

Contents

Part 1 (July 2 through July 17, 2003)

1

Catheterizing the heart.—What is a life in brief, and perhaps not so brief? 5 Telling the story philosophically.—Hence to whom? 9 Receiving new names at Ellis Island in 1904 or 1905.—My father and my mother, rage and silence. 16 Atlanta.—An inexplicable retreat from Paradise.—Rage and disorder. 18 Being moved away from the south to the north side, I learn that some man is an island. 21 Mother and son and pianos.—Backstage and outside Atlanta's Fox Theater.—A crushing beauty.—Mysteries natural and unnatural. 24 Sacramento and pawnshops.—My father visited by something called attacks. 27 Playing and running into a street, I am struck unconscious by a car.—My left ear fatefully damaged. 32 Ear treatments and further torments. 35 Convalescence and magic uncles. 38 A mountain in Tennessee. 43 A cemetery for an association. 45 My mother's cooking.—Life and death in my mother's hands.

Part 2 (July 20 through July 28, 2003)

54

Is it the wrong religion or the wrong age that has marked me for exclusion? 57 Musical evenings at home.—For whom does one perform?—Economics of narration.—Receiving a clarinet.—Ill-gotten gains.—The end of

piano lessons. 67 The catheterization of my heart is performed.—I teach myself the saxophone one day and earn money playing it the next night.—Becoming the leader of the high school dance band dissolves my social impasse. 75 Cautionary tales. 77 Three educational events in a school yard. 81 We move from the south side to the north side of Atlanta as I turn seven.—As I turn nine we move to Sacramento.—It is not only my clothes that are wrong. 84 Back and forth between Atlanta and Sacramento.—Ernest Bloch on conducting; my mother on Uncle Meyer’s conducting.—Mother’s absence.—Mysteries of clothes.—Naked boys in a seventh-grade locker room.

Part 3 (July 29 through August 15, 2003)

96

I bury a bottle in Sacramento.—The hum of the world.—What is an impression? 100 A loose cat.—Making the will practical. 102 Back in Atlanta, the old school bully finds me again.—My father’s new store fails.—Back to Sacramento. 103 A temporary school and an experience of reading.—A demonstration of abandonment. 105 Working for his brother again proves impossible for my father.—Back to Atlanta, in time to prepare for my Bar Mitzvah.—My mother plays in the WSB radio studio orchestra.—A more complex isolation. 108 Reflections on psychoanalysis and the threat of breakdown. 110 High school breakdown. 112 Back to Sacramento.—Anyway, WSB in 1940 can no longer sustain its live orchestra. 115 More about pawnshops and about writing. 118 Still more about pawning.—About fathers and others as teachers of the business of pawnshops. 123 The summer in Atlanta before the last move to Sacramento.—The Jewish Progressive Club rises in social class.—German Jews and Eastern European Jews. 130 What are “domestics,” anyway in Atlanta

before the U.S. entry into World War II? 133 Home coal deliveries.—Another domestic, and the delirious pleasures of forbidden food. 137 A later glimpse of glamorous Uncle Mendel.—My dismaying last glimpse of the vestige of Uncle Meyer.—Stalling by recounting an irrelevant success.—My father's judgment.

Part 4 (August 16 through September 3, 2003)

146

Revelations visiting Aunt Mary, the one-time runaway, while my mother is away in New York. 148 Continued, with my early witnessing of unrenowned virtuosity, which now I associate with the variously cast virtuosities of my friends Bernard Williams and Thomas Kuhn and Thompson Clarke. 151 My mother declines the invitation to join the Radio City Music Hall orchestra in New York. 153 A sentence or two from a teacher may save your life, or awaken you to it. 155 The first of four bands.—A mysterious stranger.—The stranger, Bob Thompson, becomes recognizable at once as a permanent friend. 161 We talk about music and whatever happens to exist in connection with music, mainly women and writing, as if to speak of such connections is to create them. 164 September 1, 1939. Insufficient unto the day. 166 At a navy physical examination I am inspired to invent a perfect lie in an attempt to show that my damaged left ear should not exempt me from national service. 168 An associated farce of male adolescence. 169 More about playing lead alto in an otherwise black big band.—Days playing for War Bond Rallies in Sacramento.—Nights playing in a black bar. 170 Again I wonder, now in New York, where black people live. 172 And where do they live in Atlanta?—Eugene Debs, during the period of his incarceration in Atlanta's Federal Prison, in the company of the prison's warden,

attends Passover seder at my grandfather's house. (I feel I should repeat that sentence slowly.)—The man the family called Thomas seems my grandfather's black twin. (This sentence too.)

Part 5 (September 4 through December 8, 2003)

177

Two further bands in the unassigned months after graduating high school. 179 Summers at Mount Holyoke College commemorating speculative summers at the Abbey of Pontigny, stopped by the German occupation of France in World War II. 183 The Mount Holyoke commemoration in 1943 is attended by Roger Sessions and Wallace Stevens, the latter preparing "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet" for the occasion.—I commemorate that piece on that soil sixty summers later. 186 A perverseness in refusing the obvious. 187 Traveling with a band the summer of 1943.—Sight-reading at the piano. 190 Experiencing psychoanalytic therapy.—The right to read, the right to understand, the right to speak. What, again, is the story of a life? 193 A band's summer tour.—Groupies.—My taste for places in their off-hours. 194 An effective experience of writing and, in a sense, publication. 195 A continuation of summer resorts, some with actual roller coasters.—The anticipated army physical. 199 I take a stage name, not in anticipation of going on the stage but to become liberatingly anonymous.—Entering college ninety miles down the road at Berkeley. 202 My father is curiously passive toward my proposal to change my name legally.—Another break from history into the contemporary, to respond to the copyediting of *Cities of Words*. 204 With a new name and nothing clear ahead, I send away for the Berkeley campus Catalogue of Courses.—Turning through it, I discover that knowledge is a world, perhaps enterable by me.

Part 6 (April 8 through April 16, 2004) 206

Entering the university at Berkeley in January 1944. 220 Enrolling at the Juilliard Conservatory in early 1948. 225 Abandoning Juilliard a couple of months later.—Am I going to pieces? 226 Engorging New York for a studiously unknown future.—How do you get to Harlem? 231 Unprecedented letter writing, from and to Mary back in Berkeley. 233 My debts to women of unrealized promise.—Thoughts of practicing psychoanalysis.—Revelation concerning my repressed perception of the origin of the Benny Goodman band's signature opening theme. 236 Unprotected craving for an education.—UCLA will accept me for thirty-four dollars a semester.

Part 7 (April 17 through April 25, 2004) 239

In Los Angeles I sing in as well as conduct a minimal choir for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.—The tragedy of a real singer. 242 Psychology, and comparative literature, then philosophy at UCLA.—A vision of the oncoming reign of logic, and the vision quickly dashed. 244 Abraham Kaplan's lectures.—I compose an outsized text whose ambition is openly unlimited and whose objective value seems quite irrelevant in the face of my conviction that in writing it I have found a direction that I cannot name but that I know to be mine.—Donald Piatt's encouragement. 247 UCLA's philosophy department recommends me to Harvard.—Hans Meyerhoff's presence at UCLA.—Alexander Sesonske and I publish a joint philosophical paper. 254 Meeting Hilary Putnam at UCLA.—I live nowhere.—Another regime of solitary after-hours moviegoing.—Further encouragements. 258 I note here the publication of my *Cities of Words*. Puzzle about my (lack of) reception, even though mostly I am no longer thought to be merely exotic.—A week's

set of discussions held at the Pebble Beach Country Club to assess the state of philosophy in 1950 actually prepares my transfer to the Harvard graduate school.—Morton White's tactful gesture of friendliness proves decisive. 262 In response to the week's gathering in Pebble Beach, Kaplan remarks: "Remember that analytical philosophy is not all there is to philosophy." What does he—what am I to—remember? 265 A reacceptance, in my fashion, of women in my life.—Mostly awaiting the move to Harvard.

Part 8 (April 29 through May 22, 2004)

270

An innocent at Harvard in 1951.—Anonymity transfigured. 271 Seven months preparing for the Ph.D. qualifying examinations. 275 Harvard decorum; analogues at UCLA. 276 How is teaching anywhere to be done? 278 Henry Aiken and the vulnerabilities of premature friendship. 283 A pair of Jewish Christmases. 287 Success in the qualifying examinations is laced with thoughts of death and of presages of addiction.—"To them that hath shall it be given." 292 I am given my first experience of Europe.—The Salzburg Seminar in American Studies. 295 Teachers that summer include Milton Babbitt and Robert Lowell.—A renowned physicist, Abraham Pais, gives an informal lecture to us and the next day joins our daily communal Ping-Pong challenge. 298 One morning some three or four weeks later, we learn that Lowell late the previous night had been transported to the psychiatric ward of a Munich hospital.—The previous day he had visited Berchtesgaden. On returning he called out to me, holding an open Bible in his hand, demanding that I, as a Jew, interpret a passage from Saint Paul.—A meeting with Lowell years later in Cambridge. 301 A brief but echoing crisis over a proposal for me to remain in

Salzburg 303 There are suddenly more or less as many books published about my work as there are books published by me. I can see myself as a reverse Rip Van Winkle who after twenty years of virtual oblivion has become intermittently recognizable. 307 Returning from Salzburg for a second graduate year at Harvard.—Nominated to the Society of Fellows. 310 The shock of freedom. 313 Counting immigrant generations and expectations. 316 In the summer of 1954 I am diagnosed as having mononucleosis and confined for two weeks in Beth Israel Hospital. I am discharged on condition that I not walk outside my rooms in Adams House for two further weeks. My mother travels to Cambridge from Atlanta to help Marcia bring in food and manage further necessities for the convalescent.—Marcia and I intend to discover one other. 318 I have to begin considering concrete dissertation topics.—Oxford philosophy is the new thing; it strikes me as interesting but shallow.—Austin's presence at Harvard. 326 The marriage proves, after a separation, to be on.—Berkeley offers me an initial teaching position, which I accept granted the condition that I can postpone it to spend the last year of my Junior Fellowship wandering in Western Europe. 328 Destinations among ruins.—A few experiments with time. 330 Studying German through August and September 1955 in Bad Reichenhall.

Part 9 (May 25 through June 3, 2004)

333

How may one roughly sanely commence a life of teaching, where this means appear to give 120 lectures over the first semester of one's first year? 338 The birth of my daughter, Rachel.—What are the conditions of the work I do, or wish to do? 339 I had written a paper for Austin after his semester at Harvard in the spring of 1955 that I

handed to him the day of his flight back to England.—His response catches up with me at the end of the year in another country. 341 Four Berkeley sketches of close friends of mine, no one of whom is close to any of the others.—Seymour Shifrin. 343 Kurt Fischer. 352 Thomas Kuhn. 357 Thompson Clarke. 361 Dismayingly but greatly profitably, after I deliver my first serious philosophical paper to a professional meeting, Clarke detects an essential limitation in my work. I phrase this fault variously, for example as my failure to ask systematically how it is that the human *can* become, is even fated to become, unpragmatic, say, unnatural. 366 A year of walks and conversations with Clarke in Berkeley.—What, if anything, should count as teaching philosophy?—Clarke submits his dissertation to Harvard in the spring of 1960, precipitating a distressing fiasco. 373 This day of writing succeeds a day of reunion of those of us who had traveled forty years earlier to Mississippi from Harvard as part of the Freedom Summer of 1964 to teach at Tougaloo College, outside Jackson.—In the spring of 1961 I submit my dissertation to Harvard.—Clarke's humor and practicality avert fiasco.

Part 10 (June 4 through June 15, 2004)

382

My ineptitude as a father proves not to be total. 385 Bargains to get my dissertation typed, one with an ex-con, another with Alexandra.—The dissertation is successfully defended.—More Harvard names. 391 The invitation to a permanent position at Harvard is matched by Berkeley. 396 Systematic moviegoing resumed.—Desire shielded by emotional hostage taking 398 Mary and Belle, still and again.—Berkeley or Harvard, a fateful, but given the circumstances, an impertinent choice for me. 402 A year at the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study.—The spring of that year Bernard Williams is

Visiting Professor at the philosophy department at Princeton University. We become as if old college friends, invaluable wasting precious time together.—During my few days visiting Cambridge from Princeton, Michael Fried and I discover each other.—I become a divorced father. 408 At this writing, Cathleen and Ben and Emily and I are just back from Mendel's ninetieth birthday celebration in Atlanta.—We find that the house I lived in for my first seven years is still standing and in good repair.—We are invited inside. 411 The Cuban missile crisis.—Another of Aunt Bess's unlikely romances. 412 Again differences between West Coast and East Coast intellectual cultures come into question.—The migration, or immigration, of German/Austrian logical positivism to England and to the United States.—The necessity of philosophy as therapy and as resistance. 416 On a difference between courtly and democratic gossip.—Wittgenstein's discovery, following Freud's, that the everyday is esoteric.—Opening encounter with Rose Mary Pederson and John Harbison.—Rachel and I begin, by way of Atlanta to visit family, and to Princeton to visit the Kuhns, to explore the prospects of life in Cambridge.

Part 11 (June 16 through June 25, 2004)

421

Beginning teaching at Harvard.—Living in Adams House with a dozen tutors and several hundred undergraduates.—House dining hall conversations, and Harvard Square cafeterias after midnight. 429 My invitation to participate in the Freedom Summer of 1964 in Mississippi came from SNCC.—What is my generation?—For whom does one speak?—With what right?—Wagers of fame. 435 Meeting Cathleen.—The Northeast blackout of 1965.—A brief test of my divided life. 439 In a matter of weeks: “How can we think of marrying?” 441 Early instances of my work's (lack of) reception.—The happenstance of

happiness.—Gertrude Stein on friends and strangers.—My interest in fallen worlds, for example, the one (so to speak) we have (so to speak). 446 The essential rationality and the inevitable irrationality of moral encounter.—First encounter, at this writing, with the writing of Maurice Blanchot. Reasonably uncanny connections with Thoreau and with Emerson.—A vision of the finite creature's infinite responsibility for the world.—A productive year of writing at Wesleyan's Center for the Humanities in 1970–71.—Must a worthwhile utterance draw blood? 448 The summer before Wesleyan I am invited to Paris to meet with a small group for conversations with Jacques Derrida at the École Normale.—American responses—or vulnerabilities—to European philosophical revolutions. 452 A certain psychoanalytic breakthrough.—My dissertation, revised irregularly over sixteen years, in 1977 has become *The Claim of Reason*, seeing print two years later. 455 A further sense, and evidence, of liberation.—Sandra Laugier spends the year at Harvard; the beginning of a permanent friendship.—A philosophical revolution associated with Heidegger and still another associated with (later) Wittgenstein, seem mutually intolerable.

Part 12 (June 26 through August 1, 2004)

459

I make a certain, or uncertain, peace with the idea, or my need or my ambition to discover the ways, that philosophy (if it extends beyond formal logic) is irreducibly a function of the literary.—Contesting (or resisting) ordinary language by recourse to itself, not alone by reference to logical transcription. 461 Philosophy and childhood.—Further attestation that life's events are expressed, transfigured, as events of intellectual life.—Ben and my diminished mother in conversation. 468 A few diary entries of Cathleen's and of

mine glimpsing further moments of Ben's and David's early years. 472 An agreement with the last group of graduate students I worked with before officially retiring from Harvard that we enter the French lists by means of a Wittgenstein-inspired reading of Lacan's first two seminars.—A pause, not for the first time in a lucky intellectual life, to marvel at the talents and commitments among graduate students I have worked with. 479 Another cause of the French developments breaking in is Arnold Davidson's insistence on the significance of Foucault's later writings.—Visiting Claude and Denise Esteban at Lacoste in the south of France. Claude visits René Char at his home in a neighboring village.—Departing with Denise for Nice, Claude leaves me a present of a text of Char's *Les Feuillettes d'Hypnos*. 481 After several failed searches, I succeed at this writing in finding the school tablets I filled with Char-instigated, Mistral-affected, experiments in condensation. I insert here a selected sheaf of them.

Part 13 (August 9 through August 18, 2004)

488

A not quite accidental further encounter of the writing of Maurice Blanchot.—Two myths of philosophical reading and writing.—I inspire yet another grudging review. 495 A fiasco in the 1980 APA panel organized in view of the appearance of *The Claim of Reason*. 497 The classical empiricists' stylization of experience, beginning again with what they call "impressions." 498 Bernard Williams, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the question of intellectual charlatantry. 501 Thoreau and Heidegger and what Wittgenstein calls the natural history of the human.—My graduate students correct my self-perception. 505 The student movement against our war in Vietnam comes to Harvard in 1969. 508 Jack Rawls and I present to an

emergency meeting of the Harvard faculty a translation of a petition from the association of the Afro-American (so-called in the late 1960s) students for the establishing of a Department of Afro-American Studies. 512 A proposal to receive training as a lay analyst. 514 The withholding of acknowledgment is the denial of existence.—Moments of everyday madness. 516 Henry James and the feeling of being exceptional.

Part 14 (August 19 through September 1, 2004) 518

Where is there a nation?—A welcome moment of local ceremony, even if marred. 521 I recognize my confidence that my writing will continue for me, as of a place open to return. 522 Blanchot's perception of the disaster is transcendental, for which I feel surprisingly prepared. 525 I am still working free of the desire to persuade. 528 Skepticism as a horror of knowledge. 529 Disaster implies the loss of consideration—shifting contexts—as the sidereal mode of thinking. 530 Blanchot and Emerson on the neutral. 532 Emerson concerning human understanding, despite Locke and Leibniz and Hume. 533 Proust, considering Ruskin, cites Emerson's advice to "hitch your wagon to a star."—An evening aroma in an Atlanta street in 1932 reasserts itself in the Boston airport in 1963. 535 Friedrich Schlegel, Derrida imitating, questions being understandable. 538 Emerson and Blanchot again chime in. 540 Howard Hawks's *Only Angels Have Wings*; Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not*; Saint Paul's Corinthians I. 546 To put away—perhaps not to discard—childish things.

Index of Names 549

Acknowledgments 558