

## CHAPTER 4. LEARNING HOW TO TEACH

Let me start with Henry David Thoreau. Though he sometimes sounds like a self-righteous prig, he could also be a hoot—right up to the point of mocking his own pretensions to absolute self-sufficiency.

During his would-be solitary sojourn on the shore of Walden Pond in mid-1840s, when he lived in a small wooden cabin that he built himself (though friends helped him raise it), he not only walked almost every day to gossip in the nearby town of Concord but also accepted invitations to dinner—sometimes fancy ones. Best of all, when he published *Walden* in 1854, he added a rib-tickler to his meticulous tabulation of all the money he had spent and earned (from the sale of his produce) during his time at the pond. After setting out these figures right down to the last half-penny, he casually notes that he is still waiting—after six years! –to be billed for his “washing and mending, which for the most part were done out of the house.”

Besides poking fun at himself, of course, he loved needling others, and he was a master of the throwaway line. Chiding all of humankind for our tendency to hoard and save stuff we should long ago have

chucked out, he recalls seeing a dried tapeworm at the auction of a dean's effects, "for his life had not been ineffectual." And nothing beats the bone dry wit of his comment on why he declined to accept from an unnamed "lady" the gift of a doormat for his cabin. Pulverizing the pious New England adage that cleanliness is next to godliness, the implacable foe of clutter coolly notes, "It is best to avoid the beginning of evil."

But stepping over the absent doormat into the cabin of his innermost mind, I cite Thoreau as a point of departure for this chapter because of sentences like this one:

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, *discover that I had not lived* (emphasis mine).

Short of everlasting damnation, I can think of nothing more desolating at the moment of my death than to discover that I had not lived. And to stay alive until you die, I have long believed, you must never stop learning, trying new things, even rising at dawn. Thoreau again said it best:

That man who does not believe that each day contains an earlier, more sacred, and auroral hour than he has yet profaned, has despaired of life, and pursues a descending and darkening way.

Amen to that. When you stop learning, you stop growing, and you join the long grey march of the walking dead. Above all, I think, the yearning to learn must drive the life of every teacher who wants to be good at his or her job. So just as Henry Adams wrote *The Education of Henry Adams*, this chapter tells the story of a crucial part of my own education, which is the story of how I learned to teach.

Even before earning my doctorate, which is how most people who want to teach in a college or university get themselves credentialed for the job, I began to learn that the PhD is something of a misnomer. Though it means Doctor of Philosophy, I learned precious little about the philosophy of literature in my time at Princeton, though I know that starting with the advent of deconstruction and high theory in the late 1960s, much has happened to graduate study at Princeton as well as elsewhere over the past 60 years.

But setting aside those changes, which I will touch on again below, consider the first word in *Doctor* of Philosophy, which began its life as the Latin word for “teacher” and still at least nominally identifies the holder of a PhD as a *teacher* of philosophy. Since my father practiced medicine and was always known to the world as Doctor Roy Heffernan, I couldn’t rip off that title like a bandage and stick it on myself. Instead of being called Doctor, I preferred Professor, Sir, or—from former students right after graduating, though some of them took years to make this leap—just plain *Jim*. But given the original meaning of *Doctor*, it is strange that PhD programs spend so little time in teaching the art of teaching itself.

I know of course that graduate students in English literature as in various other academic fields are often hired to teach undergraduate courses or sections: to learn by doing the very job they are being trained for, and thus learning on the job. And possibly some of them at this time are getting carefully supervised and coached by master teachers watching over them. But if their experience is anything like mine was at Princeton in the early sixties, they are getting far more training in

methods of research and scholarship than in the fine arts of conducting a truly probing and interactive class discussion or giving a lecture that captures its audience.

I don't mean to knock the value of research and scholarship, which are after all indispensable in the academy—not just to getting a job in the first place but also to getting promotion, tenure, and regular raises--the bottom line. I do mean to say that my graduate studies at Princeton scarcely prepared me for the classroom and lecture hall as distinct from the library.

During my admittedly abbreviated two years and a half at Princeton, I was asked to grade some undergraduate essays on the poetry of John Donne and lead just one class discussion of the first act of *King Lear*. I also remember fumbling a very good student question in that class: how is Gloucester so quickly suckered into thinking that his legitimate son Edgar is out to get him? All I did was note that Gloucester's bastard son Edmund leaks to his father, so to speak, a forged letter in which Edgar invites Edmund join him in killing their father.

But what the student really wanted to know was about motivation. Since Gloucester has already insulted Edmund by introducing him to Kent as a “whoreson” and clearly implying that he barely knows this bastard son (“He hath been out nine years, and away he shall again”), why does Edmund’s bastardly trick so quickly demolish Gloucester’s presumable preference for his legitimate son Edgar? I didn’t even try to field that question, and though the professor who supervised the class faulted me for fumbling it, he didn’t even try to tell me how I might have done better with it.

And in fact it took me several years of teaching *King Lear* at Dartmouth (where in the sixties nearly all first-year students were required to study it) to see how the whole problem of motivation here is swamped by what might be called the “given” pattern set by Lear’s disowning of Cordelia, the daughter he loves best and on whom he was most counting to nurse him through old age. In this play about a pair of daughters and then a son who successively betray their respective fathers, Scene 2 re-enacts the pattern set by Scene 1. Just as Lear is misled and thus outraged by the apparent defiance of his most beloved

daughter, Gloucester is misled and thus outraged by the apparent treachery of his legitimate son. In rejecting the faithful, devoted, wholly innocent Cordelia (as also in his banishing of Kent), Lear implicitly decrees that in this suddenly disrupted kingdom, good children must be hated and evil ones loved.

Admittedly, this somewhat complicated point might be hard to tease out of a class discussion, more precisely to create for students the benign illusion that they are discovering it for themselves. But surely the student's question about Gloucester should have led me to invite further questions and comments about the way Scene 1 builds the framework for the action of Scene 2. If students can begin to understand why Lear suddenly disowns Cordelia, they may also begin to see why Gloucester suddenly distrusts his legitimate son.

But all this took me several years to learn. When I started my teaching as an Instructor in English at the University of Virginia, I could fairly well lead a class into a work of literature such as one of Chaucer's Canterbury tales. But I had a lot to learn about making the most of students' questions and comments, of their own first efforts to grapple

with the works we were reading. One of the most important things I learned, in fact, came from one of my students.

One afternoon during my very first year at UVA, I was struggling to lead about 35 students through Milton's *Samson Agonistes*—not exactly a picnic on the beach. Near the end of the class—my third of the day and it ran for 75 minutes—I was running on empty when a student asked why it mattered so much that Samson finally pulled down the temple of the Philistines. As I started to say something that would have been feeble or obvious at best, another student shot up his hand and I had the good sense to call on him. Fully explaining that Samson took down all of the Philistine leaders along with the temple itself, he hit the question right out of the park, and thus taught me a crucial lesson that I have since tried to follow whenever I can force myself to remember it: give students themselves the first crack at any question one of them asks.

The many works of literature I taught at Dartmouth include Dante's *Inferno*, which begins by telling us that “nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita”—*in the middle of the journey of our life*—the poet found himself lost in a dark wood. I know that feeling well. In the middle of

the spring term of 1966, near the end of my first year at Dartmouth as an Assistant Professor of English, I felt as if I were not just lost in the woods but sinking into quicksand.

I was teaching two courses that term, as I had done in each of the fall and winter quarters of a quarter system. (Dartmouth had cut the academic year into three quarters rather than two semesters, and in the mid-1960s we normally taught six courses a year.) But those fall and winter term classes had been small and mainly powered by discussion. With nearly one hundred students, the course on English Romantic Poetry that I'd been assigned to teach with another Assistant Professor called for something I had never produced before: lectures for every single class.

In the fall and winter courses I got ample help from my students, whom I encouraged to pose questions of their own as I talked informally about a poem, novel, or play. But in a big lecture course such questions are typically treated as rhetorical pit stops meant only to rev up the engine of exposition for another lap around the track. Essentially, then, I

was expected to talk nonstop for the better part of an hour, with perhaps a few minutes left for questions at the end.

I was on the mound in this way for every other class meeting, a good deal more than usual for newcomers in the mid-1960s. Typically, new members assigned to large courses were paired with veterans who demonstrated or at least tried to model good lecturing and then asked the newcomer to step up for just a few times. But with no veteran's example or mentoring, I had to step up much more often. As a result, I spent much of my turn at the lectern babbling and flailing my arms to keep from sinking into the quicksand and making as much noise as possible to fill the pedagogical void. My young colleague and I had also mismanaged the syllabus. We assigned so much poetry that we barely had time to study it ourselves, much less prepare to lecture on it, and when the midterm exam asked for comment on several points that we scarcely mentioned in class, it nearly provoked a mutiny.

Worse still, I was led to believe that I was pretty well washed up at Dartmouth.

Just after monitoring one of my lectures in the Romantic poetry course, our department chair—a lean, grey, crusty Yankee named Arthur Jensen—told me how well the department had been placing its former members at other institutions. Only after stepping out of his office did I realize what he was telling me: my Dartmouth days were numbered. With a three-year contract, of course, I couldn't be fired for anything less than gross turpitude—as distinct from my gross ineptitude. But this hardly meant that I could coast my way to promotion and tenure. It meant only that I had another year or so to learn how to lecture before my contract ran out. Along with the bum's rush cordially offered by Jensen, then, the experience of lecturing for the first time taught me a quite simple lesson. Doing it well would take a lot more work.

In my second year, luckily enough, I was assigned to a sophomore survey of literature along with a teaching team that included one of the best lecturers I'd ever heard up to that time: Bob Hunter. For his lecture on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Bob started by quoting the Chorus from the opening scene of Shakespeare's *Henry V*, a one-man "chorus" who bids us visualize every event that words can evoke, to "piece out

imperfections merely with your thoughts.” The idea that Shakespeare could fall short of perfection, that even this almighty god of playwrights needed *our* imaginations to make his plays work, was merely the first of the provocative points that Hunter made with dramatic force and captivating wit. Quoting the Chorus’s apology for the “flat unraised spirits” that dared to re-create a battlefield on the stage, he reminded us that Shakespeare’s women were all played by boys: “flat unraised spirits” indeed! Talking of political usurpation in *The Tempest*, he pointed straight to the moment when Antonio—the usurping duke of Milan—goads Sebastian to kill his sleeping brother Alonso so as to gain the throne of Naples. (Alonso doesn’t actually get killed, but that’s another matter.)

As I listened and watched him, I could see that Hunter knew just how to seize and hold the attention of the class, and for the first time I realized that good lecturing is a performing art. Like any other performing art, it calls for study of those who are good at it, careful preparation, and plenty of practice.

I got my own first chance to perform when given more than a week to work up a lecture on Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. After carefully reading or rather re-reading the novel I developed a fairly straightforward approach to the complexity and wildness of its plot. The overwhelming passion of Heathcliff and Catherine, I argued, can never be tamed or regulated, even after they both die, by the order and conventions of the civilized world that surrounds them. It was a fairly simple take on a complex novel, but the passions of its central characters drove my argument along, and I managed to carry the class with me. Afterwards a sophomore told me it was the best lecture he had heard so far at Dartmouth (though may not have yet heard many). I thus discovered that lecturing was something I could learn to do.

But it took a lot more lecturing as well as listening to do it well. Besides Bob Hunter, the other shining star of the English Department in the late 1960s was the legendary Jim Cox, who taught American literature and wrote--among many other things--a book on Mark Twain that remains to this day a classic of critical revelation. As a teacher, Jim's special force sprang from his capacity to imagine the feelings of a

reader at crucial points in a story or novel *being read for the very first time*—such as in *Huckleberry Finn*, when Huck decides that he will “go to hell” rather than reporting on a runaway slave. Of course, Cox would say to his students, you want to assure Huck that he will go straight to *heaven* for helping the runaway gain his freedom. But then Cox would show how the ending of the novel detonates this sentimental inference by turning the project of slave liberation into a cruel joke on a man who has *already been freed*.

No other teacher I ever knew could crack up a class as Jim often did, but the laughter he provoked was almost always pedagogically inspired, a roar of delight at the shock of learning something new. During a lecture one day on *Moby Dick*, Jim cited some of its sly allusions to sexuality. Besides noting that its very title is the name of a “sperm whale,” he dwelt on the discomfort of Ishmael, its somewhat inhibited narrator, who—on his way to a whaling ship—nervously agrees to share the bed of a complete stranger because there is no other comfortable place to sleep in New Bedford’s Spouter Inn. Though all alone in the bed for a time, he is soon joined by an exotically tattooed

harpooner named Queequeg. As if it were not enough that the two men are sleeping in what was once the innkeeper's wedding bed, Ishmael starts the next chapter by saying, "Upon waking next morning about daylight, I found Queequeg's arm thrown over me in the most loving and affectionate manner. You had almost thought I had been his wife."

Though Melville thus flaunts the possibility of gay sex here along with all his other allusions to sex, one hapless student put up his hand to ask why Jim was reading so much sex into *Moby Dick*. To which Jim replied: **"Really? You're asking this about a novel featuring a SPERM whale named MOBY DICK in a course taught by a professor named COX?"**

In the midst of a lecture, of course, it can be hard to make room for any questions at all. But course evaluations give every student a chance to grade the lecturer, and when several students complained one year that I was simply *reading* my lectures on Romantic poetry, I knew I had to work harder to make them sound fresh or even improvised. In classrooms and academic conferences alike, few things are more soporific than the mechanically "read" paper—the oral regurgitation of

what has been written for the page alone, not for the ear. What's written for the ear, I think, should be pungent, artfully repetitive (some repetition is good!), often interrogative (as in "Why does Huck say this?") , and regularly punctuated by short, pithy sentences that encapsulate a central point. One of my favorites is a pair of two-word sentences I've sometimes used to exemplify the difference between science and poetry: while the scientist says, "It is," a poet such as William Blake says simply, "I am."

Whether lecturing on a work of literature or leading a discussion of it, a good teacher has to know how to get into the head of a student who is reading it for the first time. This doesn't mean vulgarizing or dumbing anything down. It means anticipating the kinds of questions—and the kinds of resistance—that a poem, play, or novel may provoke. The great Irish poet William Butler Yeats once wrote that from our quarrel with others we make rhetoric, but to make poetry we must quarrel with ourselves. Good teachers of literature strive, I think, not so much to make speeches as to stage a running dialogue between themselves and first-time readers of a text bursting with their first impressions of it.

Years ago, lecturing for the first time on Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, I foolishly assumed that I could quickly settle a thorny question about Chapter 11—is the heroine seduced or raped?—before moving on to what I thought were more important points. In the good (or bad) old days before women joined the men of Dartmouth, the men might have let that assumption pass. But the women in my class did not. For them no question raised by the novel trumped the question of exactly how Tess loses her virginity. Though I have since publicly argued that she is not raped but rather seduced, I soon realized that I could never again talk about this novel without carefully considering why so many readers—especially women—think she was raped.

I taught English at Dartmouth for 39 years—somewhat longer than Arthur Jensen once anticipated. (He also failed to foresee that I would one day occupy both his office and his Chair.) Around the year 2000, after I had been teaching the Romantic poetry course for more than 30 years, my lectures were evidently good enough to catch the attention of the Teaching Company, aka the Great Courses, which had evidently learned about them—who knows how?—from some of my students.

So one of their scouts came up to hear and record one of my lectures on Romantic poetry, and I was then invited to tape some lectures for the company. But rather than taping lectures on Romantic poetry, I had a better idea: why not a set of lectures on James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which I had been teaching in a Senior Seminar for the previous ten years?

If you wonder why and how I made the jump from the Romantic poetry of the early nineteenth century to the modernism of the early twentieth, I should explain that I had long been not so much an academic hedgehog as a wandering fox. Unlike scholars such Robert Patten, say, whom I knew as a fellow graduate student at Princeton and who went on to make his name with a series of notable books on Dickens, I just couldn't stay put with any one author or period. So even as I continued to teach the Romantics and to write about such things as Wordsworth's take on the French Revolution, I yearned to explore other authors and other periods.

I was also stirred by the Irish blood in my veins, which I have traced all the way back on my father's side to John Heffernan, son of a nineteenth-century tenant farmer named Michael Heffernan in the

village of Galbally in the southeast corner of Limerick. In the late spring of 1847, when John was just 14, he left both farm and family in the middle of the Great Famine (we never learned what happened to his parents), walked or somehow travelled forty miles to the port of Cork, took ship in what must have been a cramped and stinking hull, and after a month or so reached the port of Boston in early July of 1847. So I felt ancestrally destined for a rendezvous with the greatest of all Irish writers; James Aloysius Joyce.

It took me years, and I mean many years, to find my way into and through the inexhaustibly fecund world of Joyce's fiction, and let me here confess right now that even though I have dared to post on my personal website an article called "James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* and the War to Come"), I never finished reading that whole novel even once. (Are you shocked? Please don't be: this is a tell-all or tell-damn-near-all book.)

For better or worse, I'm a self-taught Joycean. During my four years with the Jesuits of Georgetown, I heard Joyce mentioned just once, when Father William Lynch—a warm and quietly inspiring teacher—

simply said one day how hard to read he was. A few years after GU I started on Joyce's first novel, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, but it took me three tries to get past the first chapter and read it to the end. After that I drove myself all the way through *Ulysses* like a blind fat hog slogging through a tunnel clogged with mud. Somebody once said that *Ulysses* cannot be read--only *re-read*. And the only way I could read it for a second time was somehow to get through it first.

In the spring term of 1968, an older Dartmouth colleague named Chauncey Loomis decided to teach *Ulysses* in one of the sections of our course on Critical Methods, teaching these methods by applying them to chapters of the novel right through the course. Moved by his example, I decided to do the same, forcing myself not only to re-read *Ulysses* but to begin—just begin!—making some sense out of it.

While every session meant a struggle for me, I had some success with students who entered so gamely into the novel that after the course ended, Nancy and I threw a Bloomsday party featuring pork kidney, which is what the scandalously non-observant Jew named Leopold Bloom eats for breakfast, and one of the students brought a big knock-

me-down cigar just like the one that Bloom points at the drunken and rabidly anti-semitic citizen in Chapter 12 (“Cyclops”), where Bloom defiantly declares—for the first time in the novel—that he belongs to a persecuted race.

One other powerful memory lingers from the final meeting of that course in early June of 1968. Since Senator Robert Kennedy had just been assassinated in Los Angeles (on June 6) after winning the Democratic presidential primary in California, and since that horrific event came hard on the heels of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., I scarcely knew what to do with the final class, which should have drawn some sort of conclusion about the novel as a whole. All I could do was venture the thought that even in the face of violence and bloodshed, *Ulysses* offers us a comic vision of love that somehow triumphs in the end, where the very last word of Molly’s stupendous monologue is a resounding *yes*.

For some strange reason I did not even think of teaching *Ulysses* again for about twenty years, which by remarkable coincidence is the very length of time it takes the hero of Homer’s *Odyssey*—the ancient

epic that Joyce re-cycles in *Ulysses*—to get back home to his palace on the Greek island of Ithaca after the Trojan war. But one afternoon in the fall of 1989, when I had let it be known to the departmental chair that I was *thinking* about offering a seminar on *Ulysses* in the following spring, a student named Mike Lowenthal begged me nearly on his knees to do so. A very bright student who has since then published four novels, Mike was impossible to resist, so I offered the seminar to him and five other students in the spring term of 1990, and then gave it every year—mostly to a dozen students--until I retired in 2004 at age 65.

As I conceived and taught it, the seminar was a course meant to get students talking—to each other as well as to me—as they worked their way chapter by chapter through the labyrinth of an urban novel winding its own almost unending way through the streets of Dublin on a single day, Bloomsday, the 644-page day (in the Gabler edition of *Ulysses* we used) of Leopold Bloom: June 16, 1904. After starting with one session on *Portrait*, we spent one two-hour session on each of *Ulysses*' 18 chapters--even though some were far longer and much more demanding than others. Hardest of all was Chapter 14, a steeplechase taking us

through the historical stages of English style while arduously chronicling the stages of an arduously laborious birth. (Since Joyce called it “Oxen of the Sun,” one of my students aptly observed that it “tramples the reader.”)

To seed the ground for each discussion, I asked the students not only to read the chapter assigned but also to pick out any short passage that spoke to them in any way—puzzled, provoked, baffled, or tickled them, you name it—and bring (or in later years email) to my office *before* the class meeting a page or two of comment. I did this for all the years I taught the course, and it worked amazingly well. Since I knew in advance what each of them had written, I could strategically call on anyone whose comment had a bearing on any point that I wanted to make myself. And again and again, I learned new things about *Ulysses* from students who were almost always reading it for the very first time.

Take for instance what a student named Mike Cohen wrote about Bloom’s brief encounter with a snooty solicitor named John Henry Menton near the end of the end of Chapter 6, as the two men are walking out of a cemetery after attending the funeral and burial of their mutual

friend Paddy Dignam. When Bloom politely tells Menton that his hat has “got a dinge in the side” and is “a little crushed,” Menton takes his hat off, smooths it out, and claps it right back on his head again without a word of thanks to Bloom, whom he has earlier called a “coon” (in talking to another man) and whom he still resents for once beating him in a game of bowls. Menton, then, is just one more of the would-be friends of Bloom who in one way or another diss this kindly man—largely because of his Jewishness. And that’s what I would say about this passage after years of studying and teaching *Ulysses*. But on his very first reading of this passage, Mike (a Jewish guy himself, I can’t help noting) saw something I had never seen before—but was stunningly obvious once he pointed it out: in alerting Menton to the dinge in his hat, Bloom prompts him to take it off—*and thus makes him inadvertently show his respect for Bloom*. Five stars, Mike! This was easily among the best of the many student comments that I pencilled into the margins of my teaching copy of *Ulysses*, whose pages are now almost falling apart.

In the spring of 2000, after I had been teaching the seminar for ten years, I was invited to give a course of lectures for the Teaching Company, as already noted above. So even though the company had never offered a whole course before on a single book, I proposed a course of 24 lectures on *Ulysses*: at least one for each of its 18 chapters plus a few more for long chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion. Then, after canvassing its customers with my proposal, the TC gave me a green light.

With time off from teaching, I spent six months writing out every word of the lectures because I wanted to be sure they would precisely fit the allotted time of 30 minutes each, and also that I could deliver them without any glitches. The lectures were done by May of 2001, when I delivered them to a video camera in a small room at the Teaching Company headquarters in Springfield, Virginia. To make the room look like a classroom in the video version of these lectures, members of the TC staff were asked to step into the room occasionally to be filmed as if they were students attending a lecture. But most of the time it was just me and the cameraman. When asked if I was bothered by the absence of

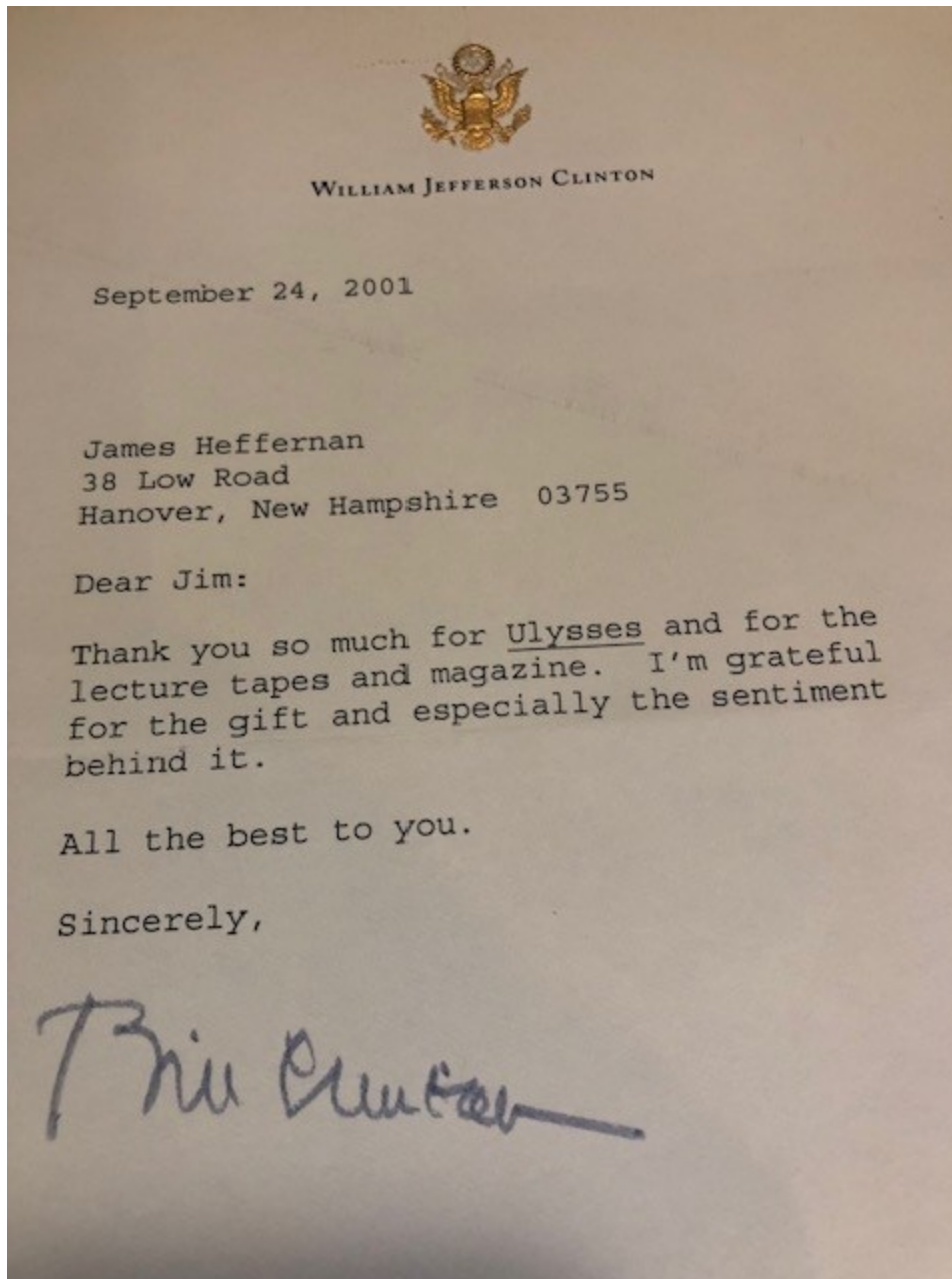
any audience, I remember saying that after thirty years of lecturing, I could blow my pedagogical trumpet to a blank brick wall.

At the risk of gross immodesty, I can say the lectures proved an instant hit. Among the many compliments they drew from TC customers, the most dazzling response came from “high standards” of Austin, Texas. Having taken and reviewed, HS wrote, over 100 courses from the Teaching Company, he (?) found it hard to say which was the very best:

But I have no hesitation in doing so with Heffernan's extraordinary work on Joyce's *Ulysses*. . . .There was never a single moment in the entire course when I lost interest or was distracted for any reason. The teaching was thoroughly engaging, challenging, and inspiring throughout.

Wow. Thirty-five years after flailing my way through my very first lecture course at Dartmouth in the spring term of 1966, I guess I had finally learned how to deliver the goods.

And as frosting on the cake of this praise, I got the following note from the now former President Bill Clinton after I sent him a copy of *Ulysses* along with my lectures on it:



In June of 2004, Nancy and I travelled to Dublin for a major Joycean event: the one hundredth anniversary of Bloomsday on June 16. For all sorts of reasons it turned out to be great fun. As we strolled one evening to a reception at Dublin Castle, my resonant base voice (credit only my genes!) caught the ears of a couple who recognized it from my lectures and then greeted me warmly. As the wife fell in line behind the husband and me, she said to Nancy, “I’ll bet this happens all the time.” Well no, actually, this was the first time, but the second occurred the very next day, when I went to see the Martello Tower in Sandycove, south of Dublin, where in his youth Joyce once lived for a few days and where he sets Chapter 1 of *Ulysses*. Now a museum, it includes a little shop where I was recognized again and this time asked for my autograph. Best of all, the Bloomsday centennial put me back in touch with a Georgetown classmate I had not seen or even heard from since we graduated in 1960 but who had since become—along with many other things—an ardent fan of *Ulysses*.

J. Patrick Lannan, Junior, a gracious and thoroughly congenial man who died in July of 2022 at the age of 83, was the remarkable son of a

remarkable father As director of the Santa Fe-based Lannan Foundation, which his father established in 1960, Patrick sponsored for years a series of projects supporting exceptional contemporary artists and writers as well as inspired Native activists in rural indigenous communities. After his death he was hailed by Jim Enote, CEO of the Colorado Plateau Foundation, as “a sublime spirit who brought an earthly and sophisticated touch to his philanthropy and art appreciation.”

Though I had not known Patrick well during our years at GU, our shared admiration for Joyce soon made us good friends, and on behalf of the Foundation he asked me more than once to lecture on Joyce in Santa Fe. Besides treating Nancy and me with exceptional hospitality as well as the most generous honoraria I’ve ever received, he gathered for each lecture an audience of avid Joyceans, for Santa Fe turned out to be almost teeming with them. Not at all incidentally, they include an actor named Adam Harvey, who specializes in brilliantly reciting long passages of Joyce’s last and most difficult novel in a program called *Don’t Panic: It’s Only Finnegans Wake*.

In the early winter of 2020, Patrick asked me to lecture that June on Bloomsday, his favorite day for lectures on Joyce. When COVID then made a public lecture impossible, he offered to fund for the Foundation website a videotape of the lecture I had planned to give on “Stephen Dedalus, Leopold Bloom, and the Ghost of Shakespeare in Chapter 9 of *Ulysses*.”

Aptly enough, this lecture about a ghostly father exhorting his grief-stricken son soon became a father-son project. To help me explain Shakespeare’s relation to the ghost of King Hamlet in *Hamlet*, especially in the ghost scene ending Act 1, I turned to my own son Andrew, a professional actor whose final project for the MFA at Penn State back in 1996 was a 90-minute one-man performance of *Hamlet* (cut to ten roles) that had struck me as simply electrifying. Since Andrew later played the melancholy Dane in a full performance staged by Harlequin Productions in Olympia, Washington, he was more than ready to perform with me.

The only question was who would play whom. But when I as Andrew's living father proposed to play the ghostly one, he protested. "Dad," he said, "if *you* play the ghost, you get all the best lines!" I strongly suspect that was his way of telling me that up against a professional actor such as him, I would come across as nothing but an incurable ham. But in any case, we solved the problem simply. Having already played both father and son long ago at Penn State, he could play them both again for my lecture, and while being videotaped he could change his clothes and make-up before switching between the roles.

Though I lectured one more time at Dartmouth in the fall of 2022 on the topic of my latest book, I consider this videotaped lecture as my last hurrah, and for at least a little longer than I live on earth, I hope it will endure online.

But I want to end with a souvenir from one more Joycean event that took place on February 2, 2022—the one hundredth anniversary of the publication of *Ulysses*. The celebration was the brainchild of Karen Lawrence, who years ago made her name with a landmark study of

*Ulysses* called *The Odyssey of Style* (1981) and is now Director of the Huntington Museum in Pasadena. Besides holding an exhibition of Joyceana, Karen organized a conference of Joyce scholars notably including Catherine Flynn of UC Berkeley, editor of *The Cambridge Centenary Ulysses: The 1922 Text with Essays and Notes* (2022), a facsimile edition of the historic 1922 Shakespeare and Company text, and essays by leading Joyce scholars on each of the eighteen episodes. Since we were all wined and dined with singular hospitality on this occasion (which I simply attended as a non-speaking participant), I felt moved to offer the following toast to Karen, who—with her husband Peter—has lately become a good friend:

### **A TOAST TO KAREN LAWRENCE**

One hundred years ago this very day,  
 When Jamesey Joyce turned forty, by the way  
 The ship he called ULYSSES set its sky-blue hull  
 Upon a Beach called Sylvia—as all of you know well.\*  
 Since then the ship has sailed to countless ports,  
 But none so welcoming as this **Angelic** isle:  
 So let us raise a glass to Karen now,  
 For berthing this immortal ship in splendid style.

**Jim Heffernan**

**2 February 2022**

\* For anyone who may not know this so well, *Ulysses* was first published in sky-blue boards by an American publisher named Sylvia Beach, whose company was based in Paris. And “this Angelic isle” is my fanciful name for Los Angeles, which includes Pasadena.

### **CODA: SHIRZAD ALIPOUR**

In the 20-plus years that have passed since the Teaching Company first released my 24 lectures on *Ulysses* and then 24 more on Great Authors from Jane Austen to Albert Camus and Samuel Beckett, I have received many generous words of praise and thanks via email. But one of those emails stands out from all the others because it launched a years’ long correspondence that has continued to this very day.

On October 22, 2018, I got an email from a 29-year-old Iranian Kurd named Shirzad Alipour, who had been teaching English for the previous five years at the Kalaam Language Institute in West Azerbaijan Province near the Iraq border, where he is still teaching English now (as well as supervising other teachers of it) along with his good friend Hiwa

Zaheri--“a golden boy,” Shirzad now writes me- “who HOPES TO BE MENTIONED in your memoir.” (Done, Shirzad!)

I have also just learned that Shirzad spent *five years* searching for my email address after hearing my Teaching Company lecture on Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Ernest*. Henry Adams once said that “a teacher never knows where his influence stops.” You said it, Henry!

Besides thanking me for my lecture, Shirzad sought my help. Having earned a BA at Urmia University in West Azarbayjan in 2011 and then an M.A. in English at Kharazmi University in Teheran (2013), where he wrote his thesis on two novels by Henry James, (*Portrait of a Lady* and *The Ambassadors*), he was now hoping to continue his graduate study in the United States. Could I advise him?

Wow! Even if I didn’t already have a soft spot for all Kurds, a brave and decent people who have never had a homeland of their own, a people not only bombed by Saddam Hussein but also reviled by the Turks and [betrayed even by us \(the U.S.\) in 2019](#), how could I refuse?

But by October 2018, you may recall, President Donald Trump had just torn up the nuclear weapons treaty so arduously negotiated by his

predecessor, with the result that no Iranian—regardless of how brilliantly he could parse the exquisite prose of Henry James--could ever set foot in the good old U S of A. On the other hand, Canada—God bless it!—*was* willing to consider taking Iranian students, so I helped him apply for graduate study in Comparative Literature at the University of Western Ontario (aka Western U) by means of the following letter, which non-academic readers of this book should feel perfectly free to skim or skip:

#### RECOMMENDATION OF SHIRZAD ALIPOUR

I have never met, much less taught, Shirzad Alipour, but I have been corresponding with him ever since October 2018, when he first wrote to me by email after hearing some of the lectures on literature that I have taped for the Teaching Company. In the ensuing months I have fielded many of his queries about literature ranging from the English Renaissance to the modern era, and I have never known any other student more keenly devoted to the study of literature or more eager to learn everything he can about English poetry and fiction.

In his very first email he asked if I might help him apply for graduate work in literature somewhere in North America, and I have done so because I find him richly deserving of further education. Part of his appeal to me is his identity as a Kurd, because the Kurds are a people of extraordinary bravery and decency who have never been granted a nation of their own and have been treated abominably by other nations—including most recently my own. But it is chiefly for his work as a student of literature that I recommend him. As an Iranian Kurd of about 30,

he has already earned a Masters Degree from the Department of English at Kharazmy University in Tehran and now teaches English—chiefly the language-- at the Kalaam English School in West Azarbayjan, Iran.

As evidence of his capacity for advanced study of literature, he presents his masters thesis: a formalist reading of linguistic complexity in two novels by Henry James: *Portrait of a Lady* and *The Ambassadors*. To be perfectly blunt, this masters thesis is anything but masterly; it is at best the work of a journeyman—if not an apprentice--with shaky command of his key terms and the structure of his argument.

Quite aside from such malapropisms as “trailed a blaze,” Shirzad gets certain basic facts wrong. It’s not true, for instance, that Flaubert and Turgenev were James’s “protegées,” that *Finnegans Wake* begins and ends with the word “time,” or that *Portrait of a Lady* ends with Strether’s answer to a question. Shirzad also fails to distinguish clearly between an interrogative question and a purely rhetorical one, between James himself and his characters, or between James’s third person / single viewpoint narration and Joyce’s interior monologue. (I have just now sent him a message explaining the difference.) And in seeking to explain how the style of *The Ambassadors* differs from that of *Portrait*, he largely ignores or at least minimizes the fact that the styles of both novels are richly figurative as well as linguistically complex—rather than one or the other. But he plausibly argues that *The Ambassadors* makes greater use of syntactical interpolations-- as a way of deferring hermeneutic closure. And at one point he quite correctly identifies James’s use of chiasmic structure.

Why then do I recommend him for your program? First of all, I believe that he was badly served by both his supervisor and his reader, who should have given him much more careful guidance than he has evidently received. Secondly and more importantly, this thesis—for all its flaws—demonstrates nothing less than extraordinary intellectual ambition. How many other students who had learned English as a *second* language would ever

dream of doing what he has done? Would set out not only to analyze in linguistic terms the style of Henry James, but also to compare the style of an earlier novel with the style of a later one—a style of exceptional complexity because of its “asymptotic” structure?

On one hand, then, this is a sprawling essay patched together with so many quotations that the thread of its main argument sometimes gets lost, and the links between its chief components--Russian Formalism (Roman Jakobson and Viktor Shklovsky) and the fiction of Henry James—are tenuous. On the other hand, the thesis clearly springs from extensive reading of linguistic theory, literary criticism, and modern fiction; along with the novels of James, Shirzad also read novels by Zola, Wilde, Hemingway, Nabokov, and Maugham.

His new project swerves dramatically from Russian Formalism and Henry James. If you accept him for your Masters program, he plans to compare *Missing Soluch*, a novel by Mahmoud Dowlatabadi (probably Iran’s greatest living novelist) with Gabrielle Roy’s *La Rivière sans repos* (translated as *The Windflower*). Different as they are, each of these novels features as its protagonist a single mother struggling with poverty and the privations of rural life—in worlds totally removed from anything to be found in the fiction of James. But given Professor Julia Emberley’s special interest in feminism, indigenous storytelling, and Arab-American diasporic literature, I believe she could ably supervise a project involving novels that respectively foreground a rural Iranian mother and a Canadian Inuit mother.

I am well aware that you may have to bend your rules in order to accept this applicant. For purely practical reasons, Shirzad will be unable to take the English Proficiency Exam by the deadline date for submitting his application. But having carefully read his 90-page thesis on the style of two novels by Henry James, I can certify that he is unquestionably proficient in English--if not always flawless.

The other problem is less easily solved. His second language—his native tongue—is Persian/Farsi, which is not officially

covered by your faculty, though Professor Emberley's interest in Islamic texts suggests that she may be at least familiar with it. In any case, Mahmoud Dowlatabadi's *Missing Soluch* is available in English.

A further problem is that Shirzad cannot yet read French (though he is now studying it), which means that he has so far read Gabrielle Roy's novel only in English translation. But he is so eager to learn that I believe he will soon be able to read it in French.

Essentially, then, I am asking you to place a bet on a student I have never met or formally supervised. All I can say is that I have never known any other student more insatiably eager to learn all he can about literature. For that reason alone, I warmly recommend him.

First the good news: he was accepted to Western with a fellowship of \$3000. Then the bad news: since that was not nearly enough to cover travel to Canada and all his expenses there, he had to turn it down.

In the fall of 2022, Shirzad wrote to say he was so determined to study English literature in Canada or the United States that his father had agreed to sell his shop in order to fund his studies, which alarmed me, to say the least. I had a better idea.

With Biden in the White House and the U.S. re-open to Iranian students, I suggested that he consider applying to the Masters Program in Comparative Literature at Dartmouth, which takes only a few students

each year but also supports them fully—in part with teaching jobs. But as luck would have it, Cupid intervened. On the previous *Bloomsday*, no less (June 16, 2022), the 33-year-old Shirzad had married a lovely young woman named Deli, and since the Dartmouth program made no allowance for spouses, he dropped all thought of applying for either Dartmouth’s MA or any other such program. Ironically enough, our correspondence had begun just as he was nursing a heart broken by his previous *inamorata*. Now he was the happy husband of a brand new wife and happy enough to stay in Iran and teach—though still inevitably pained by the constraints of its regime,

Ah, the Iranian regime! If you suppose that Shirzad likes it any more than you do, you would be dead wrong. He was just as dismayed as you or I would be by the following news—except for the small flash of light at the end of it:

An Iranian taxi driver whose dance moves at a fish market went viral has become an unlikely anti-regime hero after authorities moved to clamp down on his videos. The 70-year-old, known as “Uncle Sadegh,” sings and dances in the coastal city of Rasht,

where crowds gather to watch his lively performance. One of Mr Sadegh's videos has taken Iranian social media by storm in recent weeks, but authorities in the Caspian Sea city deemed it a violation of Islamic norms. **His Instagram account, which has over 675,000 followers,** was temporarily closed down. The decision sparked a wave of public indignation and people across Iran began posting videos in displays of solidarity. Many saw the blocking of his account as the latest example of the Islamic republic's widespread intolerance. Under mounting pressure, authorities have since lifted the ban on Mr Sadegh's Instagram account and allowed his previous performances to be made public again. (*The Independent*, posted Dec 13, 2023)

So far as I know, neither Shirzad nor Deli has been dancing in any Iranian streets, but just as Wordsworth's heart once danced with a host of daffodils, Shirzad's heart has been dancing with the words of the English language and above all its literature ever since he first started learning it in school. "I was born," he tells me now,

in a very small, yet heavenly beautiful village titled Musalan and lived the first 18 years of my life there in dreadfully difficult circumstances. I grew up motherless – being raised by my grandma Ayshe (1914-2009) with my sister. My father, Mohammad, (1971 --) re-married and I have 3 half-brothers and one half-sister. He is a farmer and he sent me off to college (none of my family members are university-educated let alone know English or French . . . I was a **dreadful** reader right from the start. I had nothing but good grades. Teacher were lost in admiration for my English. They all predicted me to come out on top as a great student.

Wonder about that “dreadful,” do you? Ironically enough, Shirzad wrote this just after I had praised his command of English as “flawless.” But **everybody make mistake now and then**—even American professors of English, and what makes this one so easy to overlook is that it’s just a tiny fleck in the great big bowl of his amazing story—the story of an Iranian boy who spent the first 18 years of his life in “dreadfully difficult circumstances” yet whose loving, farming father

Mohammed (named for the prophet!) found the means to send him to college and even graduate school, where he wrote his MA thesis on the novels of Henry James! Did this past master of suspended predication and infinitely varied perspectives, this magisterial word-painter of *impressions*, ever dream that such a farm boy hardscrabble-raised way off in western *Iran*, of all places, would ever grow up to dissect his prose?

Though I don't think Shirzad will write any more critical studies of literature or even apply for any more graduate programs, he is now hard at work--with Basir Borhani-- on translating into English a novel of magic realism by the great contemporary Kurdish writer **Bakhtyar Ali**, who was born in the non-nation of Kurdistan (part of which belongs to Northern Iraq) but has long lived and worked in Germany as first a poet and critic, then a prolific novelist. His *My Uncle Jamshid Khan: Whom the Wind was Always Taking* (2010) tells the story—or stories—of a man who lost so much weight while imprisoned by Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath regime that he becomes as light as a feather,—so that one day a gust of

wind catches him and carries him away, beyond the walls of the prison and out into the wide world.

As translated by Shirzad and Basir, you can now find a portion of this wildly imaginative novel in an anthology of eight globe-spanning stories titled *Elemental* (Calico Series) that was published in 2021 by Two Lines Press and have since been justly publicized by the [Center for the Art of Translation](#). I have no doubt that Shirzad and Basir will soon finish their translation of the whole novel, and I'm betting that its first appearance in English will make at least a modest splash on these American shores.

And speaking of shores, I can't help noting that Shirzad's way of swimming through literature makes my own version of it look like a 15-minute splash in a backyard plastic tub. Metaphorically speaking, Shirzad launches his reading days—and *every* day is a reading day for him—by breasting the Hellespont (like Leander and Byron) before breakfast, stroking across the English channel before lunch, and whirlwind-crawling the whole Atlantic in time for dinner.

OK, to get literal for once, he has thoroughly digested both the monumental *Norton Anthology of English Literature* and the equally monumental *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, neither of which has ever been fully read—much less fully taught—by me or, I’m willing to bet, any other professor of English or American literature in this country. Since the Big Ayatollan Brothers of Iran would otherwise have impounded these books lest either one might cast any shade on the Prophet Mohammed, I sent them to him via a friend of his in the Kurd-friendly city of Erbil, just across the border in northern Iraq, where he joyously collected them, sent me a photo of them, proudly placed them on the shelves of his library, and has since then—new metaphor coming!—been *devouring* them.

If you’ll let me stay with that metaphor for a sec, I’ve simply never known anyone in or out of the academy more ravenous for English and American literature of all kinds and periods than Shirzad is. Every week and sometimes more than once a day brings some new inquiry about topics ranging all the way from—you guessed it—*Beowulf* to Virginia Woolf and beyond. Not just the usual suspects like Dickens and

Shakespeare, but also—just around the great bard’s time--Marlowe, Spenser, and Sidney, plus Wyatt and Surrey too (and I had to confess to being pretty rusty on the sonnets of the last two, which I had never taught). And besides the canonized English Romantic poets, he asked me recently, what did I think of such *female* Romantic poets as Joanna Baillie, Letitia Langdon, and Mary Robinson? Were they being taught now? Answer: though I could tell him that American scholars such as Stuart Curran and Stephen Behrendt had been studying, teaching, and writing about these poets for some time, I had to admit that I had never taught any of them myself, had read only a little of Baillie, and was just barely familiar with the other two.

From one day or week to the next, I never knew what Shiraz would ask or just tell me about. So I was truly tickled one morning when I found in my in-box a message reporting his belated discovery of P.G. Wodehouse, whose elegantly riotous tales of the charmingly irresponsible Bertie Wooster and his utterly unflappable manservant Jeeves had suddenly captivated Shiraz just as suddenly as they had long ago captured me—especially since Nancy and I had just been feasting—

courtesy of You Tube –on the BBC TV versions of *Jeeves and Wooster* performed by the incomparably brilliant duo of Hugh Laurie (Wooster) and Stephen Fry (Jeeves).

Shiraz does almost nothing important without making literature part of it. Sharing fully my love of *Ulysses*, he made a point of marrying Deli on Bloomsday in 2022, as already noted, and read aloud on that occasion not just the predictable Shakespearean sonnet 116 (“Let me not to the marriage of true minds / Admit impediments”) but also yet another poem I’d never even heard of myself: Frank O’Hara’s “Having a Coke with You,” which I only just now read for the first time on the [Poetry Foundation’s indispensable website](#).

So here are Shirzad and his lovely Deli in their car—



And here is his library, his most precious possession *just* after Deli—



And here again are the newlyweds savoring the *al fresco* pleasures of a land the Ayatollas have not yet managed to fully destroy:



Though I will never get to Iran myself, much less ever meet Shiraz in person, I seem to have somehow paid him recently a magical visit that elicited this email on January 7, 2024:

**From:** Shirzad Alipour  
**Sent:** Sunday, January 7, 2024 1:16 AM  
**To:** James A. W. Heffernan  
**Subject:** Re: Travel

Dear Jim,

Believe it or not, right after reading to Deli your latest email, I slept and dreamt that we were in New Hampshire and met all your family. Then I convinced you and Nancy to pack and come to Iran to restore your health. Your passports needed extension so you couldn't, but for some supernatural reason or other, we managed to get around this problem. Therefore you all came and had a nice lunch in our garden. At least and last, the imaginary path-crossing we talked about many years ago, happened in dreams.

A dream trip to meet one of the most extraordinary students I've ever known—by email alone.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

After the Author of this memoir departed this Earth in July 2024, I received the following email from Shirzad:

**From:** Shirzad Alipour  
**Subject:** Jim.  
I miss him a lot.

We are making a bench at Kalaam for him forever...

He has influenced all my colleagues...

Please excuse any typos,

Shirzad.