

Preface

Why...?

Everyone has memories of growing up. What astonished me as an adult, as I compared my childhood memories with those of the people I grew up with, was how few memories we actually shared. We lived parallel lives, experienced the same things, but from our memories our childhoods could almost have been on different planets.

Any recounting of childhood memories must therefore be intensely personal. And I recount these particular memories of mine, not because they are important for the history of the world, but because they are important to me. They are what I am made of. And I hope this exploration of my own personal memory closet will prompt my readers to explore and ponder what they are made of.

For even though we are all different, in many ways we are all the same. It is a complex path we travel from baby to adult. Very different childhood paths may add up to very similar adults. I think it is not so much what happens to us that forms who we are, but how we—and our family and friends—react to what happens to us.

Equally important as what we remember is what we forget. Our memory system acts as a filter, selecting what it thinks we need to save and discarding what it thinks we should not. Often, the things we forget come back to us in reminders from others, so they, too, become a part of our memory closet, for better or for worse.

Implicit in this is a danger. We are more likely to remember the unusual, the dramatic, than the normal course of life. Our childhood memories are therefore likely to distort more than they delineate. But those distortions are a major key to our adult view of the world we live in. For example, in my formative years I had several rattlesnake experiences. I remember each one vividly—the location, the episode, even the appearance and behavior of each snake—but I remember much less of the non-snake happenings around the same times and places. That distortion plays a very large part in my adult attitude toward rattlesnakes.

Our society, our culture, provides a guide to our development—if we do not consciously negate it. But within the larger culture are many smaller cultures. Even a single family may be a culture to itself, forging the children who pass through it into unique adults—unique persons who nevertheless share thoughts and feelings with the entire human race.

It is that uniqueness in universality which I want to celebrate in this book. I am a man not unlike other men. I have experienced the drives and ambitions and defects common to the males of the species. Yet I am unique, and that uniqueness is a result of the events which formed me into who I am.

And so, as you read this very personal recounting of my childhood, I ask you to make a similar accounting of your own. I ask you to think about what made you what you are—both unique and in common with all mankind. Your memories will be very different from mine. But they will have had the same impact on your life as my memories had on

mine. Think about the things you remember—why you remember them instead of other things—and you will find a window into the meaning of humanness which you perhaps never saw before.

This is the story of my first nineteen years, beginning with my first detailed autonomous memory and closing, rather arbitrarily, with the end of my third year of college, just before my twentieth birthday. Not as a narrative, but as a drawer full of snapshots—not necessarily consecutive or chronological—little slices of my life which were important to me at the time they happened and which lingered in my mind long after.

I have avoided dialog because these verbal images depict more how I felt about events than how I interacted with the people involved. I have tried to present them as much as possible in the way they appeared to me at the time they happened rather than how I felt about them later. To some I have added a brief comment looking forward. And in the early episodes I have often applied names of things and vocabulary which I did not know until later. But mostly I have reserved the explanations and extensions for the Epilog, where I take the liberty to comment on events of my childhood, and their consequences as I came to understand them looking back from the perspective of added years.

The names of places and people I mention are all real and are recorded to the best of my recollection. Those people who are still alive should recognize themselves and the events I relate. The places can all be found on a good map of California, Oregon and Washington.

I have held nothing back. My closest friends, even my wife, have never heard some of these things before. I probably would not be able to relate them vocally—especially the sexual fantasies and events—some merely because trying to tell them rips me apart emotionally, even today, more than fifty years later. Writing provides a distance that the voice does not allow.

Even with this distance I am not entirely comfortable. This is not a book for small children. I hope my grandchildren do not read it until they are more mature. But when they finally do get into it, I hope it will give them a new window into the world I grew up in and into the role I played in their lives, for better or for worse.

I think most boys growing up experience many of these same things in much the same way, and I hope that my open discussion of them will ring true to my male readers. Perhaps even as a cathartic release to thoughts and memories they have repressed over the years. For women much will be unfathomable. But they were not boys.

I was, after all, an American boy.

~~~~~

### *The Beginning*

Everyone has a first memory.

It may be a simple moment of pain or pleasure—or a complex event which signals a tendency of the future life.

Mine was running away from home.

It was high summer of 1938. I was barely two years old. My older sister Arlea and I were playing among the grape vines that encircled our little house a few miles out from the town of Turlock in the San Joaquin valley of California. Suddenly she ran into the house, leaving me to ponder.....

[B.A.T]