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Looking back across a gap of twenty-five years I’m not sure I would recognize myself, but the core of things that matter to me has been sifted, pruned, and intensified more than changed. A friend at work and I traced our office choice—his with an open vista across the bay, and mine with a view filtered through trees and stopped by the hills in the middle distance—to his youth in desert Fresno vs mine in forested and hilly New York. And while most Californians live in an exposed landscape, my house is enclosed by tall pines in a steep canyon.

Family first—and it is first, the only thing that has the stability of being there because it’s there and not because I chose it. True, marriage starts with a choice, but having been married since the day after graduation to Cindy, and carrying togetherness to the extreme of commuting together to work on the same floor of the same building, that feels as stable as you can get. No kids, two sisters, lots of nieces, nephews, and grandnieces and -nephews. The death of nephew Jim in a parachuting accident was the low point of my life—even worse than the death of my parents, who lived an expected span into their seventies.

Before college I was equally interested in math/science and history/humanities, but from freshman year through grad school at Berkeley and three years teaching at the University of Virginia, I went exclusively in the latter direction. Then, weary of an all-consuming work life at low pay, disillusioned with the lack of rigor in humanities disciplines, and desperate to get out of Virginia and back to California, I reversed course and took up software in the systems engineering division of SRI (i.e., Stanford Research Institute) while filling in my missing education at Stanford. I didn’t throw everything away—my work is more writing than anything else—but I love the discipline of machines that have no tolerance for BS, and I respect the engineering education of the people I work with.

My nonwork time is mostly spent on books, music, visual arts, and the outdoors. I read widely—slowly and for pleasure and without the old compulsion to pile up knowledge. My taste in music runs towards sonatas and quartets from Mozart to Rachmaninov, especially music that is described by critics as solemn or dark, as if I’m missing the point because it leaves me elated rather than depressed. Like many others, I have found the fountain of youth and energy in jogging, and I run relays in local and national track meets on the SRI corporate team. Winter is to be looked forward to because it means skiing.

I date my escape from being overly serious from my first day of teaching at Berkeley—my immediate response to classroom tension was to find an unsuspected vocation as a comedian. I still like privacy and am tolerant of long silences, but work has made me more sociable—most of it is done cooperatively and in high good humor. I am not much driven by ambition for recognition and am comfortable living within myself.