my books, *Seek* and *Freeware*. I recognized Roni of course, as I already met her in August, 2006, when I saw my transreal play *As Above So Below* produced in Forth Worth, Texas.

That play dramatizes an encounter that I had with a higher-dimensional manifestation of the Mandelbrot Set fractal, who came to me in the form of a womanly entity called "Mamma Mathematica," or simply "Ma."

The production was great, with beautiful dancing—Ma had dancers attached to her by ribbons, serving as small, satellite fractals—just as Roni Layerson is wreathed by her satellite identities and works of art.

Roni approached me after the show and said, "Hi, I'm in your play. I'm a fractal."

She'd orbited in from Austria to visit the Biosphere and to dance in my show. She gave me a copy of her tiny Phil-Dickian book, *Multiplex Fiction: How to Do Things With Worlds, 1*.

I had a strange feeling of mirroring when I talked to her, as if a hologram recording had come to life. Like me, Roni had heavy stubble; unlike me, she wore pancake makeup.

Being in Fort Worth as a visiting star artist felt like inhabiting an entry in Andy Warhol's *Diaries*, which was my favorite bed-time reading in those days. One thing that struck me about the Texas locals was how many of them were dressed like cows—that is, they were wearing white clothes with cloud-shaped black patches on them.

Roni suggested that the black cow-patches were in fact designed to mirror the panel-patterns of the Biosphere 2 dome. "The pattern of the shadows of the space-frame of Biosphere 2, are in fact a non-repeating space-filling Penrose tiling," she pointed out.

No less a cultural light than Ivan Stang, the High Scribe of the Church of the SubGenius, was present at the Forth Worth show, right at Roni's side. It was wonderful to have Stang there in his long hair and rough face with a gap between his front teeth, leaning maniacally forward, grinning at the lines. And even more wonderful to have Roni beside him.

After the show we all went to some local art patrons' house for dinner. Stang began intoning a Southern preacher routine: "Sun Young Moon, L. Ron Hubbard, and me were talking things over the other day. Sun Young talked about having done 110 Short Duration Marriages, with some lonely people having married Sun Young himself. I've done that. But, if a ShortDurMar is not consummated in 24 hours it is a grievous affront to 'Bob.'"

"So do you consummate all your marriages personally?" Roni asked Stang. "I'm interested because I've been calculating the number of possible sex acts that may have been performed inside the Biosphere 2."

"I don't practice what I preach," replied Stang. "I'm a counter-Puritan. I tell people to have sex, and then I don't."

The beautiful "Ma" soprano, Fiorella Tirenzi, was at the dinner with her stage-wig on. She had enormous breasts with décolletage and a tight line where the mounds touched each other. Her leather blouse was open at the bottom, you could see her navel. Roni spoke Italian with her, and they shared some makeup, marking a tessellation of odd polytopes onto Roni's bristly cheeks.

And then Roni turned back to me, "Come outside and let me show you something, Rudy. Science-fiction magic."

We made our way into the villa's garden, and Roni fetched a container of liquid charcoal lighter fluid. With quick, efficient motions, she sketched the skeleton of a hypercube onto the lush lawn and set it alight. "Nobody has to invent the time machine, you understand," she said. "This is a preconstruction. What I do these days is to imitate myself."

"But does the pattern work?" I asked. "As a time machine?"

"It transmits mass through time and space, yes," said Roni. "Come, I'll take you to Vienna, 2008." And it was none too soon, as our hosts were howling with anger over their charred lawn.

Roni and I flapped and shlapped, end over end through N-space, our ears filled with Yugoslav chants. And we touched down beside the Secession Museum in Vienna.

"Every aspect of this civic building was designed by me," said Roni. "Preconstructed according to Metamartian edicts. It all follows logically from the architecture of Biosphere 2, the hermetic crystal palace of the Arizona desert, the Hall of the Martian Kings."

"Even the dome?" I inquired.

"Ah, those golden shapes are another Penrose tiling," said Roni, pulling off her shirt to reveal an intricate tattoo on a lean belly. "My skin has preconstructed the Secession building into the past. I am, you see, an alien mollusk. A living blueprint." Her tongue flickered, the tip rapid and forked. "Would you like to go inside?"

"The building's not locked?"

"No matter, never mind." Roni made a fluid gesture, her fingers trailing like cuttlefish tentacles. And the negative spaces around the building became four-dimensional black blocks that annihilated all distinctions between without and within.

We passed through humming icon-filled rooms to Roni's exhibit, a low, dim space with a rumpled bed and a running refrigerator. A video machine was present as well, mounds of tiny books—and a cactus the size of a bicycle.

Poking around, I found a honey jar filled with moldy mushrooms in the fridge. I suppose I ate them, for the next thing I knew I was back in California—but with Roni's book, *Multiplex Fiction* in my hand, me tripping my brains out.

I read this little book daily, at every hour, wandering my monastic halls like a beadle with his breviary, musing upon Roni's lucidities and obscurations. It's as if the entire corpus of human art and philosophy has been compressed into this tiny paper pad, which is very nearly small enough to eat. From time to time I gnaw off a page and eat it, spicing it with a fine brown mustard.

I would say that Roni makes me smarter all the time, or perhaps it's science fiction that does the job. Science fiction is a blue-collar philosophy of science, a tradesman's hammer for nailing the spikes of daily wonder. If UFOs aren't real, how can God exist? If there are no higher dimensions, how can time pass? If there were no antigravity, how could the planets dance?

I've learned from Roni to create some mental add-on software that I call a Perplexing Poultry philtre. It's a totally bizarre lift. If you fire up Perplexing Poultry within a bio-RAM spike attached to your spine, all the things around you seem to deform into linkages of odd-shaped birds with weird multisymmetrical ways of pecking into each other. You yourself become a wave of perplexity in the Poultry sea.

Philtres are cutting-edge in terms of image manipulation. Rather than being a static video or text, a philtre is a system of interpretation. The technology evolved from a recreational device called a twist-box that was popular in the early twenty-first century.

Twist-boxes were initially marketed as a drug-free method of consciousness alteration, as "a pure software high." The twist-box used a simple Stakhanovite three-variable chaotic feedback loop, rather than a teleologically designed process as is characteristic of the new-style Perplexing Poultry philtre, which is really meant as an *enhancement* to drugs rather than as a replacement for them.

The higher meaning of the Perplexing Poultry or Penrose Polyhedra is as an encryption form for transmitting alien life forms. When you absorb one of these messages, it sets you to shivering, with vibrations deep within you crisscrossing and spewing cascades of phonons into the live net of your quasicrystalline structure.

The structure spontaneously deforms as if you are turning a dial on an Escher-tessellation program, and you slide-whistle your way up the scale through the dimensions, 4D 5D 6D, passing through each one each twice as fast, and getting — it feels that way to you, at least — all the way to infinite dimensionality in a second. And then the sequence starts right up again.

Whooop. Whooop. Whooop. Whooop. Your body is like a scanner going over and over infinitely many channels, and you're trolling for aliens.

"Ring, ring."

"Hello, this is Roni — Whooop whooop whoop whooop —"

"What's the matter, Roni?"

"Whoop whoop whoop whoop whoop whoop *fzzt crackle gonnng* — Hello, I am Quuz from the Sun."

"Aw, Roni, why you gotta lay such a weird frikkin' trip on me; us floatin here in outer space halfway to the Moon ..."

Clicking and chuckling, I collapse into the subdimensions, following my mentor, Roni Layerson, the two of us folding up like portable drinking cups that disappear into the subdimensions.

**July 17, 2008. Why A Memoir?**

Back to the current obsession—why bother writing an autobio? What would I get out of it? Self-knowledge. Bragging pleasure. Self-guidance. Publicity.

Working on these notes in the Los Gatos Coffee Roasting cafe. The guy at the next table has an ascetically shaved head, and he's eating an abstemious salad of greens and goat cheese. Thoroughly, carefully, he chews a single wafer-thin slice of tomato. What a loser.

It's foggy every day in San Francisco this July, my wife reports, studying the paper.

A young woman at another table shakes her head, smiling. No health problems for her. I used to feel that way: potentially immortal. But these days I'm starting to feel like a doddering old man, just a heartbeat away from being cut down in my prime.

**July 19, 2008. Just Writing.**

It's mattering less and less to me if I actually do write a memoir. There's such a powerful "why bother" haze surrounding any plan for a memoir.

It might really be more productive to write another novel. Or maybe just a couple of stories first. At the very least, I'm writing in this Notes document.

Today I actually got a thousand words done on a new story I plan to write with Paul Di Filippo. "To See Infinity Bare." It wasn't too hard. It felt good. Although when I was done, around noon, I was tired enough that I lay down for a nap. But that's okay, a thousand words is a respectable day's output.

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It's so terrible when people have words appliquéd onto the butts of their sweat pants. Like the back of a van. Like the woman I'm looking at right now in the coffee shop. Pale blue sweat pants with "**H O L L I S T E R**," the name of a small town south of here. But of course, to her, the pants aren't terrible, they're cool fashion. All a matter of convention.

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If I weren't going to write a nonfiction memoir, what might I write instead? I could scotch back just a bit, and write a novel that's close to my actual life. A transreal SF memoir, in other words.

It might be nice to write a really easy novel. Something first person and transreal, like *Mathematicians in Love*.

Maybe I go with the 1959 fallout in Germany thing, for instance. And then back to the US and, yaar, NYC and/or DC are *gone*. Especially Texas could be gone. A frikkin' Texas-shaped hole in the surface of the globe, a thousand-mile deep shaft with a giant orange *blup-blup* lava lake at the bottom. A fence around the edge, and you can buy little baskets of bread and throw in the crumbs for the Gnomes of the Hollow Earth. Tiny cowhand gnomes down there in tiny hats, shooting tiny pistols. You can rent time on an ion-beam destruction ray and fry the Texas Gnomes that you've lured out with the bread crumbs. The Gnome Cracklins drift up and people munch 'em down. "One less Texan! Yaar!"

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I posted most of this entry on my blog as, "[Wisecreing For The Swing of Thought](#)." But the next day, the entry was (for a time) inaccessible. Were the Texans defending their honor by hacking my site? Or was the outage merely a "coincidence"?

**July 20, 2008. A Hole.**

Today in the coffee shop, I saw the same woman I saw yesterday with “**HOLLISTER**,” on her sweatpants, only today, it being Sunday, she was dressed a bit more formally. Her husband is seven feet tall, they’re black, they have a cute two-week-old baby.

Today I painted a little, touching up my most recent painting and working on a new one, call it *Collaborators*. A painting of two men sitting on the ground, with unnaturally long, insect-like arms, choking each other. It’s meant to be an image of the collaboration style between Bruce Sterling and me. I was thinking we might use it as a cover image on our joint anthology, working title: *Two Guys*. Probably Bruce won’t like the painting or the working title, only he won’t tell me this until much later on.

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I like the transreal SF memoir concept better all the time. I wonder if I really could write the Texas gnomes story. What sensual pleasure, to describe the massive particle beam weapon that the onlookers use to shoot the little Texans. G. W. Bush has pushed a lot of us over the edge.

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I had another SF vision today, of what you might call *Oinkness*. An alternate world or mindscape that’s made of pig. It’s not like encountering a single pig, it’s pure pigness. Pink skin, ears, perhaps an eye here and there, the stench, the squeal, layer upon layer of skin and meat, an endlessly cloned pig surface, folding back on itself.

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How about a trip to Oinkness? Maybe combine it with that German fallout and Texas hole story.

Possible titles: “Death To Texas!” “Die, Texan, Die,” “Texas Gnome Cracklins.” Or instead of picking on Texas, I could have the sunken state be my Olde Kentucky Home. It’s the land of Oinkness down there. The older boys are down there, having sex with pigs.

German fallout, sunken Kentucky, Oinkness in the pit, J. Edgar Hoover attempts to arrest the hero, that is, young Russ, but Russ calls on the force of Oinkness to protect him.

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From a memoir note of mine, “The Big Island of Hawaii.doc”, Jan 18, 1999:

We’re at the Volcanoes National Park, it’s a bit touristy. The former lake of fire-boiling lava is cold and black now, a dead hole. Halemaumau. Hale-ma-uma-u. A tourist man next to me looking down into it, talking to his kid, “I’d sure laahk to see a gaah drivin’ a four-wheeler around in there.”

**July 21, 2008. Oinkness.**

I’m still thinking about working the Oinkness idea into a story, or into a longer work. Not that it’s such an incredibly wonderful idea, but I have nothing better to think about.

Maybe later today I’ll work on my new painting some more, *Collaborators*. It’s quite primitive now, which is, in a way, charming, but I have that usual yen to polish it some more. Also I’d like to enhance how the foreground pops out from the background. If I do in fact to

use it for a book cover, it's better for it to be graphically strong. Also the guys' legs ought to be longer, more like their arms. And their expressions could be more interesting. Maybe the arms should be squid tentacles with suckers. Here's the version 3 below, maybe the final one, as I'm not sure it's gonna get much better.



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Maybe I should just start writing "Oinkness." Or what's oinkness in German? Oinkheit?

In 1958 or 1959, in Germany, we went on a group hike from my boarding school. The counselors would cook stew for dinner, and we'd wait in line for our servings, singing this song:

*Umba, umba, wir sind Neger  
Von den Stamm der Hosenträger!  
Unsere Häuptling ist ein Weisser,  
Von den Stamm der Hosenscheisser!*

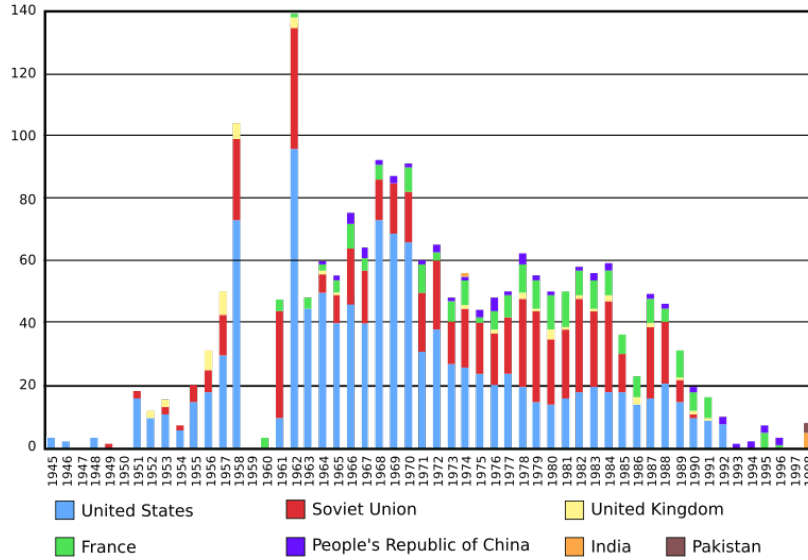
[Umba, umba, we are negroes  
From the tribe of the pants-holders (suspenders)!  
Our leader is a white,  
From the tribe of the pants-shitters!]

The food seemed so delicious in the woodsy air. And I think it's safe to say that you'd only get one portion. It was spring break or maybe fall break. Most of the kids were home with their families, but, as I was visiting from the U.S. and my grandmother in

Hannover was busy, or figured the hiking was good for me, I was one of the kids who stayed over during that particular vacation.

It was raining a lot, and the puddles had yellow dust in them. I think it was spring or early summer, and I'm sure (now) that the dust was pine pollen, but at the time I thought it was fallout from the atmospheric atomic bomb and hydrogen bomb tests that the U. S. and other countries had been conducting.

Worldwide nuclear testing, 1945-1998



Checking a graph of atomic testing on [Wikipedia](#), I find that, as chance would have it, there were a lot of tests in 1958 and none in 1959. So we may as well say the hike was in spring or early summer, 1958.

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I'd like to give my main character a hospital death experience that deflates the mysterioso horror of death. He realizes that, if he'd died, the only thing different is that I wouldn't have woken up. My point is that, in many cases, you're not inevitably gonna see the White Light and the Pearly Gates and the Dead Relatives. What you see has, I'm guessing, a lot to do with the biochemical states you're going through. Some paths go straight into the dark. Death, where is thy sting?

**July 22, 2008. Plugging In.**

My character—what's his name?—is convalescing, and working on a memoir, and he goes for his first bicycle ride, around a loop here, with a friend along to keep an eye on him and chat. He walks his bike on the steep parts. He feels a little dizzy—but his main impression is: what a beautiful world it is.

He says that he's still plugging back in—meaning that he's still repairing my interface to the giant reality computation. "I see now that so much of what I thought of as happening inside my head was always going on outside."

He feels tired a lot of the time. The naps hit him like sandbags—*boom*, he's out. At times it's even like there's bags of sand *sewn into* his body cavities, weighing him down.

**July 23, 2008. *The Novel.***

So the memoir plan isn't gelling for me. It feels like work instead of like fun. And I'm leaning towards a simple and crystalline SF novel. Something light and irresponsible.

Oversized invader worms underground, *They Only Come Out At Night?* I read a book like that in high school, I think. But nah.

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Better: a UFO novel, kind of in the Young Adult mode, although not actually a YA book. I have this eidetic vision of a scene with a bad kid, call him Denny Allaway, frantically humping a chunk of cow liver in the UFO, he's imagining that it's Weena Wesson, the Hollywood love goddess.

I get the name "Weena" from Aldous Huxley, *The Time Machine*, the woman of the future. I match it with "Wesson" for doubling, like Marilyn Monroe, Diana Dors, or Brigitte Bardot—and of course Wesson is a kind of commercial vegetable oil, perhaps not all that healthy.

Cute Sue Pohler is laughing at Denny. Our hero, Tim Bruno, helps Denny out of the saucer, shielding him from Sue's ridicule. It's like an after-school special.

They learn that the President of the U. S. has sold us out. So they set out to kill him—but are spared the karmic onus of the assassination when Tim reforms the Prez by talking sense to him? Naw, that would be too much of an after-school-special touch, pretending that you could teach a powerful politician anything by talking to him. Rather, Time sets up the Prez for a visitation by some "good" aliens.

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I've never written as much about flying as I'd like to. Like Disch's *On Wings of Song*, only more upbeat. Naw. Yet another idea: a kid goes to visit his dead father in Heaven (but I kind of did this in *Realware* already).

I remember a radio play—I think it was by Norman Corwin, "The Odyssey of Runyon Jones"—about a kid who goes to look for his dead dog in "curgatory," first broadcast in 1941, I might have heard it as a re-broadcast around 1954. It's available as part of an out-of-print CD set called *Thirteen By Corwin*, I'd dig hearing that.

Story: The hero comes back from Germany, and his father is dead. The fallout. The giant worms. The oinkness. He goes to bed with a cow liver shaped like Weena Wesson. And suddenly he's President of the Senior Class! He marries Sue Pohler and she gives birth to an alien.

**July 24, 2008. *I Finish "Collaborators"***

I was playing with a photo of the latest state of this painting, *Collaborators*, in Photoshop yesterday, using the "Replace Color" dialog. I think it might be a good idea to make the background more lavender, as I think the current pale blue background is too blah. Until you actually start painting, you don't realize how completely easy and trivial it is to change that kind of thing.

Today I did what is I think the third and final version of that painting (as shown in the [July 21, 2008](#) entry.) It's sort of a representation of how of Bruce Sterling and I work on stories together. Choking each other. I think it's funny, but he might not. I don't think of it as really a great painting. It's more like a rehab project someone did in a church basement. Like threading wooden spools onto basketball-shoe laces.



Synchronistically enough, right after I finished the picture, and had screwed a wire onto the back, and had hung it near my desk, I got an email from Sheila Williams at *Asimov's* saying she was accepting the new story by Bruce and me that I snail-mailed her last week. "Colliding Branes." It's a pretty good story.

I'm hoping Bruce and I can get an anthology of our collected stories out from Tachyon in, like, 2009. Possibly my *Collaborators* painting could be part the cover—it may not be great art, but it's certainly graphic. Or maybe I just enjoy suggesting this as a way to annoy Bruce.

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I'm really starting to feel like myself now. I keep saying that, and then a week later, I realize I was only kidding myself before. Maybe I'm still kidding myself. How can you really tell when you feel like yourself, after all? It's so subjective. Good routine for my main character to be running.

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Writing this, I'm sitting on the deck outside Borders Books, one of my favorite spots in Los Gatos—although it's slightly tainted by the infernal noise of ventilation fans. I have a great view from under a huge live oak of a high, virgin, wooded hill called perhaps Monte Sereno. The shapes of the trees and shrubs along the ridge-line always make me think of the border of a cubic Mandelbrot set.

In this connection, I think of a guy I met at the Almaden IBM research lab near San Jose, around 1988, and we'd been in his office talking, and then we walked outside together and were looking at a wooded ridge-line similar to this one, and he was telling me that the patterns were—I don't remember exactly what—some manifestation of a type of fractal or Fourier series that he was studying. He thought everything in the world was a reflection of what he was doing in his lab. But he was thinking this with a complete lack of irony, which is dangerous. I wonder what ever became of him.

I gave a great Christmas talk on cellular automata at that lab around 1988 as well. I'd just gotten a CAM-6 cellular automata accelerator card, and I shoehorned it into an early IBM PC and connected it to this monster projector they had in the lab. Nobody had projectors like this back then, so it was incredibly exciting to be projecting the enormous images.

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Two young teenage girls are cheerfully jabbering together on the deck behind me. Like birds. Nice to hear the rhythms, though I'm not exactly listening to what they say.

Back into the head of my convalescing narrator:

The world runs itself without me. The world kept on happening while I was gone. I'm still in the process of getting hooked back in. It used to baffle me that the world would go on after I die. I understand this better now. It's like I'm just one particular monitor displaying the reality crunch. But, yes, my circuits do add some small smidgen of extra oomph, but not enough that the world will seem all that different without me. It's nice that my wife and children are concerned about me. They really would miss me, just as I miss my parents. Be that as it may, I'm inevitably on my way out.

Recalling that IBM lab stuff earlier today was fun. I can almost see doing a bunch of memory-dump writing—just write recollections for the fun of it. And then, later, snip and arrange to make it seem meaningful and—this is the gimmick—put in extra characters and subplots to make it a novel.

**July 25, 2008. Choir Memories**

When I was in the choir at St. Francis in the Fields Church around 1959, this funny boy, Roger Smith, would sometimes sit next to me at rehearsal. He was a real 1950s type, with a burr haircut, heavy glasses frames, and a cocky attitude. His father was, I think, a real estate scam artist, physically resembling the then-famous con-man Billy Sol Estes whom I'd seen on the cover of *Time* magazine. There was this one hymn we were rehearsing, with the chorus, "Jesus loves you, why not serve him?" And Roger would make his voice sweet and gentle, and sing his obscene variant: "...why not blow him?" What a witty guy.

We would have been even better friends, but it turned out he wasn't that interested in drinking, which surprised me, as, in my youthful ignorance I assumed that every guy I knew was going to be an alcoholic. And then I think he moved out of town.

Choir practice was one of the only times I was ever around girls, as I went to a boys' school. It was exciting to see them, and to be however tenuously involved in their intrigues. I recall that I liked Carol Cobb and Polly Townsend.

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This morning, waking up, I feel good. The world outside looks so green and lively. I keep coming back to my character's thought: "It's not me who makes the world, the world makes itself, and all I'm doing is plugging into it, picking up on the ambient gnarl."

I recall a feeling I sometimes have when I'm flustered—less so now than when I was younger—of being in a tunnel, caught up in my worries, deaf and blind to the outer world. It's all a matter of the attention that you're able to pay.

My geezer character again:

If, indeed, the richest and most interesting part of my life is what's coming in from the outside, then my death really won't be such a loss. The rich and interesting stuff will continue, and what does it matter if the information is being displayed on devices other than the meat body that wears my name? This is in some sense obvious, but somehow it's not a fact that I really internalized until this month. In the past it had struck me as somehow paradoxical that the world will continue after I die. But now it just seems obvious. Kind of a relief.

**July 26, 2008. Rudy Lane.**

I'm writing almost at random in these notes. Which could be a good thing. I've heard it said that writers are at their best when they have no idea what they're doing.

William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, [Plate 14](#): "If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern."

I'm wondering how I might write a story or novel that dramatizes a guy's insight that the world will go on much the same after he dies. The trick would be to make this insight seem surprising rather than crashingly obvious.

So maybe write it mostly from the p.o.v. of the person who's going to die, say, Tim Bruno, the saucer abductee. And he's worried about death, and he's viewing it in the hysterical-grim-finale kind of way that mortality is commonly presented in Romantic mass media adventures. And he goes down, saving the world from alien domination.

And then in a later chapter, Tim's acquaintance (not really a friend) Denny Allaway is thinking about Tim, and Denny realizes that it doesn't really matter that Tim is dead, any more than it matters when a pinecone falls off a tree, and that if Tim hadn't saved the world, someone else would have, maybe even Denny himself, if he hadn't of been so busy humping that 120 pound chunk of cow liver made up to look like Weena Wesson.

The cow liver is sitting next to Denny, sharing a bottle of hard lemonade.

"*Muuur*," says the liver.

"I love you, Weena."

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A Louisville memory. Waiting by the side of Route 42 near Rudy Lane for Barbara T. to pick me up and give me a ride to nursery school in her 1951 Buick Roadmaster with the four little portholes set into the side of the hood. Miss T. wore more lipstick than any woman I've ever seen, it was almost like she put it on by eating it. Tidy, well-dressed, but not terribly attractive, she lived with her mother. She was the Director of Religious Education at our church. I liked her, up to a point, as I found her pretty easy to talk to, although not so easy as my own parents. She later gave me a science-fiction/fantasy book that I liked a lot—or maybe I just found it in her house while my parents were having a dinner with her—the book was called *Zotz!*, by Walter Karig, 1947. I think my father read it too, and we talked about it—that was one thing my father and I could always talk about, the plots of SF books and movies.

Once Barbara T. came to Maine with my parents for their summer trip to Boothbay Harbor. She liked playing golf with them, they'd joke ribaldly about getting golden balls that would be easier to find—golden-colored golf-balls, that is. Miss T. came to our wedding, too, although I think she had an upset stomach and missed the wedding dinner. Possibly my father or even mother remarked that "she has the trots," which struck me as too much information. One's parents can seem so gross.

Back to the intersection of Rudy Lane and Route 42. I should mention that, initially, it seemed reasonable and natural to me that the street I lived on would be called Rudy Lane, only later did I realize that it was a coincidence, due to the fact that at some point a family with the last name of Rudy had lived on the road, which was maybe three miles long.

There was only one retail establishment in our neighborhood at this time, that was the gas station at the corner of Rudy Lane and Route 42. I think it might have been an Esso station, or maybe Standard Oil. They sold penny candy from large glass jars that you could reach into. One of the first times we went in there, my brother, told me that the candy was free—maybe he wanted to see what I'd do. Sure enough I took several pieces: I recall Saf-T-Pop lollipops with a limp loop instead of a hard stick. I think maybe the guy running the

station called me out for taking the candy and someone—my brother?—paid for it. I'd hardly ever had candy before. I must have been about four. It was great.

The gas station was maybe a half mile's walk from our house. We might have gone there with some neighbor boys, who'd recently moved into a new development across the street. Jimmy and Paul, roughly the same ages as, respectively, my brother and me.

Our house wasn't part of a development, in that our lot wasn't on an artificially added curvy street. Our lot butted right onto Rudy Lane; it was two acres, an area which my brother was proud of—he said we should call our estate “Twakers,” but nobody else in the family picked up on that. Embry always had this sense of being a noble, due to my mother's aristocratic German lineage, and due to my father's being descended both from a governor of Georgia and from a Georgia congressman. But that worldview of his never really caught on, not in Louisville.

I remember some of my first days at nursery school, or maybe at kindergarten—the two blend together, and it's hard to be sure which memories come first. I remember a large room called Hilliard Hall, with grayish-black asphalt tiles on the floor, and ordinary sash windows in the walls. We had some really big blocks to play with, maybe two or three feet on a side. You could stack them and make little mazes. They made a hollow boom when they fell down.

Someone pointed out a kid to me and said, “That's Butch. Stay away from him. He's mean.” I stayed away from Butch, but had plenty of other friends. I think Polly T. was there. Maybe Arch D. Mary G. George S.

We'd play a game where we'd dance around the room with a record playing, and now and then the teacher would lift up the needle and you'd have to freeze in place where you'd been right when the music stopped, and if you didn't freeze fast enough, you were Out.

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I feel like this is getting nowhere. But you never know.

***July 27, 2008. Novelized Autbio.***

Today my wife and I drove 45 minutes to the Stanford campus to visit the Cantor Arts Center Museum there. We saw a small show of Richard Diebenkorn paintings belonging to one of RD's fellow Stanford classmates, also a larger show of paintings on loan from the beleaguered New Orleans Museum of Art, including, for instance, a strong Picasso and a great O'Keeffe.

It was nice to be in a museum, seeing art and other people. We had a pleasant lunch on a patio overlooking a lawn beside the gallery.

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But now I'm tired. Thinking about my geezer narrator character again. Maybe he quotes the Skip James blues line: “The doctor came in mumblin' very low. / He said, ‘You may get some better, but you'll never be well no mo'.”

It always raises my spirits to think about writing projects. Last night I had insomnia, and I was reading one of Allen Ginsberg's biographies, Bill Morgan's [\*I Celebrate Myself: The Somewhat Private Life of Allen Ginsberg\*](#).

I began imagining writing a transreal SF author autobio novel called, say, *A Writer's Life*. That's what Joyce's great first novel is, come to think of it—dropping the SF element

of course, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). Dylan Thomas parodied the title in his own memoir, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* (1940).

Anyway, I'm kind of liking the angle of a novelized autobio. Of course if I put SF in it, then that makes it unreadable for some largish percentage of the people in the world. Well, I could go light on the SF, have it just be magic or fantasy. Or, hell, just turn it up to eleven as usual and play what I want to hear.

E.g. the part about the cow liver and Weena Wesson? The liver is hiding under the boy's bed. She whispers to him through the mattress. Maybe her "real" name is Awnee Swones, an anagram or, better, Anne Wowsesse.

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What might I call a novelized autobio about the life of a writer and computer programmer? *Book #31* is the default title, but surely I can do better. *A Writer's Life* seems workable, if conventional. Gay Talese used it for his autobio title, and it's used as a subtitle of lots of third-party bios of writers, e.g. the bio of Bernard Malamud.

Or I could go with the cow-liver goddess thing. *Weena and Me*. Talk about irrelevant info, I found a YouTube video, "[Weena + Me=Love](#)" of two young women goofing around. I think it was filmed, on the street by a stranger with a cell phone. "Oh, mama!" says one of the women at the end, and you get the feeling that's about as much English as she knows.

Can I imagine a novel opening with the Weena thing?

The good news is that people think they saw me making love to the legendary Weena Wesson—the bad news is that my co-star was in fact a cunningly tweaked cow liver.

What is Weena Wesson like? I see her as a Native American, or perhaps a subcontinental Indian. Or Japanese? Or just a pale, dark-haired Californian. Anagrams of the name: Awnee Snowes. Anne Swesewo. Anne Wowsesse.

Like I say, it cheers me up to think about a novel project. Actually calling the novel *Weena Wesson* might be overdoing it—I mean, the novel might not be about that at all. It's just a phrase to start with.

**July 29, 2008. Title: *Nested Scrolls*.**

Today I worked for a couple of hours on the [Memoir or Novel section](#) at the start of these notes, lying in bed. I put together a table presenting all eighteen of my novels as transreal memoirs, a way of convincing myself I might as well make this new book a novel, too. I mean, come on, Jack Kerouac didn't write "memoirs," nor did Burroughs or Ginsberg. They wrote transreal novels and poems!

Once I got the table together, I combined it with the most recent BS in these notes, and some pictures I took at Stanford the other day, and made up a new blog post, "[Novels as Memoirs](#)." What a nice way to start the day—literary dabbling, supine in my cushiony bed.

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What *do* I want to write this transreal novel about? Some possible themes...

- The world partially poisoned by fallout, starting in 1958, Germany. Kentucky becomes a sunken, glowing hole in the Earth. They fix the fallout problem, but Kentucky is permanently lost.
- A character's lasting relationship with an intelligent, human-sized cow liver that he meets in a UFO—Anne Wowsesse. We have a flashback of him meeting her at the Yacht Club dance at Sweet Briar, Virginia.
- How it feels from the inside to spend your life carrying out fictional fabulation and scientific theorizing.
- The realization that the world continues after you die. The meaninglessness/meaningfulness of life.

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Today's title for the book is *Nested Scrolls*, a phrase I like because it describes the chaotic, self-organizing, artificially alive Belousov-Zhabotinsky simulations that I love. And "scroll" is good, as it refers to a document or even a sacred text, and if the scrolls are "nested" that's fractal and self-referential and heavy.

I could even get literal with the title, and have the book in the form of a memoir that an aging man is trying to write, and he begins finding extra stuff in the document. Maybe he can somehow zoom in—it's an electronic document—and he sees stuff that he doesn't remember writing. And he goes into time-travel flashbacks. And maybe some characters from the past show up. *Nested Scrolls*.

And maybe I even have a big climactic Weena Wesson scene! Anne Wowsesse really is a better name, I think. Reminds me of Modess, the sanitary napkin company. But with a Wow. And the "esse" is French. Anne shows up from the past.

It's good to have a novel to think about. *Nested Scrolls*!

### **July 31, 2008. How to Begin?**

[I blogged a version of this entry as "[Nested Scrolls, Alpha Start.](#)"]

I feel like starting work on the transreal novel that I'm presently calling *Nested Scrolls*. It would be good to be writing a story once again. How to begin?

Usually I put together a fairly thorough outline of a novel before I begin writing the book itself. But maybe this time I could do less of an upfront outline than usual. I have this urge to just dig in and get going. Later I could still do some outlining in any case, especially if I get stuck. And it's not like the outline is such gospel anyway, I usually end up revising it a dozen or so times during the course of the book.

Just to have enough to start with, maybe I can come up with at least a miniature, high-concept, three-by-five-card outline. But just for now, let's try writing an opening scene.

My unreliable narrator, Jim Oster, is reminiscing about his life with Anne Wowsesse.

Twenty years ago, I had a few days of publicity for appearing in an online sex video. My partner, Anne Wowsesse, was rumored to be a saucer alien. Our video link was everywhere: "New UFO You!" But then the public's fickle attention moved on.

I do feel it's possible that Anne is non-human—this is something I periodically think about, as I still live with her. In certain moods, I can visualize her

body as a tissue-culture grown from tweaked cow liver cells, and her mind as a holographically implanted alien engram.

Not that just anyone would notice this, whether by talking to her or by having sex with her—which is, I might add, not especially difficult to do.

Our Surf City neighbors regard Anne and me as unsavory or even beneath contempt. But I'm dreaming of restoring us to the level of fame that we deserve.

What's going to make the difference is the "scroll nesting" technique that Anne recently taught me.

Jim Oster wants to write his autobio, well not *write* exactly, he wants to make a lifebox version of his autobio, using a kind of Belousov-Zhabotinsky simulation that creates the data base as a pattern of nested scrolls, based on what he says or types.

The scroll nester isn't a computer-science kind of thing. I was thinking something like a cell phone earpiece that you talk to a lot. Or maybe more organic than that. A crystal ball? A tiny aquarium kind of thing with slime mold in it.

Jim himself isn't a techie. For much of his career he worked as an assistant for a guy installing wooden screen doors.

What's gonna happen with the scroll nester is that he stares into the display and gets hypnotized and flashes back into the past.

[By the way, maybe "[engram](#)" isn't the right word to use—although it has a vanilla science meaning as a memory trace, it also has a more specifically doctrinal meaning as a term in Scientology.]

**August 2-4, 2008. *Teeming Tales.***

*[I blogged a version of this entry as "[Teeming Tales.](#)"]*

I'd like for part of the novel to be Jim Oster's memories of his boyhood, thus allowing me to transrealize some of the remaining unused segments of my autobiography. But for the novel to work as a story, I need some hooks between the old days and the present year (around 2010) in which Jim Oster is narrating.

A fan, Andy Valencia, wrote me in response to my blog post, "Nested Scrolls, Alpha Start," suggesting that Jim Oster be somehow broadcasting his story to other worlds, perhaps by collapsing the info into diamond-weave nanobooks that he launches into space via a rail-gun. Andy also proposed that Jim might find some extraterrestrials' nanoautobiographies on Earth.

I like the feel of these idea, but in order to give my book a fresh feel, I do want to avoid familiar notions of possible technology—sometimes we forget how unfamiliar the future is likely to be. I see the autobios as being more like biotech growths than like tiny abacus-precise tapestries of atoms. I think of seeds or animalcules that grow into scroll-patterned cultures, akin to lichens on rocks. Or of hive-mind algal blooms. Or of quantum-computing air currents.

We can readily suppose that alien autobios are all around us in these kinds of forms, and always have been. But—until Jim Oster's breakthroughs—we haven't been able to read these **natural books**. Note that natural books aren't a new concept. For instance, my friend

Brian Wallace has, I believe, an ancestor who was a fringe scientist who said he could read the markings of shale as clearly as the pages of a newspaper.

For that matter, the *Book of Mormon* is described as originating in some marks on plates that the prophet Joseph Smith deciphered by using a “seer stone” or a pair of “stones of sight” known as [Urim and Thummim](#). What if Jim Oster were to found a new religion based on a natural book that he finds in the form of the shadows of a eucalyptus tree’s leaves, or in the rustling whispers of a palm tree’s fronds?

There’s a bit of the hylozoism notion in the concept of natural books—as we’re talking about ubiquitous, logically deep information. I find it pleasant to suppose that the air is teeming with the biographies of extraterrestrials. Note that these aliens aren’t necessarily from other planets, they might be from the subdimensions or parallel branes. To me it’s always seemed like overkill to drag in aliens from millions of light-years away. Why shouldn’t they be as near as my heartbeat?

In any case, *Nested Scrolls*—or maybe it’s called *The Natural Book*—still needs a plot. We’d want to have some impending crisis that might end our world—and the aliens are enlisting Jim Oster to help save our shared reality. Save it from who? From some benighted humans—I might well bring back my favorite villains, the Heritagists. One can readily suppose that Heritagists have a hysterical, superstitious, witch-burning fear of the aliens. And they’re working on a Reality Cleansing Treatment to erase all the ambient alien autobiographies and alien minds.

Opening scene: Jim Oster in the hospital, recuperating from what they’re telling him is a mild stroke, caused by a cerebral hemorrhage. His long-term woman friend Anne Wowesse visits him—these two are both somewhat out of it, along the lines of the characters in Phil Dick’s *A Scanner Darkly* or William J. Craddock’s *Be Not Content*. This said, I think it clarifies and simplifies my story if I assume that Jim and Anne are both sober, perhaps even in recovery—this way, it’s more believable that their perceptions of the world’s workings are in fact true.

After visiting hours end, and Anne leaves, Jim is thinking over some of the things she said, and he becomes convinced that his so-called stroke or hemorrhage was in fact a Heritagist attempt to wipe the very scroll-nesting powers of alien empathy that Anne has been teaching him.

He escapes from the hospital in his gown and catches a ride with a not-so-coincidentally passing van of seeming hippie musicians who are, we suspect, aliens. The odd musicians fan Jim’s mental scrolls back into life, and he becomes more and more certain that, yes, the consensus world-view is a lie. The evidence is right there in his memories—and in the tales that the other van members tell, Decameron style, as they motor down the coast to a disorganized hippie/punk festival to be held on the beach near Andrew Molera State Park.

The van band comes on at sunrise, and when they start playing, the aliens and their subdimensional UFOs appear.

**August 5-7, 2008. *Is Jim Oster Losing It?***

[I edited this entry into a blog post, [“Imagining Jim Oster for Nested Scrolls”](#).]



Right after his attack, Jim Oster is thinking about sex a lot. Like—sex is one of the very first facts about the world that comes back to him. Zero and one, as it were. He feels a little surprised about reproduction—he can hardly believe the details. His woman friend, Anne Wowsesse, says he’s like an id with no ego or superego.

In the first mornings, he sits on the hospital patio with his IV-drip and looks at the clouds in the sky. They drift along, changing shapes, with the golden sunlight on them. The leaves of a potted palm tree rock chaotically in the gentle airs, the fronds are clearly outlined against the marbled blue and white heavens.

Most of the other convalescents fail to notice their natural surroundings, but, be that as it may, the information *is* coming in from outside Jim. He’s not creating it. And now Jim is struck by the realization that the world will go on without him after he dies.

Or...? He thinks of the participant/observer maxim in quantum mechanics: “No phenomenon is real until it’s observed.” He begins to wonder—or even to hope—that some aspect of reality depends on being seen by Jim Oster. He is, after all, a bit of a writer, and he sometimes imagines that his journals works are altering reality.

Looking up at the clouds from the couch in his back yard, he sees a high-flying bird—a crane or a gull. Mentally reaching out to contact the fowl he feels he can see through her mind, feeling the rhythm of her wingbeats, enjoying the vast expanse of her view, with the coastline and the Pacific ocean visible. Jim imagines that bird sends him a telepathic message: “Thank you.” She’s grateful to Jim for making her real by seeing her.

But—naaw—if Jim was dead, the birds would still be flying, the Earth would be turning, and the sun would be rising in the sky just the same. He’s of no more lasting significance than a dead leaf scuttering across the patio. He finds this fact to be somehow horrible.

Jim doesn’t feel like his old self. He feels like his mind is a giant warehouse where an earthquake knocked everything off the racks, and he has to reshelve things one by one. “Oh, yes, that’s a steam shovel, that’s a potty, that’s a quartz crystal, that’s my first day of nursery school.” Repeatedly he remembers marrying Anne Wowsesse, and how cute she was in her white hat and veil. Repeatedly he remembers that he never married Anne Wowsesse at all.

The days and weeks fly by. He doesn’t understand how he used to pass his time. He’s continually ransacking his bookshelves, looking for some old volume to reread. He spends much of his time waiting to go back to sleep. Each day he looks forward to bed time at nine p.m. sharp. And he naps every day. He wants to act normal; when he greets people, he forms his mouth into a smile, as deliberately and artificially as if he were making an “okay” hand-sign. He feels he’s living a lie.

When Jim stares at a neutral-colored object such as the 1940s frosted-glass light fixture on the ceiling in his rented house, he seems to see the tint of the object change in slow waves. Faint pastel hues amp up and down, as if some unseen force were diddling the world’s color balance sliders.

Smells seem much more intense, the smells of drains, of garbage, and of fruit. The meaty, oily smell of the skin fragments in his electric razor is almost unbearable. He's tempted to stop shaving.

Is the change because he quit smoking after his attack? Or has something been reconfigured in his brain? Maybe there's a piece of him gone missing. His once-powerful spiritual impulses are weak, and, in a possibly related change, he's no longer goaded by the impulse to get high.

Slouched on a the lawn chair in his back yard one afternoon, Jim falls into a trance while studying the clouds. When he comes back to focusing on his immediate surroundings, he realizes that he hears the low tapping of fingers on a keyboard. He tries to maintain a calm appearance, but inwardly he panics, thinking that he's inside a computer program or a video game.

But, whew, it's just his daughter sitting in a chair behind his head, checking her email on her laptop. He twists his neck so he can look at her, to talk this over. And then he remembers that he doesn't have a daughter. There's nobody in the chair. Or, no, wait, he does have a daughter, and she's visiting him, yeah. She is sitting there after all. Her name is—what?

Is Jim Oster losing it?

**August 25, 2008. SF Futures**

[I [blogged](#) this entry on Aug 25, 2008 and got a lot of comments.]

For the last three weeks I've been hung up revising my new novel and two of my old ones, but I hope soon to get back to thinking about a new novel.

The other day I was looking at the Tor.com SF website, scanning through a post by Jo Walton, "[The Singularity Problem and Non-Problem](#)," [I also scanned through the many comments on the post] and I picked up the idea that some SF readers (and writers) are unhappy with the notion that SF's content should *change* over the years.

Walton herself speaks fondly of "the kind of SF that I like best, the kind with aliens and spaceships and planets and more tech than we have but not unimaginable incomprehensible tech..." And some of the commenters take this a bit further, even questioning whether true artificial intelligence is even possible.

Change is of course something that happens to any living art form—think of painting or popular music or literary novels or even TV sit-coms. Yes, it's sad to see Golden Ages slip away, but it's sadder still to keep doing the same thing. Inevitably the old material goes stale and the fire goes away. I'm not saying it's become *impossible* to write fresh novels about aliens and spaceships and planets. But maybe it's become a task as difficult and quixotic as writing a fresh doo-wop song. But why not a new kind of song? Why not a new kind of SF novel? This is, after all, the twenty-first century.

If you think about it, it's quite unreasonable to regard, say, the physics and sociology of classic space opera as "rules" about science-fictional futures. These are all things that writers made up in, like, the 1930s, and which later writers polished and refined. The "rules" have no Higher Truth and they're unlikely to apply to any actual future. They're only stories that people made up for fun, and there's absolutely no reason why we can't keep changing the rules.

I'm certainly not a whole-hog, card-carrying Singulatarian—as I discussed in a pair of [blog posts](#) in March, 2008, I don't see virtual reality as ever eclipsing our ambient quantum-computing "real" reality. This said, I do strongly feel that, down the line, intelligence will be ubiquitous—that's the main theme of my novels *Postsingular* and *Hylozoic*.

What's interesting to me is not the beating or eating of dead horses, but rather the search for genuinely new science-fictional scenarios. For me, SF is the fun-loving hipster sister of Big Science. SF finds the vibby spots first. Sometimes the spots are gone in the morning, but sometimes there's time for Big Science to trundle in the Measuring Machines and Theory Generators and capitalize on what we fey writer types have unearthed.

Here's a more or less random list of some themes that I currently find appealing.

### **Magic Doors**

I've always liked the idea of magic doors to other worlds, also known as Einstein-Rosen bridges. I wrote about them in *The Sex Sphere*, for instance, and I thought about them again this summer in Dick Termes's studio.

As it happens, Dick, just sent me an email encouraging me to think of his spherical paintings in this way.

"To be living in a world where these spheres float in. Spheres like my work where you can see from outside what is really an inside view. With some effort you can enter these spheres and get on the inside which takes you to those real worlds. Some are real worlds some could be subconscious worlds etc. So, you could go from one world to the next by finding these spheres to enter. You would be able to look at the outside of the inside scene before entering..."

I like that idea, I like to think of a character with spheres/doors swarming around him or her like fireflies. Like old memories.

### **Dreams and Memories**

We've seen plenty of virtual reality tales in which people mistake an illusion for a reality. But I think there's still some interesting things to be done with ordinary dreams. Waking up inside them? Finding out that they're really happening in a higher dimension?

In the mental front, we might also consider viewing memories as in some sense real. Maybe memory is a form of time-travel, and you really can flip back into the past or, more oddly, bring people from your past into your present.

### **The Afterworld**

I've always thought there should be more SF that speculates about what happens to people after they die. This can shade into fantasy, of course, but giving it an SF slant would be interesting. Certainly it's nice to speculate that there's some kind of underworld...rather than nothing.

### **Quantum Computational Viruses**

The current trend is to view any bit of matter as carrying out a so-called quantum computation. These computations can be as rich and complex as anything in our brains or in our PCs. One angle, which I explored a bit in *Postsingular* and *Hylozoic*, is that ordinary objects could "wake up." Another angle worth pursuing is that something like a computer virus might infect matter, perhaps changing the laws of physics to make our world more congenial to some other kinds of beings.

### **New Senses**

How about some new senses—other than, say, telepathy or radio-wave-sensitivity? Things we might notice more acutely: viscosity, temperature, pressure, electrical charge, neutrinos, Higgs bosons, sterile neutrinos, quarks, “ghosts.”

### **The Holographic Universe**

Some physicists say that our 4D space is a kind of illusion built up from a two-dimensional pattern...somewhere. Is it maybe a comic strip? Let's go meet the artist!

### **Why?**

Why are we here? What's it all for? What's the meaning of life? Why does anything exist at all? Why is there something instead of nothing? Surely SF can come up with an answer.

### **The Subdimensions**

For too long we've let the quantum mechanics tell us that there's nothing smaller than the Planck length. Let's view this tiny size scale as a membrane, a frontier, but not a wall. We can in fact go below it...into the land of the subdimensions. Possibly the subdimensional world is a kind of mirror version of ours. Certainly aliens can visit us from there...no need for all those star ships. Just focus on a speck of dust.

### **An Infinite Flat Earth**

What if Earth were an endless flat plane, and you could walk (or fly your electric glider) forever in a straight line and never come back to where you started? The cockroach zone! The kingdom of the two-headed men! One night there'll be a rumble and, wow, our little planet will have unrolled, ready for you to start out on the ultimate *On the Road* adventure.

### **August 30, 2008. Beyond Transrealism?**

My mind again turns inward now that I'm done revising *Hylozoic* and *Spacetime Donuts* and *The Sex Sphere*.

I had a little health scare two months ago, at the start of July. And already the concerns I had the wake of the crisis seem remote. I remember being flummoxed by the realization that the outer world will indeed continue after my eventual death. Looked at superficially, this seems trivial, but at the time it seemed very profound to me. I was realizing it a deep and existential level.

I think most of us have a kind of mental filter that prevents us from directly seeing death in normal times. The reality of potential non-existence only hits home when I'm in the vicinity of Death's Door.

Another result of my death-fear was the conviction that I should write a memoir...while there's time. So for several weeks I was writing swatches of memoir-like material, trying it on for size. And I kind of like that stuff, it's pleasant to reach back and massage my past.

But I like the memoirs even more when I mix in an SF rap now and then. That adds layers of meaning, and makes it funny or somehow more real. Like I was going on about this convalescent guy, Jim Oster, who lives with a woman, Anne Wowsesse, who may or may not be an alien mind inside a 120 lb. culture of cow liver cells.

In the past, what I've often done is to take memoir-like material and ascribe that to a character in an SF novel: thus transrealism. But now I'm wondering if I could instead work in a hybrid format that's more like a memoir with SF riffs, raps or storylets interspersed within it—functioning like illustrations. Don't try to merge it.

The reason I'm considering this approach is that I don't see longer memoir-type raps as fitting smoothly into a transreal novel, at least not into one of the short, fast-paced novels that I usually write. I tend to think that an SF-action reader isn't going to want to plough through much background material about the characters.

So maybe I flip the emphasis. The foreground thing is the memoir, and the background thing is SF. In other words, I'm kind of envisioning a memory-dump memoir whose sections alternate with short-short SF stories that are in some way playing off the memories.

Obviously this may not be a highly commercial concept, but at this point in my career, I don't mind taking a chance. The main thing is to start with something I find worthwhile and fun. And maybe later a commercial element emerges.

In terms of tightening up *Nested Scrolls*, there's the scenario where the character is writing a journal with memoir-like elements, and the journal excerpts alternate with scenes from the character's ongoing life, and then the two action threads converge. Perhaps something from the journal is incanted into life, as if called up by a magic spell. Or perhaps the journal-work leads the character to some profound realization about the events taking place in his or her daily life.

If I wanted a real dog's breakfast, I might even incorporate the material in my as-yet-unfinished notes on how to write, *A Writer's Toolkit*. The appeal of this idea. Some autobiographies do include practical information, for instance Dylan's memoir has interesting stuff about how he composes, plays, and sings. Just in terms of "what I do all day," it would be possible to include stuff about the craft of writing. But, naw, it's just a way of avoiding the real issue.

Coming back to the main idea: think of alternating memoir chunks with transreal extensions or reinterpretations of the events in that time period. I don't think you'd necessarily want to go over the same material twice, it'd be better to could segue in and out of SF mode as you moved forward through time.

But maybe I'm talking about more than one book here. I'll just have to see what emerges. Maybe just a memoir is what I really want to do.

### ***September 4, 2008. Memoir Plans***

7 p.m., in the Bear Cafe in Los Gatos, listening to Jimi Hendrix sing "All Along the Watchtower." I'm drawing strength from the music; earlier tonight I listened to Lou Reed and the Velvet Underground singing "Heroin," on their 1967 album, *The Velvet Underground and Nico*. "Heroin" was one of the very last songs we played in our empty house in Lynchburg, Virginia, 1986, the house empty and echoing, all our worldly goods in the rental van at the curb, kind of laughing with our friend Mike Gambone over the negativity of the song, but at the same time loving the swoop of its sound and the imagined glamour of the lifestyle—although, of course, in reality, I was moving my family to California to take a job teaching the then-new subject of Computer Science.

As I write this, John McCain's wife is introducing him at the Republican convention on TV, her voice slow and simple as if talking to school-children. I'm glad to be out of earshot.

Suppose that I only plan to write one more book, what should it be? Wait—*why* just one more book? Well, maybe I have some rare condition that dooms me to die in a few years. Or maybe I just feel like claiming that, because it makes my life seem interesting. Or maybe I have a sense that I've written so many books that it might be time to stop...only not quite yet. "Just one more!"

When he was about my present age, my father wrote an autobiography called *Being Raised*. He was a good guy, a human, a thinker. It's an interesting book, and he even put in some fairly wild stories, although of course I kind of hunger for whatever he left out. Certainly it's inhibiting if you imagine that you're writing your memoir "for your children and grandchildren." Though, really, by now I'd forgive my father for any imaginable sin, so he didn't really need to hold back on *my* account.

But—still—if I were, like, writing my memoir, would I really want to include stories about crummy things I'd done when I was drunk or high? Well, maybe just a few, so as to give the illusion that I'm being frank and forthcoming, but, really, I'd rather write about the events in the main stream of my life: family, teaching, writing, and philosophical investigations.

And, aside from any purposeful sorts of recollections, I'd like to drift back and muse over some of the earlier memories, the things that an old man misses the most.

Like the handful of times my father took me fishing—I think of Sleepy Hollow near Prospect, Kentucky. Catching my first fish on a fly line. A bluegill, naturally. He'd invented a device called the Retrieve-O-Ring to rescue an expensive lure when it got snagged on an underwater log, he even sold a few of them via ads in sporting magazines.

Thinking of those times, I remember the G. family who lived in a shiny log cabin in the country near Harrods Creek. The father was the church organist, quite a musician, and the mother was my second-grade teacher. Cultured, pure people. They had an open house party once and my family was there, enjoying ourselves. I was talking to some big kids, telling them I was in the second grade, and one of the older girls said she was in the tenth grade. I was stunned. I had no idea the grades went up that high.

Mr. G. got my brother and I to come to choir camp one summer, and before each meal we had to sing this song, "Hey-ho, nobody home. Food, nor drink, nor money have we none. Fill the pot, Hannah!" I wondered if the cook was named Hannah. Soon we boys began thinking of "fill the pot" in a vulgar way, first to our great amusement, but eventually to our disgust, and for me it became a terrible way to start a meal, thinking of that chamberpot image.

If a boy farted, you could yell "Pokes," and begin counting, and he had to yell "S.O.E." (which my brother said stood for "Save Our Ends") to make you stop counting at whatever number, and then you got to punch him in the arm that many times. Once at choir practice, a truck on Route 42 outside made a huge, gaseous noise, and I shrilled, "Pokes!" and everyone laughed. Mr. G. was mad at me, maybe not *mad* exactly, more like stern and disappointed, but forgiving and expecting better.

I definitely want to write about fireworks and rockets, not to mention dogs and smaller pets like white mice. And the canteen of bourbon that Willie F. fetched for me when

he was pledging for my high-school fraternity Chevalier. And my friend Barbie van. C. who got me to play a game where we were separated lovers who'd been looking for each other for years and we walked right by each other in a snow storm, missing each other by only a foot, but not seeing each other in the torrent of ice-crystals. This enactment was taking place in a pasture on a sunny September afternoon on her farm, you understand. Barbie had two older brothers and they had an amazing toy circus upstairs in the play room. I used to dream about that circus a lot, the dream even made its way into my novel, *The Secret of Life*.

And of course I want to expatiate upon life and death, as in—why, whence, and what's it all for? When my father was on his last legs, finding his way towards death through a maze of heart attacks, hospitals, strokes, and nursing homes, my brother and my son and I were visiting him in a sick-room, and that afternoon I'd bought my son a black suit, just in case. "Why...why'd you get him a suit?" asked my father. "Funeral!" said my brother in a stage whisper, pitched too low for the old man to hear. We cracked up. Times like that—what do you do? Laugh or cry?

Seeing my grandchildren is such a nice bookend to having seen my parents die. The other day, I was visiting my son and his twin girls, and one of them was toddling out the front door to the porch—she's only just learned to walk—and I was cheering her on, and she got this proud, happy, shy look on her face, for all the world like a great lady entering a ballroom and being announced.

### **September 15-16, 2008. Write What?**

I pasted together a mockup of my memoir under the working title of *Nested Scrolls*. I broke the material into chapters based on the chapter outline I made in these notes, and I partially filled the chapter slots by excising the memoir-like passages in my notes thus far + the relevant sections of the material in my 2004 [Contemporary Authors autobiography](#).

And looking at this document frikkin' paralyzes me with ennui. I mean, that 2004 autobio kind of nails it already. Why reinvent the square wheel? Maybe if I didn't try to recycle the stuff from 2004 it would look more interesting to me, but then I'd have to write all that stuff up again, and I hate doing the same thing twice. I do love the lambent, intense recollections I've been writing (sometimes only in my head) of late—they enchant me, but I'm not so sure other readers. It might be a pushing-back-your-cuticles kind of thing—interesting to do, numbing to watch.

I bought this memoir-type book by Tobias Wolff, *A Boy's Life*, and after about 20 pages, I'd had more than enough, despite the trumpeting of its blurbs. One thing that Wolff's book has, common to many best-selling memoirs, is that the boy has a rather horrible and dysfunctional childhood.

I'm thinking my childhood is maybe too peaceful. But, to some extent, that's a matter of emphasis. I do remember being occasionally unhappy at school, and subject to bullying. I guess I could build that up. But my sense is that I'm usually off in the clouds, or into my surroundings, as opposed to being obsessed with my status. Maybe that's not always true, though. I do remember thinking about the pecking order in my fifth grade class, and not liking where I stood.

So...maybe I should write a novel, after all. Go back to my plan of Jim Oster recovering from his stroke and reminiscing about his early childhood, and somehow the childhood memories dovetail with his present and with some aliens.

Maybe something horrible happened in Jim Oster's childhood, some real horror-novel or dysfunctional-family-memoir type thing. Like he finds a dismembered corpse in the freezer—and it's his mother! Maybe something not quite that intense. Maybe it's just the milkman. Or the Girl Scout leader.

Or, I've got it, he finds all the cats and dogs in the now-eerily-silent neighborhood, each butchered pet with its little brain removed. Off in the corner of the basement, a sliver of light leaks from beneath a door. Within is Father, gloating over the wired-together animal brains, who are computing the odds of college basketball games.

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In a different vein, I've also been thinking about not writing anything at all. What if I retired from writing as of now? That would be kind of liberating.

I guess I feel that way partly because I was reading *Locus*, and noticing the Hugo and Nebula nominations for novels far inferior to my unjustly neglected *Postsingular* of last year—with the (I rather expect) general neglect and dissing of *Hylozoic* still to come. They don't *deserve* my books, the fools! Or—maybe I'm the fool, over the hill, out of touch and overly baroque, cracked and incomprehensible, no longer worth reading.

Certainly I could wait a few months before launching into another book.

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Sept 16, 2008.

So naturally today, I'm working on the *Nested Scrolls* document. I have a scheme to write memoir and SF at the same time, interleaving them, with a sidebar along the SF sections. Like this section.

And I went and formatted sidebars for some of the sections in these Notes and in the *Nested Scrolls* document. Maybe I can make it work.

### **October 6, 2008. Writing the Memoir**

I ended up taking out the SF passages from *Nested Scrolls*. It's going to be enough of a project to simply write a memoir. And if I put SF into it, I'm needlessly reducing the possible audience.

[Eventually I ended up using the SF stuff in an SF novel called *Jim and the Flims*, which I started at the end of December, 2008, after finishing my first draft of the memoir.]

Memoirs are so big anymore. I was reading the NY Times Book section this week, and I saw two or three of them reviewed. One was by Julian Barnes, aged 62 like me, focusing on how worried he is about death. Lightweight self-aggrandizing whiner and cosseted mandarin that he is.

I have some hopes of shaping the book somewhat like a novel, that is, of having the anecdotes sketch a pleasing story arc.

The work is going pretty well, now that I know what I'm doing. I have something like two and a half chapters done, out of a projected twelve. The finished stuff is about 12,000 words long, but I'm already sorting some other sketches into the later chapter bins, so the book document is about 27,000 words long.



Tracking the word count would be less confusing if I was keeping the later unfinished chapters in this Notes document, but, given the scattershot nature of a memoir, it's convenient to have all the chapters be simultaneously editable in the Book document.

I'd like to bring in the thing under 90,000 words, maybe under 80,000. My sense is that people don't want to read a memoir that's overly long. It's all about choosing entertaining bits that fit together into a harmonious whole.

**October 6, 2008 . Multiverse Story Idea.**

Ever since I read *Anathem*, I've been wanting to write a multiverse story that's logically coherent.

Suppose there really is only one truly existing path through the branching thicket of possible worlds. The others are only juiceless abstractions. Fine.

My gimmick is that I'll suppose that our branch is not quite a pure jagged line. It *does* very commonly grow a stub out a few seconds (or longer?) past a given branch point. I think of a tree that's been pruned down to a single path: bole to limb to branch to twig to leaf, with knots and stubs all along it. And sometimes the tip forks for a bit, but then one of forks dies and dries up and stops growing, and the "real" branch of history continues.

The stubs are in fact more than common, they're all but ubiquitous.

When someone could die, but they don't, it means that their mind has explored both the branches, and has managed to noodle the universal history into a branch where they survive. So in some sense, whenever a person dies, it's because they failed to realize the possible world in which they survive.

And the action for the story is that some guy figures out how to always be in the right branch, and he becomes immortal, although exceedingly old. It's kind of a "The Golden Man" story, really. I'll have to reread that and see what kind of ontological commitments Phil Dick made about the alternate worlds.

I could even give it a title that echoes Dick's. "The White-Haired Man."

This all has personal significance for me, as I read on the web that, like, 50% of people who have a cerebral hemorrhage die. So there's a stub where I died this July.

Somehow I can mix this with an "Incident at Owl Creek Bridge" thing. A guy actually gets to do something important to him in the stub. I mean maybe I'm living in the stub now, and the real branch is the one where I died. I'm just in the stub long enough to write my memoir. And then *auuugh*, the noose snaps my neck?

**October 28, 2008. Done Chapters 1-4.**

I'm done, or almost done with Chapters 1-4, though I'll do a little more work today on 4: Teen, about high school. I seem to be going through the book really fast, I'm having lots of 1,000-word days, and even some 2,000-word and, *mirabile dictu*, 3,000-word days. At this rate, I might finish the damn thing by spring, 2009.

I can write so fast because I'm not having to invent it all. I even *want* to write fast, it's like I have this frenzied compulsion quickly to get it all down. Before I have another cerebral hemorrhage and die. Like Galois writing out his proofs on the night before his duel.

I'd thought it would be hard to select which incidents to include—especially as I move out of childhood into the eras about which I remember lots and lots of things. But so far I'm doing okay. Certain main incidents push themselves forward. And if some left-out bit nags me, I go back and work it in.

In the teen and college years I have a certain amount of overlap with my novel *The Secret of Life*, but I'm generally trying to avoid hitting the same things too hard—or where that's unavoidable, I'm trying to make the story in some way new, although here and there I do end up pasting in (or unconsciously echoing) some of the *Secret of Life* phrases. I'll be seeing some overlap with *All the Visions* as well. But, as I say, I really do want to make this version new, otherwise there's not so much fun in writing it.

**November 2, 2008. I'm Well.**

I saw the neurosurgeon this weekend, and he said my brain is fine, and that I'm out of danger, with no particular likelihood of dying anytime soon. A new lease on life. In from the desert.

I've been writing really fast, I'm up to 42,500 words, and I'm finishing chapter 6 out of 12. Amazing how life rolls along. I was writing about the time when I realized I wouldn't make it to the top echelon of pro mathematicians, and today I happened to go to church, and this hymn, #287 in the Episcopal hymnal, had a line that seemed like something I might have thought about my position vis-a-vis start mathematicians. "We feebly struggle, they in glory shine; yet all are one in thee, for all are thine." The "thee" being Mathematics.

**November 15-17, 2008. Jammin' on Chapter 8: Cyberpunk**

*Nov 15, 2008.*

I'm moving right along, sometimes hitting over three thousand words a day, which is unprecedented for me, to be having several of those kinds of days in a row every week. I think I've even had a four thousand word day.

I know all the stories, is why I can write so fast. It's just a matter of picking them, typing them out, polishing them, and arranging them.

*Chapter 9: Cyberpunk* is over halfway done. For this chapter I dug out the first of my ledger-style journals and read about a third of it, finding some good lines. I really should read more of the ledgers to get more goodies for the rest of the book. But I feel somehow so frantic to finish the book that I hate to take the time off from writing. I can always read in the ledgers later, and work more details in.

I worry that too many researched details can be paralyzing, my tendency is to trust my unaided mind to pop out the memories that are the most significant to me. But, really, reading the ledgers is great.

I need to mention the Clash concert I saw with Mike Gambone in Williamsburg, Virginia. [Done.]

*Nov 17, 2008.*

Today I had another 3,000 word day and I finished *Chapter 9: Cyberpunk*. This is going really well. I read more in the ledgers last night.

On to *Chapter 10: Hacker!*

**December 10, 2008. Nearly Done.**

I finished chapter 11 (out of 12) day before yesterday, bringing *Nested Scrolls* up to a book-length 95,000 words, and running it out to something like the year 2002. I just need a final "Still Kicking" or "Old Man" or "All in All" chapter to wrap it up, but before I write that one, I think I'll reread the whole thing to get a sense of how to sum it up.

It was fun to write, and—like life itself—over all too soon. I had to leave out more and more stuff as I got closer to the present, as I remember so much more about the recent years.

What did I learn? Teaching was never very important to me. I write compulsively. I love my family. I worship Nature. I have trouble being idle. I'm not very scared of death anymore. I like looking at things and seeing shapes and colors. I believe that a higher reality underlies what we see.

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And now I have to think about getting it published.

I sent a PDF to my agent, Susan Protter, and I'll see if she has any good ideas about where to send it. She mentioned that I'd need to come up with a pitch for the book, like a short proposal, which is reasonable.

I thought Tor would be a logical place to send *Nested Scrolls* first, but she's not sure. David Hartwell at Tor said he wanted to *read* it, but wasn't sure if he could *publish* it. In this context David mentioned that he's serializing some old-timer Tom Purdom's memoir in his zine, the *New York Review of Science Fiction*, and he says I could do that, but that doesn't interest me.

Jacob Weisman at Tachyon said he might be interested. He turned down the idea of reprinting *Spacetime Donuts*. He almost accepted an anthology of my stories with Bruce Sterling, but we didn't reach a deal because he (a) didn't want to print all the existing stories, and (b) he wanted us to write yet another one.

I might try Sean Wallace of Odyssey books, to whom I'm selling the *Ware* series.

What about a bigger house? Looking on Google I found a [list of best-selling memoirs](#) on Amazon, here's a few of them, with their publishers.

*Chronicles* by Bob Dylan, Simon and Schuster. *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Random House. Augusten Burroughs, Picador. Che Guevara's *Motorcycle Diaries*, Ocean Press. David Sedaris, Back Bay Books. Dave Eggers, Vintage.

But of course these guys are either extremely famous outside the writing world, or are masters of the memoir idiom. I don't know if my memoir could get into one of these houses. Maybe Vintage. Why? An SF writer I was talking to a few weeks ago was telling me that Vintage was reprinting him, and of course Vintage publishes Phil Dick's reprints too. So maybe they're SF-friendly.

Oh, I've got it, I should try Perseus Books. Their imprint Running Press already publishes six of my SF books, and their imprint Basic Books publishes my Lifebox tome--- they took these titles over from Thunders Mouth Press. Perseus has [memoirs under several of their imprints](#): Basic Books, Running Press, and Da Capo Press.

And I know a Perseus editor, Bill Frucht, William.Frucht@perseusbooks.com.

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Turns out Frucht doesn't work there anymore, so I may have to go in cold to a stranger, in which case I really will need a pitch and a proposal.

Susan says she can figure out who to contact at Running Press.

***April 29, 2009. Still Looking for a Publisher.***

So Susan gave the book to Dave Hartwell at Tor, but he's pretty much already says he thinks it's unlikely they'd publish it.

I tried Perseus, which seemed natural, as they're now the umbrella publisher over the imprints that carry my Four Walls Eight Windows and Thunders Mouth books—now under the Basic Books and Running Press imprints, but they couldn't see doing it.

And Susan sent it to someone at Prometheus, and they didn't want it either.

Susan feels the book should have more about my writing process, she says I make it sound too easy, as if the material “just comes to me,” and that I should delve into the anxiety of a writer and the details of how writing works.

I sent it to Jacob Weisman at Tachyon Books, and he wrote back yesterday that he likes the book a lot, especially the part about my life as a mathematician, but that he's having trouble seeing how to market it. He thought I should try a mainstream publisher, but Susan doesn't seem to think that's a plausible option.

So today I talked to Weisman on the phone in hopes of getting more input about how to make the book marketable, and also with a slight hope of changing his mind about publishing it.

He suggested I use a title that pops harder, like *Confessions of a Cyberpunk*. The c-word is rather passé in the SF world, but in the wider world it still has some punch. If I used this title, I'd want to build up the cyberpunk aspects of my life a bit more, e.g. by talking about my programming work as applied cyberpunk.

He was interested to hear that I could get him a nice cover via Georgia.

He suggested using shorter chapters, and putting in a little more about the SF milieu.

He also remarked that I might changing the framing of the book. I might, for instance, move the stuff about my near-death experience this summer closer to the end of the book.

### **August 28, 2009. PS Publishing and Tor.**

Things are looking up. I had the idea of sending *Nested Scrolls* to PS Publishing in England, a high-end small-edition publisher. They made me an offer to do a limited edition and a short-run trade edition.

I was on the point of taking the offer, but when my agent, Susan Protter, mentioned this to my Tor editor, David Hartwell, he suddenly said that he wanted to see the book too. I'd distinctly had the impression that Dave had said in advance that he wouldn't be interested, although now he says he didn't necessarily mean that.

And in any case we'd already sent him an Acrobat PDF file of the book and the proposal, and nothing had happened. But now it comes out that Dave had been busy, also it came out that he doesn't like to read PDFs, so I sent him a Word DOC version of the book in mid-August. And now maybe the PS offer makes *Nested Scrolls* look credible. So after a day or two, Dave told Susan that he'd be interested in trying to get Tor to make an offer for *Nested Scrolls*!

Dave's plan is to try and get me a two-book deal with Tor for both *Nested Scrolls* and the SF novel I'm currently working on, *Jim and the Flims*—although he won't know until maybe late September if he can deliver.

In any case, PS Publishing could still do a collector's edition of *Nested Scrolls* and, if I want, *Jim and the Flims* as well. They might share the book design files with Tor. So everything's coming together. It's just taking (as usual) longer than I'd hoped.

With this encouragement, I've started doing a revision of *Nested Scrolls*, just reading through it and patching things that are either too roughly phrased or too flat. I'd been a little uneasy that the manuscript might be really weak—given that I started writing it in late September or early October, 2008, only three months after my brain hemorrhage. I'd been almost scared to reread it. But it's good, I dig it, there's some great stuff.

**November 9, 2009. Revision Requests from Tor**

On October 19, 2009, I heard that Tor will buy *Nested Scrolls*, and it can come out first from PS Publishing in a limited edition like we'd been planning, with Tor reusing the design, which is good, as PS Publishing does nice work, and this way the production costs Tor less. I'll get a modest advance from Tor and some money from PS Publishing as well.

I'd hoped for a two-book deal, but Tor won't buy my novel-in-progress *Jim and the Flims* because: (a) my recent sales figures are weak, with less than 5,000 copies sold of each of my last two novels, and (b) my editor, Dave Hartwell, doesn't think this new book is one of my stronger ones. He could be right about the second point. I've had my doubts about *Jim and the Flims*. I'm currently working on revamping the story and making the novel amazing. But I'll leave any further discussion of that issue to my *Notes for Jim and the Flims* document.

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I saw Dave Hartwell in San Jose on October 30, 2009 at the World Fantasy Con. We had some time to talk, and he asked for a couple of revisions to my memoir now.

The main request is that he wants me to put in dates—I worry this could be kludgy, but it's true that when I read a bio, or something like Virginia Woolf's journals, I'm often thinking "But what *year* was this?" And he says that, once he can see the dates, he might suggest moving some of the material around so as to have a more uniform temporal flow.

Dave also suggested that I should put in a scene or at least a vivid mention of, *sigh*, my quondam alcoholic misery so as to motivate the event of my getting sober.

He also said that I could include some black and white photos—probably they'd be put into the book as an insert of photo pages rather than mixed in with the text.

And he says I might want to change the title. See my ["Title" section](#) of these notes for the latest thoughts on the title.

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Nest week we leave for a month-long trip to Australia, and I don't presently plan to do much work on the memoir during that time. It may be that I don't even get into the memoir until December. I don't quite have the energy to get into a work-frenzy and polish off the revisions by next week. But, who knows, maybe I will.

**November 12, 2009. Sent Version 3 to Tor and PS Publishing.**

So of course I went into demonic writer mode and I polished off the changes before my trip. Following David Hartwell's suggestions, I've produced a third version of my autobiography. Changes:

\* I've now tagged nearly every event with a date.

\* Using these dates, I have in some cases rearranged the sections to have a smoother temporal flow. In a very few places, I do run forward on a given topic out of sequence, and then jump back to the main time thread. And within the introductory first chapter, I still jump around in time.

\* I added a few prefigurings to set the stage for my decision in 1996 to give up drinking.

\* And I put a bibliography of my works at the end.

\* Finally, I propose changing the title from "Nested Scrolls" to "Rudy the Elder" — echoing my fondness for Peter Bruegel the Elder. And I'm now referring the book as an autobiography rather than as a memoir... "autobiography" seems more accurate. But I'm still open to discussion about these packaging issues.

I feel pretty good about the book now.

#### **January 20-25, 2010. Version 4.**

*January 20, 2010.*

Okay, I got David Hartwell's final suggestions about the book—he read Version 3 and marked in some changes and queries. Generally they're all good suggestions, and I'll implement nearly all of them in the next week or two.

So this will make Version 4.

I've decided to go back to my original title, "Nested Scrolls." That's what was in my head as I wrote the book after all.

Once Version 4 is done, Nick Gevers at PS Publishing wants to go over the manuscript as well, possibly he'll have some suggestions as well. I'm thinking the PS version will appear in 2011, and the Tor/Forge in 2011 or 2012.

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*January 25, 2010.*

Today I finished taking care of all Dave Hartwell's suggestions. I put in more about my feelings at certain occasions, and filled in a few missing bits. I ended up adding eight thousand words to the book, and now it's 124,000 words long. I emailed the Version 4 to Dave and Nick.

I liked doing the revisions, it was nice to be back into my life story again. And now I miss it already.

I didn't reread the whole thing through, so I may have broken a couple of segues, or repeated a couple of things, but we can catch those later.

Dave had asked for a fun anecdote about a Mondo 2000 party, so I reworked the Tilden Park party scene from *Saucer Wisdom*. In this version, I have Nick Herbert show up instead of Frank Shook. I'd actually thought Nick was there, but I emailed him, and he says he wasn't. To fix that, I have Nick show up, hang out with me for a minute, then say, "I'm not actually here. I'm at home dreaming this." And he disappears into some bushes. Which is kind of perfect. It's a type of inverse transrealism, where I start with an actual party, transrealize it into a fictional scene of *Saucer Wisdom*, and then I have blowback from that transreal version coming into my memoir's supposedly real account of the actual event.

#### **September 3, 2010. "Twenty Years of Writing"**

So now I'm wrapping up work on *Nested Scrolls*. I made a deal with PS Publishing to enhance their deluxe edition of *Nested Scrolls* by including a CD with the PDF files for the writing notes of my last 13 books, including this one, calling the merged document, "Twenty Years of Writing." So today I'll combine all those files. They're, I don't know, about a million words combined. Great.

My life in a (large) nutshell.

**November 15, 2010. Version 6.**

The copy-editor at PS Publishing sent me some edits to the old Version 2. He should have using Version 4, which I'd sent them—but these things happen, I've seen it before. I made a Version 5 by layering the copy-edits onto my Version 4. PS then added a few more copy edits for a Version 5.1.

Over the past week, I reread the whole book on my computer screen, finding a number of little typos and missing words. I rewrote some of the newer material, and added a few more little bits. So now we've got Version 6, which could be the last one.

PS is paying me a bit to use my painting *Surfin' Tiki* for the cover, and my *Jellyfish Lake* for the end papers, which is great. It'll be a nice book.

Rereading it gave me a good, mellow feeling. I've had a nice life.

**February 10, 2011. Version 7.**

Last week PS Publishing sent me a PDF file showing their preliminary layout for the book. I printed it out, read through it, and found a couple of hundred more fixes or improvements that I integrated into a Version 7 that I sent them today. I've given PS a nice set of 35 photos with captions from me to use in a photo insert section.

**April 26, 2011. Version 8.**

PS Publishing sent me an ARC (Advance Review Copy), printed in a nice font, with a great design. I read the whole thing and found about eighty little fixes, and sent those in, which brings us to Version 8. Maybe this is the end. I still feel very good about the book. I'm now guessing it'll come out in May or June.

I was in Munich earlier this month, visiting my cousin. Listening to an ensemble of classical musicians on the street, I started thinking about my life, and about the *Nested Scrolls* autobiography, and about how much better things have turned out for me than I'd ever hoped. The sweet music filled my throat, and I felt close to tears. It's good to have my autobio done. I'm in the clear now. Off the hook. Posthumous, almost.