

Sons,

I thought I would write for you this memoir of my youth which I believe was in many ways quintessentially American and thus so very different from your own. Your experience of life as expatriate Americans born in Bahrain has meant that in some ways you are not fully native in your own country.

Now that our family is finally home again, even though that home is essentially a new one, I thought you might have an interest in my experiences in the America of the 1960s and early 1970s, as seen through my eyes of youth.

I was, as you know, born in Seattle in 1955. I lived there for three and a half years in a town called Lake City. My father was a graduate student at the University of Washington, and my mother taught in a girls' seminary.

My earliest actual memory is from some time after I was two years old. I put a drinking straw into a knothole in the wall of the kitchen, and it disappeared. I was amazed by this. Other than this, I cannot remember anything specific about the time or the house, except for one frightening and traumatizing incident.

There was an alleyway behind the house. My father, in a heavy-handed attempt to demonstrate the dangers of going into the alley, took my Easter basket and backed the car over it in front of me. Unfortunately the lesson I learned was not just that cars were potentially dangerous, but rather that my father was mean as well. It's still depressing to think about till this day.

In the summer of 1959 we moved to Columbus Ohio, where my father had a year of post-doctoral work at Ohio State University. I remember more from this year. We had an apartment where the sunlight streamed in the windows of my parents' bedroom; their bedspread was often dappled in light. I remember a constant sense of delight and joy whenever I was on that bed.

My brother was born that summer. He had a problem with the sphincter in his stomach so

he was constantly vomiting up his milk. I wasn't too happy about his arrival and the endless attention he received from my mother.

I did, however, find the dried end of his umbilical cord in the hallway after it fell off. For some reason this find excited me greatly.

Besides that I didn't have any real interest in him. He was merely an irritant. My mother tells me that one day I was bending over his playpen and said: 'Donald, you're illiterate.' My mother supposed I didn't know what that meant. When she asked me I informed her with glee that it meant Donald couldn't read or write.

The most exciting thing I remember about our time in Ohio was a raccoon in the alley that would root through the garbage cans. I spent many an evening on the back steps trying to spot it. Occasionally I succeeded. Having a wild animal on our doorstep was so exciting at that age - a feeling that was similar to our attempts to spot the mongoose in the compound in Bahrain when you were a little younger than that, Duncan.

In 1960, we returned to Seattle. Although I can't remember the neighborhood we lived in, I recall the house we lived in with clarity. It was a small, comfortable house, except for the basement. The basement during the day was tolerable, but at night it became terrifying. I would not go into the basement after twilight. It had a window at ground level, and for some reason a large pile of sawdust under the window. I'd watched a movie, which I believe, is called *Invaders from Mars*. The Martians were hiding their spaceships in the ground and pulling hapless passersby into their clutches, and then gaining control of their minds. I was convinced that the pile of sawdust contained Martians who would come out at night and suck out our brains. There were a number of children in the neighborhood. During the day we would play in that basement and climb through the window, but we were all agreed that come dusk there was real danger there.

I don't recall ever speaking to my parents about it, but the hidden menace of that basement remained a terror as long as we lived there. A boy my age lived in the house across the street; I

recall his front yard as a kind of hill. It's strange how childhood memories distort things, and size in particular. I drove past these houses once when I was about thirty five. The 'hill' was actually a slope of about four feet in height. Yet to me, the child, it was so much more.

My friend had a bicycle; he let me ride it one day. It was the first time I'd ever been on a bicycle. I went along just fine down the sidewalk till the end of the block. I was balancing perfectly. Then disaster struck. I didn't know how to turn, and collapsed in a heap at the corner. I'm sure that everyone remembers the first time they ever rode a bike. That was mine. I was a little gun-shy for a while, but soon mastered the art of riding without being taught by anyone.

At the end of the street was the elementary school where I spent the year in kindergarten. I don't remember very much about kindergarten except that I didn't like the teacher, and she didn't like me. The main thing I recall about this school was the contrast between how dreary it was inside and how wonderful the grounds were to a five year-old.

The edge of the playground was planted all around with large rhododendron bushes. There were paths between the bushes and the fence, and we used to slip along the length of the fence and in and out of the bushes. It was like a magnificent jungle and all of us children loved our time in that playground hiding and moving, moving and hiding.

As for school, I only clearly remember two incidents out of the whole year. The first was Halloween. That was the only time I found the interior of the school appealing. It had been transformed into a haunted house, and I loved it. We went through the hallway and from room to room. To my eyes it was done up spectacularly. It's strange I can't remember Christmas or my birthday from that year, but that particular Halloween in that otherwise dreary school, remains one of my best. Afterwards, I walked home with my mother. I was immensely happy.

My mother's pride in me took a knock one day at a parent-teacher meeting. She tells me she went to meet the teacher. Filled with pride, she said: 'I'm Glenn Stewart's mother.'

The teacher responded: 'Oh, that horrid little boy!'

I don't know what the source of our problem was, but my mother was terribly deflated by that exchange.

The second incident I remember was towards the end of that year. We had a system whereby 10 or 15 minutes or so before the school day ended we went out to our lockers and got our lunchboxes or whatever we needed to take home with us and then returned to the classroom for some final harangue or exhortation from the teacher. The lockers were in the hall outside the class. I recall that on this particular day I expected to get in some trouble from the teacher when I went back into the classroom so I merely collected my things and went home.

My mother was surprised I was home early, and I got in a little trouble with her but I always had her sympathy against anyone who didn't like and admire me as much as she did. So the teacher was given short shrift for whatever it was.

My brother continued hapless, and suffered two unfortunate episodes that year. In the first, my mother accidentally hit him on the eyebrow with a measuring cup while she was cooking. He was underfoot, and she, unaware of his presence, merely turned at some point with the cup in her hand and clocked him on the brow. That required a couple of stitches, and her consequent guilt increased her coddling of him no end.

The second mishap was even more spectacular. When he was getting on for two Donald decided to try to melt a couple of ice cubes in a Dixie cup on the gas stove in the kitchen. When the cup burst into flames he badly burned both his thumbs trying to take the cup off the stove.

In the summer of 1961 I went to stay with my grandmother in Bellingham. This was the first of six summers I got to stay with her. They were all simply wonderful.

I loved Bellingham, and I loved being with my grandmother. She was sweet, loving, attentive and crotchety all wrapped up into one. She had snowy white hair and a 19<sup>th</sup>-Century-frontier, can-do spirit. She believed in hard work, honesty and God. And she was always willing to help anyone willing to help themselves.

My grandmother lived at 917 North Forest St near Western Washington University, more or less at the foot of Sehome Hill. The house was not large. It had two bedrooms upstairs and a living room. Best of all was a dining area with a view over Bellingham Bay. Downstairs was the

utility area, storage and another bedroom that was mine whenever I stayed. There was a trundle bed for my brother when he was also there.

She had an old-fashioned tub washing machine with a hand-turned wringer for the clothes. It was one of my jobs to wring out the clothes after washing for her to hang on the line.

The house stood on a corner lot next to a church, so it was always quiet during the week. In the front lawn between the house and the church stood, and still stands, the most magnificent Tulip tree you could ever see. I don't know how old it is, but it was and is grand. It had a rope swing with an old tire hung from it. I loved that swing.

At the back of the house was the church parking lot. My grandmother provided me with a bright red tricycle, so I had full reign over the sidewalk, driveway at the back, and then access down the slope into the parking lot - a fairly large area over which to achieve daredevil speeds.

The best part of this house was on the side below the tulip tree and between the back yard (such as it was) and the church. This area was covered by a magnificent raspberry patch about 40 feet long and some 15-18 feet wide. It was always a fraught exercise for me to get berries from the middle of the patch; I was small, and the thorns on the branches were a nuisance. In addition to the raspberries my grandmother also had blackberries and boysenberries. One of my jobs was to pick the berries and fill mason jars with them; she would then make them into jam. I wasn't allowed to touch the pressure cooker, but the process always fascinated me.

Berries are one of the marvels of the Pacific Northwest. They are literally almost everywhere. In addition to the patch in the yard I used to go to Sehome Hill to pick wild blackberries, which were delicious. This too was a delicate exercise, as the hill was very steep and there were stinging nettles on the hillside. I had to be extra careful. It was almost always futile, however, and the price of a quart mason jar of blackberries was getting hands and ankles stung.

My grandmother ran a corner grocery store on Monroe St. The place was cheerful and a little dark, with plain wood floors stained dark from years of people walking on them. I had a few chores in the store, such as putting empty boxes out for the trash, sweeping the floor, and sorting

and rinsing the empty pop bottles that had been returned to go back to the bottler. I remember the Squirt bottles the best because of the logo - a smiling sort-of elf with a bottle cap for a hat. I don't know if the brand even exists any more, but on the occasions I got to drink one I loved its zesty lemon-lime taste.

For these chores I got a small amount of pocket money that I used mainly to buy candies from the store. I was particularly fond of the liquorice chewing gum - I think it was called Blackjack. My grandmother had an assistant named Roy Rudy, a big, slow, gentle man with silver hair. He always wore a green apron, and was very nice to me - as he was to everybody.

My grandfather worked in the back, but I don't remember that he did very much. He was generally cranky and brusque, and I mostly stayed out of his way. My grandmother always seemed a bit disapproving of him. He had had a heart attack during the Second World War while working in the shipyards. He hadn't worked very much since. He collected stamps, and when at home seemed to spend most of his spare time fussing over his collection. He gave me a few starter stamps and a little album for US stamps which I built up somewhat over the next few years, but mostly I didn't have that much to do with him.

He had been born in Selkirk in Scotland and still spoke with a Borders lilt. I've heard stories that he was a bit of a Jack The Lad when he was young. Apparently he was highly convivial and preferred to take off and go fishing for week at a time rather than go to work. Also, he was supposed to drink. The latter would have been a serious factor for my grandmother, who was Women's Christian Temperance Union. She believed that all the evil in the world came out of a saloon, and that the devil lurked in every bottle of whiskey. She was a staunch Presbyterian of the old school - hellfire, damnation, we're all sinners. I had to attend church with her each Sunday. I didn't actually mind, although I don't remember anything of substance from the sermons, but the church was a nice, solid, gray building a few blocks away.

My grandmother drove a 1948 DeSoto, a massive thing. I loved that car. It had very comfortable cloth seats and a huge steering wheel that looked like ivory. I would ride with her when she went downtown to order goods for the store.

The other notable feature about Bellingham to me at that age, and even in the summers to follow, was the sidewalks. From the Forest Street house as you headed west there were sidewalks that went through vacant lots, sidewalks that split in two and curved outwards and back together again. Sidewalks that turned into stairs I used to go walking for blocks and blocks and although it's a small, insignificant thing really, I loved those sidewalks and going for those walks. I don't know why. They're still there and I still like them. I've never seen a sidewalk split into two and go curving through a vacant lot in any other American city.

The other notable aspect of life at grandmother's was the food. She cooked everyday and although the meals were fairly plain, they were good. We had a traditional Scottish dish called mince and tatties, basically nothing more than potatoes and ground hamburger in a meat sauce, usually served with turnips. My grandmother ate beets with nearly every meal. I couldn't stand them, and especially hated the way the purple juice got all over the plate and dyed the potatoes. It was particularly disgusting mixed with mashed potato.

The main meal aside, baking was my grandmother's forte. She was always making cookies, cakes and pies. A lot of the berries I picked went into the pies. My favorite cookies were molasses cookies topped with a bit of white frosting. I always got a spoonful or two of the molasses in my milk and I loved it. This seems to be an old-fashioned treat, now gone with the wind. I know I tried it on you boys when you were young, and you were singularly unimpressed.

The most amazing aspect of my grandmother's cooking was that it was all done on an old-fashioned, wood-burning stove. This stove was a marvel to me. It had a door in the front into which wood was fed, and there were various vents to adjust the airflow. On the top of the stove were iron plates that could be lifted by inserting a metal stick into a slot. How she turned out such exquisite baked goods with this stove I don't know. It really was an art, and she seemed to love the stove. She also loved coffee, which she brewed coffee in the morning and drank all day. She always said as part of her ritual that the coffee had to be strong enough to stand a spoon up in it. One of my evening chores was to take the coffee grounds and sprinkle them in the flowerbeds.

These various chores and tasks were a great thing. They gave me a sense of being useful, wanted, a sense of accomplishment. My grandmother was very good at getting the best out of me, and everything she did, she did with love.

I once awoke in the middle of the night in a terrible state of fear about something. Till this day I remember how soothing and tender she was to me. In many ways I had a better relationship with her than I did with my own parents, but more of that later. You can see from the body language in the attached photograph her proprietary feelings towards me.

I already lived in a world of imagination, and had two imaginary friends whom I spent time with. I suppose that may be natural; I didn't actually have any playmates that summer. One of my imaginary friends was name Boggy Souswade. I can't remember the other one. In any case, my mother got very upset with me one afternoon after I tried to run into the street to save Boggy as he had gotten hit by a car. I don't remember much more about it other than her restraining me, and my crying rather hysterically.

Towards the end of that summer my parents came to collect me. We were about to move on to a new phase in our lives.

The summer ended with a cross-country trip. My father had finished his post-doctoral studies, and had obtained a job as an associate professor at the University of Maryland. So my parents, my brother and I drove across the country in, I believe, a 1959 or 58 Rambler sedan. I don't remember very much about the trip other than that the back seat of the car was huge, as was the leg area. We piled pillows and blankets up in the back and my brother and I spent a lot of the trip on mounds of pillows. My parents would get up early and bundle us into the car, where we'd go back to sleep for a couple of hours and then be woken for breakfast at some diner. I loved those breakfasts on the road, typical great American breakfasts - for me, usually a short stack of pancakes with bacon or sausage and apple juice. There's no better meal to be had anywhere in America than breakfast, and no better place to have it than in a roadside diner.

Thus at the end of the summer of 1961 we found ourselves in College Park Maryland. It

soon became clear to me that this was not the Pacific Northwest. Everything was different - the climate, the plants, the people. It was a strange little world for me initially. Although I've come to like Maryland and many aspects of its culture and ambience over the years, I still find it in general a harsher and coarser place than the Northwest and certainly less physically spectacular