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As a writer for more than two decades, I would like to look back and see the traces of inevitability or design. Instead, I see a series of accidents and fragile encouragements that at crucial moments kept me going when I might just as easily have turned towards some other, presumably more lucrative career. At one point in 1971, for instance, I vowed to get a real job if I did not get a check for an article within the following six weeks.

The Los Angeles Times came through with a commission, and not long thereafter I assembled a shaky package of grants, loans, and commissions that got me to Vietnam. There I wrote an investigative article about fragging and other symptoms of the demoralization of our fighting forces which Saturday Review published as a cover story in January 1972. I took on this project in part because I needed to know whether my opposition to the war was well-founded—I left for Vietnam only a few weeks after receiving an honorable discharge from the Navy by reason of conscientious objection. The trip had its ironies: In Quang Nai Province I was asked whether I wanted an M-16 for self-defense. I declined the well-intentioned offer on the logic that I had not argued successfully against shooting Vietnamese as a soldier only to find myself gunning them down as a journalist.

If there is continuity in my career it is that I continue to explore ideas and interests developed while at Yale. My work in Vietnam sparked a few letters and calls from publishers. Instead of writing a book about Vietnam, however, I chose to explore the implications of experiments attempting to teach language to apes, following an interest in concepts of human nature that I first began thinking about as an undergraduate. In fact the series of books I wrote during my twenties and early thirties—Apes, Men and Language, The Alms Race, Affluence & Discontent—all grew out of the seeds of ideas planted in the late 1960s.

I have continued to explore the same broad questions throughout my writing career: How do we fit in the natural order; what drives consumer societies? In the mid-1980s 1 wrote Silent Partners, which examined the ways in which conflicting attitudes towards animal and human nature buffeted the lives of captive apes in years following the language experiments. While working on books I also wrote articles and commentary for a wide variety of publications including the Atlantic, the National Geographic, the Wall Street Journal, and the New York Times.

My struggle continues at Time which I joined in 1987 with the responsibility to report and write stores on the environment, nature, and science. Time has given me the opportunity to write for a mass audience—it’s amazing how many “authentic” messiahs I hear from, readers eager to share messages received directly from God. Timealso has the resources that enable me to report and write global stories about the fate of the world’s megacities, for instance, or the impoverishment of the world’s knowledge base as tribes abandon their ways.

If there is any other leitmotif to my career since Yale, it is that I am just as clueless about managing my career as I was back then. As I write this brief biography, I am also beginning research on a new book offering my thoughts about what life will be like in the middle of the next century. My entire writing career has been an apprenticeship to write this book, but I feel much as I did when I first left Yale: haphazardly prepared to deal with daunting subject matter, but still hopeful that I might offer useful insights into who we are and where weare going. If anything has changed it is that as the father of an eleven-year-old  
daughter, Gillian, I feel an urgent need to understand the world she will inherit.