

## To England

I've been to England four times, in 1955, 1980, and twice in 2000.

1955

The first time was when my grandmother was dying in the house in Plymouth where my mother had grown up. My mother, my brother and I went. It was my first plane ride. I was wearing a Davey Crockett coonskin hat.

The house had a bomb shelter in the backyard left over from the blitz that destroyed much of Plymouth in WWII. At some point my Mom had been evacuated to board with a family in Tiverton, on the far side of Dartmoor. The shelter's corrugated iron cover was overgrown around the edges and sealed shut.

At the back of the yard was a wall and on the other side of the wall was the lane. The lane was what we would call an alley in the States. That's where I played with the neighborhood kids. They knew all about Hollywood movie stars from fan magazines. They knew a lot more about American movie stars than I did.

A neighbor boy's father was a stock car racer. The boy had a miniature racetrack with toy cars on a mechanical conveyer with a crank to make it move. We went to a real stock car track to see the father drive. Before the race, the cars played a game of soccer with an enormous ball. They slammed into each other and got all dented up.

My grandmother died and I turned six. With my grandfather we visited the Hoe, a green swath of land rolling down to the harbor where my Mom had spent many happy times. That day we toured a naval exhibition with sailors in uniform and a miniature submarine.

Another time we took a walk in the countryside. I saw a lizard in a creek bed and, in a small museum, the military drum of Sir Francis Drake, who was born thereabouts. Drake was said to have been playing at bowls on the Hoe when the word went out, "The Spanish are approaching!" According to legend, he finished his game before sailing from Plymouth Sound to the defeat of the Spanish Armada.

In 1944, my father proposed to my mother at a stone commemorating the sailing of the Mayflower for America. According to my Mom, the way he put it, he said, "Will you go that far with me?" And she said, "I'll go anywhere with you." They had met at a dance for American naval

officers. They married in Plymouth after the war and sailed to the States separately, my mother on a ship full of war brides.

1980

I didn't make it back to England until 25 years with funds from an NEA Fellowship in Creative Writing. I spent a month in London, first at a house in Westminster in the room of a friend from college who was away. She was a dancer who had lost the front part of her foot in a subway accident. She and her roommates were students of the Alexander technique of posture and movement. I attended several Alexander classes in a church basement. One sits on the edge of a chair and silently repeats the mantra "Forward and up" for a while until finally one stands up quite effortlessly if done right.

After that I rented a room in a small hotel on Old Brompton Road in South Kensington. I read Salvador Dali's novel *Hidden Faces* and a book on Lautréamont by Marcelin Pleynet.

I met Eric Mottram, Nick Kimberly, Paige Mitchell, who worked at Compendium Books, and cris cheek. When I visited cris and Paige, cris had just woken up from a nap. He was wearing a cable sweater and had long hair. We smoked some hash and listened to an absurd recording by Richard Hamilton and Dieter Rot of dogs barking.

Another time, cris and I met at a nightclub on the South Bank to see the South African saxophonist Dudu Pukwana. Dudu had canceled his show. It was late at night as we walked back across the recently rebuilt London Bridge and through the streets of the City.

I went to Plymouth to visit my Mom's twin sister Barbara and her family, husband Joe and son Young Joe. Barbara took me to see the school at Dartington Hall and to the charming seaport of Dartmouth near the dairy farm where she and my Mom were born.

I went to the pub with Young Joe and his mates and learned the expression "drink your age in pints." Joe was 19. I woke the next morning in the neighbors' house where I was staying, sick as a dog, and endured a horrifying English breakfast with the neighbor family.

Back in London my Mom came to visit. I was impressed at how much energy she had, jet lag didn't seem to bother her at all. We went to several plays, including Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine* at the Royal Court in Sloane Square.

Ahni and Ericka joined me in London. We went to stay with Margaret Bailey and her three teenage children in Council housing in Camden Town.

Ahni and I went to a music festival at the Institute of Contemporary Art. We heard Derek Bailey, Evan Parker, Peter Brotzmann, Han Bennink and Steve Lacy. Leaving the theater we encountered Steve Lacy having a smoke. He smiled and nodded as we passed by.

We went to Paris and stayed in a small hotel at Place Dauphine on Isle de la Cité. We dined at the Polidor and went to the Pompidou, the Jeu de Paume and the Louvre. When we got back to London I was sick with a high fever. I stayed in bed for a week and read *Three Trapped Tigers* by G. Cabrera Infante while Ahni and Ericka explored London.

After they left I went to Amsterdam, where I visited poet Harry Hoogstraten for cocaine, opium and collaborations. The next day, high and hung over, I took a train to Brussels for dinner of *moules* with Bill Graves, who was working for the U.S. Information Agency. A day later I went to the train station unsure whether to continue my travels into the heart of Europe or return to the States. I opted for the latter and, after a turbulent ride on a cross-channel rubberized powerboat, made my way home to San Francisco by way of New York and Cincinnati.

2000

In Y2K I found myself working in a hot B2B startup called Commerce One that was taking Wall Street by storm with its futuristic concept of a Global Trading Web that promised to automate supply chains in the automotive, aerospace and energy industries. The company's international conference was in February in London. My job was to organize a press conference for media and financial analysts, staff interviews with the CEO and help prepare speeches for the execs. I stayed with the team at the Royal Lancaster Hotel.

The hotel was mobbed. The Chinese were there, including the recently founded Baidu. Commerce One had closed GM in the fall, while Oracle had signed Ford. IBM and SAP were making plans of their own. The race for market share was on.

Meanwhile, I met my cousin Joe Pengelly for dinner at a restaurant near Charing Cross station. What was he doing in London? Had he come from Devon just to see me? I don't remember. It was wonderful to see him. He had become a solicitor, married Janet and sired a family of four.

Meanwhile, I met Miles Champion. Miles organized a reading at an empty house that was being run as a gallery. There was no art on the walls, it was between shows. A lot of people showed up. There were no chairs and no heat, everybody stood and kept their coats on.

Afterwards there was a party at Miles's apartment. cris cheek had come in from Lowestoft, and Allen Fisher from wherever he was living at the time. I hadn't seen them in a long time. I met Caroline Bergvall, Dell Olsen, Rob Holloway and Tim Atkins. There was a huge amount of gin, and I could tell that the party was going to go on until the wee hours. I was tired and needed to be back at work in the morning. Tim drove me to my hotel.

When CEO Mark Hoffman looked into my room he was glad to see that Ahni had arrived. After the conference she and I stayed on at the hotel and did a bit of London. My memory of this time blurs into the 1980 trip. I believe we did see an exhibit of work by Ian Hamilton Finlay at the Serpentine Gallery in Hyde Park. Or was that in 1980?

We took the train to Exeter where we met Tony Lopez, visited the Cathedral, walked along the waterfront and dined in a dark restaurant with a wood fire and excellent fare. Tony had arranged for us to read together at the University of Plymouth in Exeter, where he was teaching. The students at the reading were grownups continuing their education, not poets, I sensed, but receptive to work resonant of life experience.

Back on the train to Torquay to visit Joe and his family. Arriving at the station, there was a rugby match going on in a field across the way. I'd never seen grown men play rugby before. It was fantastic – primitive, strategic and muddy.

We had dinner with the family, Joe and Janet, their boys Sam and Joe, the twins Phoebe and Verity, and my uncle Joe, proper name Albert Pengelly Senior. Everyone was in high spirits, and a good time was had by all.

In June I returned to London with Mark Hoffman for the Farnborough Air Show, the annual conference of the global aerospace industry, which alternates between Farnborough and Paris.

The air show was an awesome spectacle. From an observation deck we took in maneuvers by the industry's latest aircraft. We saw the new Airbus 320A Supertransporter, whose massive hull floated improbably in air, and the Apache Longbow helicopter, which hovered high above then dropped like a predatory bird stopping just above the

ground. There was also a massive trade show where you could step into the most advanced new cockpit environments.

I accompanied Mark Hoffman on a tour of the Boeing Business Jet conducted by Boeing CEO Phil Condit and his wife. The jet was furnished with hardwood and plush living room and bedroom layouts and the *piece de resistance*, a circulating shower in the back. The price tag: \$37 million.

I saw Miles again, we met somewhere and walked around, had a drink, dined on vindaloo at an Indian restaurant, had a pint outside a pub called the Golden Heart. We walked to the ICA where there was a bar, flashing lights and loud canned music, drum 'n' bass.

*London, August 3, 2018*