

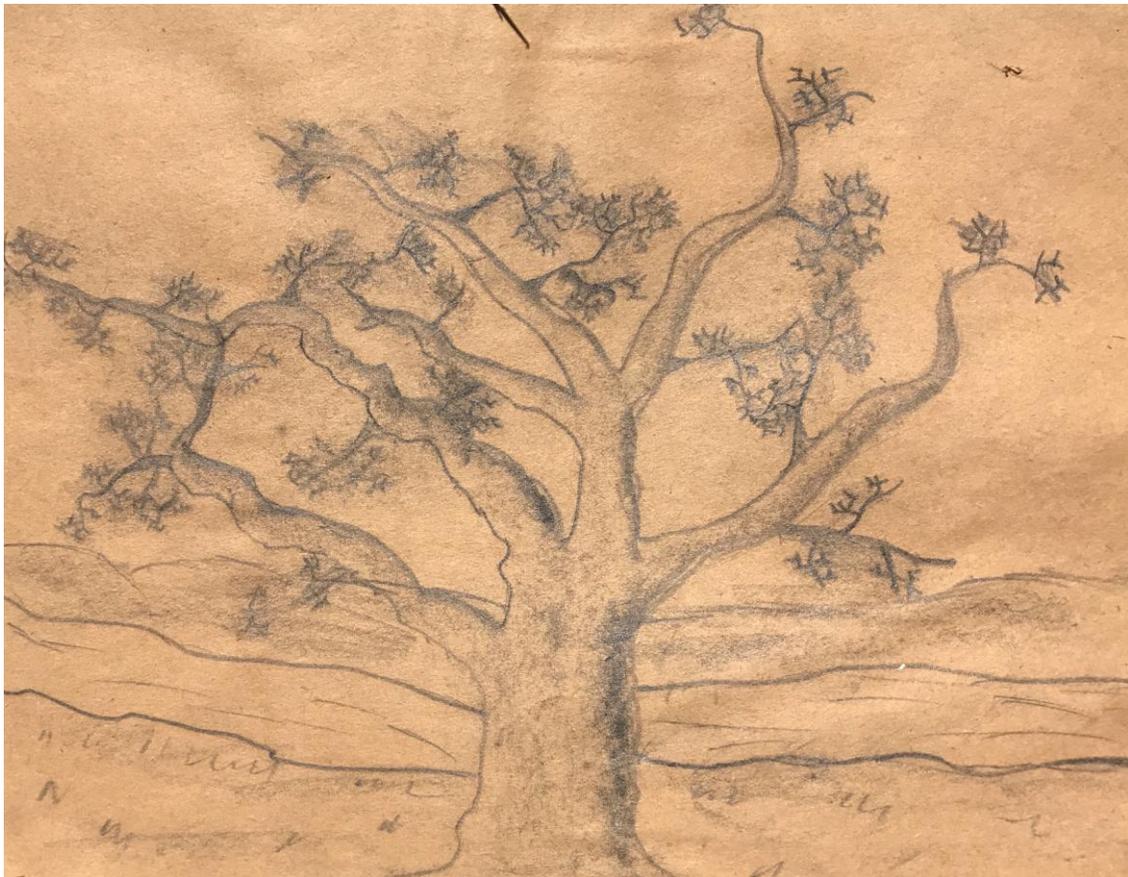
Growing Up in Los Altos Hills

Eric Bredo

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I first saw what was to become Los Altos Hills in 1952. My parents and I had driven across country in our not so trusty Studebaker, camping in national parks along the way. We were coming from Washington, D.C. where my father had worked at the Department of Agriculture and my mother had been teacher. Stanford Research Institute in Menlo Park offered my father a job as an economist, so Westward Ho we went.

I think we took the Tioga Pass over the mountains. What I remember for sure is that there were no barriers on the down side, making it seem very dangerous. As we entered the Bay Area I remember thinking, "So, this is California." Its golden hills and gnarly oaks imprinted themselves on my mind. Somehow the dry Eastern side of the mountains didn't count. I came to love the hills and oaks, as in this drawing.



Since we had nowhere to stay we were going to the home of Wilbur and Mary Henry, old friends who lived on Purissima Rd. On the way we stopped at El Camino and Page Mill. The intersection was stark in those days, Page Mill being a little road leading through bare grassy fields with horses grazing toward the hills—in what was later to become the Stanford Industrial Park. I seem to remember that it was a one lane road, in parts, with turn-outs to pull over if you met another car. Of course, I'm talking about Old Page Mill Road before the four lane by-pass was built to get people to 280 (which also didn't exist then).

As an historical aside, Page Mill Rd was named after William Page's shingle mill, located in a beautiful valley in Portola State Park, on the other side of Skyline.



In those days when you passed people walking on the road, or met another car, you often waved—as we still do to those on our own lane. We had to stop again when we reached Arastradero since it took off first to the left, and then to the right, and we didn't know which to take. After consulting the Henry's letter again, we took the left turn, over the hill until to Purissima. Going along Purissima a short way we came to the Henry's mailbox on the right. Their dirt driveway led through an old orchard to a parking area near a large fig tree and an old wooden barn (The Town's Purissima Park now occupies this space). I was curious about the old farm equipment in the barn, but we passed by and walked up the winding path to the Henry's white farmhouse up the hill.

Mary and my mother (Genevieve--"Jenny"—Bredo) had met at Iowa State when my mother was teaching art as a teaching assistant. Mary was, I believe, a fellow art TA. Both were probably students, as well. My father had come to Iowa State from Calgary to work on his Masters degree in agricultural economics. Here are my parents around that time:



After my father received his Masters degree my parents went back up to Canada, Ottawa to be specific, since my father had to do wartime service for the Canadian government. When my mother became pregnant they were eager to have me born in the US, however, since the living standard and opportunities were considerably better at that time, so my father asked if he could serve an ally as his wartime contribution. His job with the US Department of Agriculture was duly approved and I was born a U.S. citizen. As I later put it when applying for a job in Canada, I was “*conceived* in Canada but *delivered* in the US.” By the late 1940’s both my family and the Henrys’ were in Cambridge, Mass, where my father and Wilbur were pursuing advanced degrees at Harvard. Here’s a picture of us at the time.



After grad school Wilbur and Mary moved to the Bay Area where Wilbur worked as an engineer and Mary became a local artist. Among her commercial works were murals for the Hewlett Packard building on Page Mill Rd (1960), noted in RoadsideArchitecture.com's "California mid-century buildings."



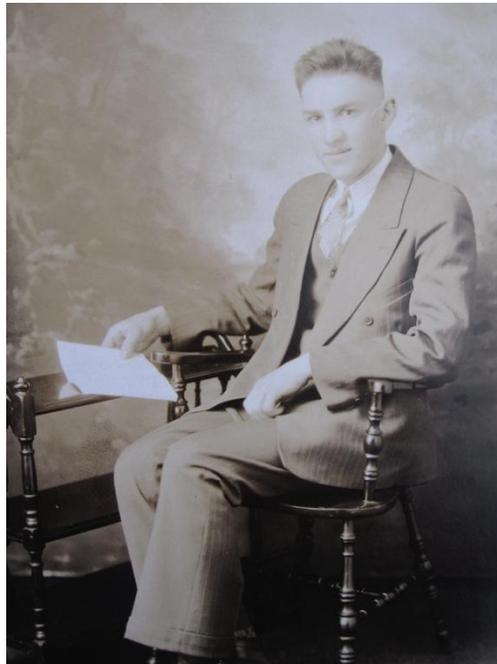
But Mary became best known for her private art work. Here's one that is a bit tense and gloomy to my mind, but it gives you a good sense of the meaning of "abstract expressionism."



After many years, Mary moved to Mendocino, and later to Seattle. When she died in 2017 at 96 the Seattle Times celebrated her as "one of the northwest's most accomplished painters" and a leading

abstract expressionist. The Henrys' daughter Suzanne, my oldest friend, became an English professor in Seattle. Unfortunately, their younger son, Billy, died as fairly young. All of this was before highway 280 was built through the Henry's land, destroying its rural character and ultimately leading them to sell the part that had not been taken.

My father, William Bredo, was born in Calgary to Russian immigrants who had emigrated from the Crimea around 1908-10. Although they came from Russia, they spoke German since they were ethnic Germans, descendants, I imagine, of German farmers Catherine the Great brought in to improve Russian agriculture. My grandfather originally did manual labor in Calgary, but the family soon had to flee to the country due to anti-German sentiment during the First World War. My father told me he was once beaten for speaking German at school (prompting his Aunt Rose to go and tell the teacher in no uncertain terms that she was never to do "dat" again!). The family received a quarter section of farmland (160 acres, i.e., a quarter of a square mile) as a land grant, and built a sod house where my father lived for seven years. I was fascinated by his tales of growing up on the prairie, riding his horse to school, looking out for rattlesnakes, and going on a day's wagon ride with his father to get the center pole for the sod house. Despite this impoverished upbringing he did well in school, gaining an all Calgary history award in high school. After graduating he became a teacher in a one room school and later the principal teacher (i.e. "Principal") of a two-room school. He told me stories about how he tried to handle pupils of many age levels in each class (twelve grades, as I recall), getting the older to teach the younger and giving them all parts and instruments to play in common musical tunes. Since my father's uncle, Robert Livett, was head of the United Mineworkers in Alberta, he had a little more money and was able to help my father go to the University of Alberta, where he completed his BA. Here's my father in his early twenties when he worked as "Uncle Bob's" secretary.





My mother was of Swedish extraction from an earlier wave of immigration to the US, although Swedish was still spoken a bit when she was growing up in Iowa. She and her family later moved to San Diego, where her father worked as an electrical engineer and her mother as a cafeteria cook. Her father was said to be able to do anything but tune a piano, since he was very handy but partially deaf. I loved visiting them as he always took time for interesting projects, like making a hunting knife for me out of steel from an old car spring, with madrone wood for a handle and a handmade leather scabbard.

My mother received a BA in Art and Education from Diego State College, and then became an elementary school teacher in El Segundo, CA. For several years she commuted every summer to Columbia University in New York, finally receiving a MA in Art and Education. In those days Columbia was the center of American educational thought as John Dewey, America's foremost philosopher and educational theorist, was there. Although aged, he tottered into my mother's class to give a guest lecture or two. Perhaps because of this influence, as well as her own tendencies, she adopted a hands-on, experimentalist version of progressive education, which she applied to art education.

While at San Diego State my mother also painted a WPA mural, like those in Coit Tower today. Being supported by the FDR's Works Progress Association, such murals tended to depict everyday people at work. I never knew about it until I was surprised by a letter from the head of San Diego State's archeology department telling me that mother's mural had been discovered behind a false wall. It was strange to have my mother's work unearthed by an *archeologist!* However, he valued this

bit of history and was able to preserve and move it to where it now welcomes visitors at the entrance to the San Diego State University library.



After coming West, my mother taught art in the Sunnyvale School District and eventually became district Art Supervisor. She later taught at Foothill and De Anza Community Colleges, and lived on Moon Lane until her early death in 1977 at 63. After a career in development economics at SRI, in which he worked in 30 or 40 countries, and eventually headed the Development Economics group at SRI, my father retired and moved to Washington, D.C. for a post-retirement job with the Treasury Department. He later moved to Southern California and teaching jobs with USC in Hawaii, Korea and Japan, before dying in 1991 at 79.

But to return to our local saga, when we arrived in California in 1952 we first bought an Eichler in Palo Alto. Four years later we bought our current house on Moon Lane--in the future Los Altos Hills. It had water pumped to a tank above the house from Matadero Creek, a septic tank, and a long dirt driveway that became muddy--and occasionally impassable--in winter. One would call its architecture "Midcentury" today, as it was very spare and modern, with an unusual "butterfly" roof that allowed for full-length living room windows looking towards Black Mountain. It was redwood on the outside and had shiplap redwood on the walls inside, with a high beamed ceiling--something of a romantic modernist's dream, which fit my mother's taste well. Youngsters who visiting recently exclaimed, "Wow, Retro!", as they entered.

The house was built in 1950 by the Moon's, from whom the name "Moon Lane" derives. The Moon's (Courtney Moon) owned much of the land around the lane, but only stayed a few years, selling "our" house to the Casey's. Fortunately for us the Casey's also stayed only a short while, it being rumored that Mrs. Casey, who was very religious, wanted to go to Ireland to help the Irish farm. When my mother spotted the ad the second time (after the Casey's got it) she immediately called the real estate agent to say that we wanted to buy it. The agent wondered if we'd like to see it first, but she assured him there was no need, since we knew exactly which house had the butterfly roof.

There were few houses--or even trees--in the neighborhood at that time, giving the area an open, not to say barren, look. Here's a view of the back of the house—the one that looks towards Black Mountain—just after we put in a pool in 1957, and another of part of the view it looked towards.





And here's the same ridge-line today:



As you can see there is now not only a road on the ridge (Saddle Mountain) and a number of large houses, but many more trees. Los Altos Hills is much greener today than it used to be, partly from planting but also because of the spread of coast live oaks (as well as less desirables, like Coyote Brush). The next photo shows our house and barn in the foreground, ca. 1958, with me and my trusty air rifle. The Handley's house is in the background (They will be mentioned shortly).



One of our first encounters was with a three-foot snake slithering across the driveway. Since we were new and didn't recognize it as a harmless gopher snake, my father got out the .22 and shot the poor thing. I later caught virtually all the local species, except a rattlesnake, which I never found on our property. Black and white ringed king snakes became particularly favored pets since they are quite gentle (and eat rattlesnakes). Strangely, it seems as though there are also more animals today, including more frequent coyote visits, bobcats playing on the lawn, a recent influx of wild turkeys that seems to reach its peak just before Thanksgiving, and others.



The human occupants have changed too. When we first came, the area was populated by many with rural occupations. There was Baleri's horse ranch along Page Mill Rd, with its 76 rolling acres, house and barn (The origin of the name of "Baleri Ranch Road" off Page Mill near Arastradero). The line of trees in the picture below were large Eucalyptus trees along Arastradero that later burned in a fire 35 years ago or so. Many were also cut down as fire hazards but I miss the beautiful shaded drive they made along Arastradero.



Following Arastradero Rd. along that tree line one came to the Pierce Dairy, which supplied much of Palo Alto's milk from cows grazing in what is now Arastradero Preserve. In later years we kids would go over to Felt Lake off Arastradero for a walk or a dip, sometimes encountering "Old man Pierce" patrolling on horseback, with a pistol on his hip. Later, he used to drive around in an open convertible with a rifle planted ostentatiously on the floor boards. He seemed particularly concerned that Hippie bathers not offend his cows, although in fairness he was probably more concerned about tangible damage people might do to his cows.

A disabled veteran lived in a little shack right near the creek on Page Mill, between Arastradero and today's Paseo Del Roble. One could sometimes see him on his crutches as he worked his little garden. I never knew him and don't know what happened to him. Just a little further along Page Mill, just before Moon Lane, two women (whose names I've forgotten) ran a nursery, so one passed their little nursery, just before Moon Lane. When they died decades later the Ewald's bought the property, living there for many years. I think it was Mrs. Ewald who used to ride a horse around and around in a circle while standing on its back. Another neighbor, Henry Clark, ran a small horse boarding operation in a large, brown barn on Lupine Rd. I'll say more about him shortly, as well.

My parents were among a wave of professionals moving into the area, displacing some of the country people. Since then many professionals have been displaced, in turn, by Silicon Valley executives and managers, financiers, and wealthier professionals. Many of my parent's wave sought rural beauty, even if it involved dirt roads, well water, septic tanks and a longish drive to town. In contrast to some of today's copies the estates of yesterday's nobility, the ethos was about fitting in rather than showing off.

Budge and Betty Garbett, near neighbors along Page Mill, might be listed in this group. Wallace Stegner, a well-regarded novelist of the West who lived nearby up Three Fork Road also exemplified this ethos. I'll say a bit more about them shortly, as well.

Maury and Helen Johnson were one of our next-door neighbors, after they started building their house right below ours off of Moon lane. They made a living building houses, living in them until they were finished, and then selling and moving to the next. Maury built two houses along Moon Lane, one for his family and a second for the Vucinich's. Sally Vucinich was Helen Johnson's sister, so once the houses were finished the sisters could look across at each other toward their respective houses in the valley. Wayne Vucinich was a professor of Russian history at Stanford. While the Vucinich house has since been replaced, the Johnsons' remains on Moon Lane. Its large beams and thick roof boards show its origin in timber Maury hauled down from Oregon—because he could get it more cheaply there—in his old steel-bed truck. Maury later developed the Altamont Circle division at the intersection of Page Mill and Altamont Rd, and also built houses on Aric Lane and Weston Drive off of Fremont Rd, near the town hall. These roads were named after two of the Johnson's sons, Aric and Weston. I believe the Johnsons lived to a good age, no doubt partly due to their good eating habits. In addition to Maury's humorous and intelligent banter, I remember Helen's sugarless apple pies, which were delicious but made one's mouth pucker. When I last saw their oldest son, Soren, he was working as an independent contractor in Los Altos, although I believe he is now in Oregon, while the next son, Aric, went off to BYU, entered the Air Force, and

became a “top gun” instructor. I felt that Aric probably got exceptional training for this from time spent spinning in the air on the large trampoline they had next to their house.

Ray and Louise Handley were our other close neighbors, on the hilltop to the west of us. Ray was a prominent commercial realtor—a partner in the firm of Renault and Handley, whose signs one used to see frequently. He later bought and sold African art from a store at the Stanford Shopping Center, and another in the Frank Lloyd Wright building on Maiden Lane, in San Francisco. The Handley’s built a lean-to barn and for the horses of their daughters, Julie and Milla, who were younger than me. The rural life style apparently affected them, Milla becoming the first female winemaker to graduate from UC Davis. Apparently, she went there because it was the only university to she could bring her horse. She later founded Handley Cellars in Mendocino. While writing this I found she just died of Covid this year, at age 68. I’m not quite sure what happened to Julie but think she may have had a managerial career. Their mother, Louise, died before Ray, who died in 2009 at 91.

Since the older Johnson boys, Aric and Soren, were near my age they became my chief playmates, and companions in many adventures. The Johnson’s had a cow or two, as well as chickens, and one often heard their Bantam rooster calling in the morning, or saw him strutting proudly about the yard. After I returned from a summer with my parents in Argentina at 16, I brought back a bolas. Of course, we had to see if it really worked—the Argentine’s using them, to catch ostriches. and no doubt cattle as well. Sure enough, it entangled their cow’s legs, bringing it down. Later we lured the poor thing into a stall with a head lock, hopped on its back, and, releasing the board, tried to ride it for as long as we could. We quickly found that a cow’s back is broad and flat, so it’s like sitting on a board. I would say our best ride lasted about a second, giving me a profound appreciation of rodeo bull-riders.

Andrew and Eileen Stevens were near the bottom of Moon Lane, where it meets Page Mill Rd. Their driveway had a ranch-style sign that one drove through saying “A & A Ranch” (or something close to this). Andy was the Principal of Terman Junior High School (since renamed Ellen Fletcher Middle School--of which more later), and later became Associate Superintendent of the Palo Alto school district (If I recall correctly). The Stevens’ had a flock of sheep, a cow or two, and a small apple orchard. A rather grisly incident occurred at their place when the sheep broke into the feed storage and gorged themselves on the oat flakes. Being thirsty afterwards, they drank a lot of water, making the oatmeal swell, bursting a number of their stomachs. This gave me a great appreciation of the dangers of eating too much dry oatmeal! I also remember both the Stevens’ and Johnsons’ slaughtering their cows along the lane, a hired butcher setting up a triangular pipe frame to haul the cow’s body up to make it easier to butcher. Things were different then! The Stevens’ children, Kathy and Johnny, were younger, but we knew one another quite well.

In addition to playing with the Johnson boys, I’d walk over to the Garbett’s to play with their son Mike (Rachel and Matt being younger). “Budge” Garbett worked as an engineer with Shell Oil, while Betty was a gardener and home-maker. In addition to a flourishing vegetable garden they had chickens and pigs, and maybe some other animals. Betty sometimes let us scatter seed for the chickens, which I enjoyed, watching them run for it. I also remember her chopping the head off one, which took off and ran around the yard headless, giving me a vivid sense of the meaning of “Running like a chicken with its head cut off.” The pigs scared me as they were large and seemed like they’d bite, which I think they would have, but we sometimes tried to catch the small ones, which felt like tightly packed sausages, giving a sense of how difficult it is to catch a greased pig in

contests, like those still held in Woodside. Budge would sometimes let us use the metal lathe in his workshop, which was a wonderful treat (I own a similar one today). When I last visited in 2019, Betty had died a year earlier (I believe at 100), while Budge was still doing well at 102. I gather he is still well today at 105!

Another family lived in a small house just up the hill from the Stevens. I didn't know them well but they had a younger daughter whose name I seem to recall as "Julie." At some point their house burned down, forcing them to leave, and I never saw them again. However, this was one of the events described in Wallace Stegner's book on life in the neighborhood (as well as life more generally), All the Little Live Things. Stegner, a slightly more distant neighbor over on Three Forks Lane, loved the West and was a great defender of the rural beauty of our area. He has often been described as "the dean of Western writers," as though he eulogized the West, but a recent essay argues that he was "critical of the individualistic ethos of the West in all of its manifestations: romantic, entrepreneurial and countercultural (A. O. Scott, "Wallace Stegner and the Conflicted Soul of the West," NYT, June 1, 2020).



Stegner, at home with his dog, Suzie, in Los Altos Hills, Calif., in 1972. His commitments to ecology, family and community against the forces of modern economic development leave him jarringly and thrillingly resistant to the ideological pigeonholing that has become our dominant form of cultural analysis. Credit...Robert W. Klein/Associated Press

I only met him a couple times so did not get a good sense of him, though I've read a number of his books and used parts of his book On Teaching Creative Writing in some of my classes. One of the principal figures in All the Little Live Things is described as a "curmudgeon," which I took to be Stegner's representation of himself, although that may be wrong. After reading the review I just mentioned, I take him to have been particularly critical of those who are careless about the consequences of their own actions, like the hip younger couple in All the Little Live Things, or those who threaten the beauty of our area with monuments to their own status or libertarian ideas, unmodulated by public responsibilities. Stegner is memorialized by the lovely Wallace Stegner pathway along Page Mill near Middle Fork Lane.

On weekends our family would sometimes have brunch with the Henry's, which was always fun as we kids would run around the orchard pretending to be horses, or Suzanne would set up Billy and me up as knights competing for her favor (an early sign of the later English major). A few times our family also joined the Ginzton's for a meal. Ed was a physics professor at Stanford, as well as a board member and later CEO of Varian Associates, where they made klystron tubes for particle accelerators (and presumably for radar and other purposes). These are essentially large versions of what's in your microwave oven. We didn't know them well but I was given the impression that we were dining with important locals. Artemas Ginzton is memorialized in another Town pathway off of Moody Lane.

Sometime after we moved to Moon Lane I began to take horse riding lessons. At first this was with Ms. (Myra) Engman. The horse-riding academy just off of Page Mill Rd at Deer Creek continues in the same place as her's. Ms. Engman's approach was too formal for me, however, as I had no ambitions to ride competitively, and preferred the kindly neighbor with a small horse boarding operation and barn on Lupine, Henry Clark, who would give me a tip or two and then let me enjoy the experience.

Since we had a barn and a little fenced pasture we also took in an old horse that someone had been unable to care for. It was the most broken-down thing I've ever seen, with a cancerous lump on its neck and large cataracts in its blue eyes. Whoever had it did not trim its hooves, which had grown so long that it was walking on its fetlocks—like walking on your wrists! Being an old farm boy, my father knew what to do and got the carpenter saw to cut the hooves down. I watched, fearful that he'd cut the live part of the foot, which he didn't, before rasping them into shape. The old horse didn't last long but could at least walk again without pain.

One of the big surprises coming West had to do with Palo Alto's schools. Schools in the East tended to be old and enclosed against cold weather. Everything focused inwards and was hierarchical, as well, with upper grades in the higher levels of a multi-storey building. The atmosphere was also rather punitive atmosphere. I remember the smart from my kindergarten teacher saying, "You'll never learn to cut with scissors!" I actually did manage to learn, but was never able to forget her saying it.

When we got here in the 1950's, elementary schools, like Loma Vista and Ventura in Palo Alto, were new and modern and seemed so open, with lots of windows, and each classroom having its own door to the playground. It was interesting to see this architecture mirrored in the first large Hewlett Packard building built on the hill along Page Mill. Both had long rows of rooms with lots of windows and light. Funny to be educated to fit in with the model of industrial work!

The attitude in the schools here was also more open, seeming to be more about encouraging students than blaming them. It was quite IQ conscious, however, and since I'd tested well I was given special leeway, with private science lessons with the principal for two of us, and allowed to make a little telegraph of my own devising, using metal from food cans for key and clicker, electromagnets made from wire wrapped around nails, and a battery, which I set up in my desk and connected to a friend's in the next-door classroom. What (unjust) fun!

All of this was between 1952 and 1956, before we moved to our new house in the future Los Altos Hills. But we had barely settled into it in 1956 when we took off for a year in West Pakistan where my father was part of a Harvard-based group advising the Pakistani government on its first five-year

economic plan. We lived in Lahore for a bit more than a year, and while there I went to Acheson College, a Pakistani version of a British “public school” (i.e., a private school for boarders). It was for boys only and I was one of only three non-Pakistan’s. Courses were in English, only the religion course (from which I was excused) being taught in Urdu. We wore uniforms with blue blazers and a badge showing the five rivers of the Punjab. Younger boys, like me, wore grey shorts and knee socks, since only older boys got to wear long pants, which were a sign of manhood. On Friday’s we wore turquoise turbans wrapped in the neat Sikh style over a golden cone, and met to sing the Pakistani national anthem and hear the headmaster’s speech to the school. The mode of control was shocking for someone who had become familiar with progressive California practice as it included pulling disruptive students to the front of the class by the ear, slaps on the face from classroom monitors, and in egregious cases, caning on the hands or bottom by the headmaster. I don’t think it was meant to be cruel; it was just good English “discipline.” We also had ink wells in our desks and pens we dipped into them. I would have been better prepared had I read Dicken’s David Copperfield—which we did in fact read in class—as very little had changed. I was treated leniently, however, and suspect my parents had had a word with the authorities.

After school I ran around with friends, biking to the local bazaar to buy beautiful paper and bamboo kites for a few Annas and flying them off our flat roof in kite battles with neighbor boys (the strings were coated with powdered glass so you can cut through an opponent’s string if you maneuver the kite correctly). I also spent a little time riding the Pakistan army’s military horses, something they would let one do for a small fee to keep them exercised. Since I didn’t know how to post I often felt as though my innards had been rearranged by banging up and down on the large horses. Otherwise, we rode our bikes around town and along the drainage ditches, slingshots at the ready in case a pi-dog would chase us. Here’s a picture of my family, and another of me with my two best friends, Aga and Nasrid-din. Aga’s father-- a large landowner--had three wives, though I met only the youngest, a blue-eyed Scottish-Pakistani beauty forty years her husband’s junior. She told us a little about the politics of a three-wife family, which we had us all agog.





It was a bit of a shock to come back to Wilbur Junior High in Palo Alto in the middle of the 8th grade. The other students were studying algebra, which I had not taken. I eventually got up to speed, however, and later became a member of Cubberley High School's math team which was proud of being first in Northern California, Nevada and Hawaii in a nation-wide math competition. We also had a wonderful electronics class where we learned how radios and transmitters worked. I built tube radios in class, and later built small ones using the new "transistor" invented by John Bardeen, Walter Brattain and William Shockley, for which they got the Nobel Prize (More on Shockley in a moment). I also built a small transmitter, and, after learning Morse Code, got a novice HAM license. Since this was my first experience with American secondary schools, I was surprised at having to move from classroom to classroom for different subjects, unlike in Pakistan where (and many European schools) where the *teachers* rotate. I felt that the tracking system separated me from some of my old friends. Since I was placed in more advanced classes, I lost contact with friends who had been placed in lower tracks.

IQ based tracking had a special relationship with Lewis M. Terman Junior High, the new junior high school to which I was transferred after a year at Wilbur. Palo Alto's practices were influenced by the IQ testing regime promoted by Lewis M. Terman, a Stanford psychology professor associated with the Cubberley School of Education--where I was to go many years later. He had revamped Alfred Binet's earlier intelligence tests for use by the Army to select soldiers for different tasks and ranks. Terman was influenced by the Eugenics movement of the 20's or 30's, in which science was going to improve the human race by lessening the number of "idiotic" and "defective" individuals who reproduced (quotes from the times, not Terman). As a Wikipedia article notes, Terman was "a

prominent.... member of the Human Betterment Foundation.” His son, Frederick Terman, an engineering professor at Stanford and dean of the Engineering School, is “widely credited (with William Shockley) as being the father of Silicon Valley.” He helped grow the infrastructure that supports Stanford by encouraging talented engineering graduates, like Hewlett and Packard, to found firms in the Valley. Shockley, for his part, tried to get into transistor production but had a group of key engineers leave, because they were disgruntled with him, to found Fairchild Semiconductor. As I recall they had a building on Page Mill, near Junipero Serra, for many years. But what I remember Shockley for was his explicit racism, his belief that racial differences were genetic, which I saw on full display in a debate at Stanford. I took him to be a prime example of someone who was technically smart and socially ignorant, though he seemed to think that a Nobel Prize in physics gave him license to speak on all topics.

The association of Terman Junior High with IQ testing, eugenics, and the genetic theory of intelligence, all of which have had racial connotations, is the principal reason the school was recently renamed “Ellen Fletcher Middle School.” I later came to oppose IQ-based tracking as bad for all, feeling that it subtly corrupted those more favorably treated, like myself, while systematically disadvantaging others.

Not long after we had returned from Pakistan my father brought back an air rifle after a trip to Germany. I couldn’t have been more delighted and used it to “hunt” in the buckeye grove beneath today’s Saddle Court Rd. I was often joined by Aric Johnson and sometimes by his older brother Soren. I’m afraid we killed some beautiful creatures, which I later regretted, though I also think it also made me more sensitive to the behavior and—eventually the lives--of our native animals.



I also remember lovely times lying in the field of tall wild oats beneath our barn, watching the Daddy Longlegs crawl through the grass, and listening to the yellow breasted Meadow Larks as they warbled on fenceposts. One of the unnoted changes in the area is we no longer have Meadow Larks since fire prevention measures have killed off these beautiful, sweet-sounding ground-dwelling birds.

When friends visited we’d often go up to top of the hill above our house (where there’s a house now) and swing on the branch of an oak tree. It had a U-shaped saddle in which one could sit, and we would give our friends a vigorous ride by swinging the branch around, simulating a ride on a wild horse. You can see the branch on the right of the leftmost oak in the drawing below by one of my mother’s students. Having this history adds extra meaning to the name “Saddle Mountain,” although it presumably originated in reference to the Baleri horse ranch and/or the saddle point the road takes.



Whatever its name, the Baleri horses seemed to like the view there, and would hang out near the top, just on the other side of the fence. Since they were just standing about they presented an opportunity and we would attempt to ride them, hopping on the backs of the tamer ones without a bridle or halter, while trying to steer them by pushing their noses in one direction or another. Years later when I was in college I brought a girl-friend and we tried to ride them again. I got on one which was followed closely by another, so I thought we could ride together if I rode the first and she got on the second. Once she got on hers, however, it bolted, spooking the whole herd into galloping at full speed down and around the hill toward the barn. I jumped off quickly, but she stayed on for the mad gallop, only falling off near the end. As it happened a deputy sheriff was renting the place and came out nab her. I went down to accept my portion of the punishment, and the Deputy dragged us both to my parents, giving a stern lecture about the years one could spend in jail for “horse rustling.” I felt like arguing that we had not actually *stolen* any horses, but kept my mouth shut and we were eventually released to my parents.

Another favorite activity was racing home-made “soap box” coasters down Moon Lane. Since it was a rocky, dirt road, it was much bumpier and not nearly as fast as a paved one. The Johnson boys didn’t have wheels to make a coaster, so Soren cut some nearly round one out of two-inch thick oak boards, smoothing them out on a lathe at school. With a little grease they worked pretty well. I was determined to make something competitive but had only two small wheels and a larger discarded bicycle wheel. Given these constraints, I decided to make a three wheeled coaster but quickly found that one steered by turning a board with two wheels attached in front was highly unstable. So, I decided to make the front wheels fixed and steer by moving the rear wheel. I mounted the rear wheel in a fork cut from a thick board that ran underneath the cart from the back

up to the middle, pivoting on a large bolt. A pipe in the movable board stuck up through a slit in the floor in front of where I sat so I could steer by pushing the pipe to the right or left. This contraption was perhaps a bit faster than the Johnson's but much more unstable. It also had the disadvantage that pushing the pipe to the left made it go right, and to the right made it go left, so one frequently steered the wrong way. Even worse, the steering pipe came up in just the right place to hit one's privates in a crash—as I quickly discovered.

We also used to slide down the slippery dried grass hills on cardboard boxes in the summer. Some still do it elsewhere in town, as one can see from traces in the grass on a hill along Arastradero shortly after Deer Creek heading south. After we wore out our boxes I tried some old Norwegian skis but that was way too difficult, since the bumps and rocks made them drift all over the place. After a while I got the idea of making a sled out of them by screwing some boards across the two skis to keep them steady and mounting a little wooden seat between them at the back. This was much faster than the cardboard, but one had to be careful to bail out before running into the barbed wire at the bottom of the hill—something Aric Johnson learned the hard way.

Once we had the sled, Soren got the idea of attaching a sail to it made of a sheet of polyethylene left over from Maurey's home construction. In that way the wind—which is often pretty strong *up* the valley—could pull us up hill and we could also slide down. He took a 12 x 12-foot sheet and attached a rope to each corner. These corner ropes were then tied together at one point along a main tow rope. Two of us would throw the sail up until the wind filled it, and away you went, roaring quite fast up a steep hill, if the wind was right. We became afraid it would get caught in the oak trees near the top, however, which would ruin the plastic, so Aric was given the job of holding on where the four smaller ropes joined the main one, while running and being pulled up hill, so that he could pull on one rope to collapse the sail before it hit the tree. The sail was more powerful than we expected, however, and Aric was lifted about six feet in the air before letting go and falling to the ground.

Aric and I also built a treehouse in the large oak at my place. This was fairly dangerous, as it was about 20 feet off the ground. At first, we were quite afraid and nailed a series of sturdy wooden steps to the trunk to make a ladder, which we carefully climbed up. Soon we got quite used to it, though, and would scamper up and down, like monkeys. We eventually took the steps off to keep the uninitiated away, leaving only a nail or two that would still allow us to get up while discouraging others.

To build a good-sized house in a tree whose main forks were far apart we decided to use a heavy 3 x 12 board about 20 feet long, which I suspect was one of Maurey's unused roof boards. We pulled this up using a rope and pulley towed by the Johnson's truck (by this point we were in our mid-teens and had learned to drive by practicing on our private dirt road—Moon Lane). Another large board was used as a vertical support and nailed into the tree with a single 16" nail. Most of the fun was in building it, but I occasionally slept overnight there in my sleeping bag, and found it a calm retreat to read in. Here's a drawing of it by another of my mother's students, followed by an old photo in which you can clearly see the vertical support beam.





I realize that this is a relentlessly Tom Sawyer-ish account, but that's the life we had. As another example, we built "doodlebugs," which were popular in the late 1950's and early 60's. We took old bicycle frames, cut the tubes that go down to the front sprocket, welded a flat metal plate to them, and bolted an old Briggs and Stratton lawn mower engine to the plate. Since the Johnson's had an arc welder, one could do such things. We then hooked up a drive chain between a small sprocket on the engine and a larger sprocket on the rear wheel. Since standard bicycle brakes would not work on such wheels we made do with sliding our tennis shoes along the ground to stop. A commercial version available today—that even has brakes-- is pictured below.



We would roar up and down Moon Lane on these things. Since they didn't have quite enough power to get all the way up the hill we'd take off the mufflers, which made just enough difference in power, but was very loud. I never heard a complaint about the noise, though. Of course, there were many fewer people then.

We also went up the dirt fire road that later became Paseo del Roble, and rode around on what later became the golf course. Of course, we were tempted to ride on public roads, even though this was illegal. Aric and I finally succumbed and had a guilty but very pleasing time blasting down Page Mill, up and over Arastradero to Purissima. How free it felt to be going on pavement! However, *another* deputy sheriff appeared to nab us! Apparently, he was renting a house near the current stables on Purissima and heard our noisy machines roar past. I was again dragged by the ears back to my parents, as was Aric. We did not repeat it, but it sure was fun!

I think I remember the discussion when Los Altos Hills was incorporated as a town in 1956 (Jitze Couperus recently passed on a copy of a document showing that my father was among the initial signatories). As I recall, the general feeling was that we didn't want to be swallowed up by Palo Alto, which was showing an interest in annexing our unincorporated area. I imagine that was anathema to the rurally oriented, while the more monetarily oriented probably feared increased taxes, the town's one-acre rule serving both interests. I remember vividly when the first signs went up indicating the town's boundaries.

When I was 15 ½ I got a 50cc motorbike, which I fell in love with it, thinking it's oily two-stroke smell better than perfume. I would dream about the red smelly thing. One time I rode up Page Mill Road and as a lark took off on a muddy fire trail to the right that eventually led down into a gorgeous valley. There was lush green grass, many deer grazing, and flowers everywhere. I thought it was one of the most beautiful places I'd ever seen! That is now the lower valley of Palo Alto Foothills Park, where the main park building is located. While it is still pretty, it is not a patch on the original. When Palo Alto bought the land some years later Los Altos Hills refused to pay taxes to support the park, which is why we have only limited access today.

But the most elaborate of these boyish activities involved building rockets, as in the movie "October Sky." You have to remember that rockets were "in the air" at the time—military rockets, Wily Ley's little book on going to the moon, and Werner von Braun's efforts. My mother and I stopped at a garage-sale near Stanford where the makings for some simple ones were on sale. There were thick cardboard tubes, ingredients for a crude rocket fuel, and fuses. I begged my mother to let me buy them, and to my surprise she agreed. Using these materials, I built a few simple rockets which went "whump," and took off for short flights (only in the wet season, of course, and remember there was hardly anyone around). Before long I was making more elaborate rockets out of one inch aluminum tubing with aluminum nozzles I carved on a little metal lathe. I even tried calculating expected pressures and velocities, but truth to tell the design was almost entirely guesswork. I also worked on developing better fuels and eventually created one quite similar to what I later found is used in solid-fuel military rockets (basically rubber cement mixed with a strong oxidizer).



To launch the things, I set up an underground bunker on the side of the hill in what is now a neighbor's property, off of Saddle Mountain Dr. A hidden spring had resulted in part of the hill siding down towards the valley, creating a kind of plateau halfway down. This was the source of a lot of difficulty on the property when it was later built on, as things tended to slide downhill, resulting in a large law suit. As I write this the neighbors are having their pool removed, with noisy cement jack hammers, because it, too, slid downhill a bit, cracking it. But well before all that I dug a bathtub-sized hole in the dirt at the edge of the plateau as a shelter to hunker into when triggering my rockets, using a battery and resistance wire igniter. If it worked there would be a loud "whump" as it went beyond eyesight, often never to be seen again. The most elaborate one had two stages, was about two feet high, and an inch in diameter. It had aluminum nozzles at the bottom of both stages, with a small hole in the top of the larger stage for a fuse that led up to bottom of the top stage into the top one to ignite its fuel. I had no idea how the timing would work, so it was quite possible the second stage would have ignited after the rocket was on a downward trajectory. But, as it turned out these concerns were moot. When I tried to launch it the ignition failed, putting Aric and me in the familiar firecracker quandary. Should one stay away for a long time because it might go off, or go over to try again? I was going to let it sit overnight, but Aric, who was more impulsive, went over to try to light it by holding a match under the main rocket's nozzle. I screamed at him not to do it, but he ignored me. Luckily, it didn't go off. He was far luckier than he knew as when I retried it some days later the nosecone blew out, making the rocket go *backwards*, driving the sharp nozzle edges fairly deep into the board beneath. Had Aric's fingers been there they might have been chopped off.

My quest for better rocket fuels culminated in a science fair project when I was at Cubberley High School (now Cubberley Community Center).¹ I decided to test the energy released by different

¹ Ellwood P. Cubberley was a professor of educational administration at Stanford for whom the Cubberley School of Education is named. He also helped promote tracking in schools.

fuels by using a “bomb calorimeter.” To do so I put rocket fuel in an aluminum chamber with a glass exit for the exhaust gasses, which was sealed and placed under water in a thermos. If you connected a wire from it to a spark coil it would ignite the fuel, sending burned gas out the glass tube and into the water. By measuring the increase in the water temperature (and knowing the amount of fuel and water) you could calculate the energy released.

This was memorable because of the way it played out at school. The advanced chemistry teacher—Clyde Parrish--whom we all liked, allowed me to conduct this experiment at school. When it was ready all of the students would be ushered out of the classroom and I'd touch an ignition wire with a spark coil, there would be a little “whump” as the fuel ignited, and we'd all file back into class as I wrote down the temperature change. Truth to tell I never did a very systematic set of experiments, being more interested in making the devices than recording data, but it serves as another example of the flexibility the schools had in those day, encouraging scientific investigation even if it meant disrupting a whole class for a few minutes.

After graduating from high school in 1962 with an award for “promise” in science, I left for UC Berkeley, where I received a BA in physics in 1966. Here's a picture of the author as a young nerd.



The student movement began the middle of my time at UC, in 1964, and there's a lot to tell about it, but that's *another* story and *not* about Los Altos Hills. To briefly summarize my own later story, after Berkeley I went to Stanford, first in Engineering Economic Systems (systems analysis), and later in sociology and sociology of education, my movement to the social sciences having been affected by the cultural shifts of the 60's. After some years at Stanford I met my wife, Anneke, who was Dutch, although her family had come over when she was 11. They came first to Canada, and then to the United States. After undergraduate work at the University of Toronto (where I would later teach!), and a teaching job in Baltimore, she came to Stanford as a fellow doctoral student in sociology of education. Here we are with my dog Jasper.



After I received MS, MA and PhD degrees at Stanford, and Anneke was finishing her PhD, we moved to downstate Illinois where I got an academic position at the University of Illinois. After some years there, and a short stint at Virginia Tech, most of my academic career was spent at University of Virginia. However, I eventually took a job as a Department Chair at the University of Toronto, completing the cycle back to Canada, where I was initially “conceived.” During earlier years we came back to Los Altos Hills every summer, making it a stable point amid the various moves. Later, when Anneke and Alisa were here full time, Alisa was able to spend formative years growing up in Los Altos Hills, much as I had.



And what a wonderful place it has been for three generations of our family to have lived in and shared. As for myself, I'm just incredibly grateful to be home again after forty years away from our beautiful Los Altos Hills!



