

Class of 1972 – Class of 1972 Memories

Classmates,

One of my '72 confidantes who shall remain nameless often previews the memoirs shortly after I read them for the first time and provides me with his suggestions in a rather cryptic fashion. After he finished "The Live Adventures of Paranoid Pete, Revisited," my friend called me and remarked. "Run it just the way he wrote it. Cornell had Richard Farina; we have Stephen Berer." Fortunately, as you will soon read, Berer survived his motorcycle escapade far better than Farina, who died in a motorcycle accident after leaving the publication party for his classic work, [I've Been Down So Long It Almost Looks Like Up To Me.](#)

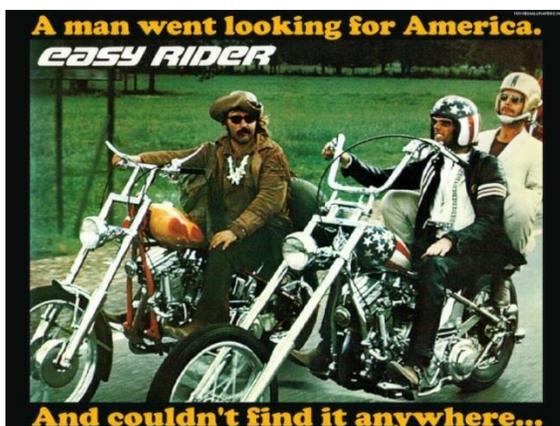
Before embarking upon his European fiasco, Stephen attended Gateway Senior High School in Monroeville, Pa. Our author lasted one year in Wharton, before transferring to the College where he designed his own major which he named "Symbolism." Since graduation, Stephen has pursued his career in writing but has had to finance it in many ways, including working at Penn's cooperative, The Eatery, and working for his father's investment management firm. He currently lives in Washington DC with his wife of 37 years, Nancy Micklewright. They have two sons, Josh and Caleb. If you enjoy this memoir, you can find more of Stephen's work on his website, <http://shivvetee.com/>.

If Stephen's tale inspires you to write a piece of your own, please send it to me at Friar72@gmail.com.

By the time you read (or delete) this email, Homecoming will be over and Alumni Weekend will be fast approaching. Although we do not have an official reunion this spring, I urge you to come to campus for some part of that weekend. Since the class president carries the class flag as part of the graduation procession, I will be there for most, if not all, of that weekend. If you have a relative who is graduating that weekend or just want to come to campus and keep me company, please let me know when you will be at Penn.

Best,

Jeff Rothbard,
President, Class of 1972



The Live Adventures of Paranoid Pete, Revisited

I saved a lot of money at my job at a mutual fund during the summer of 69. After I went back to school the market tumbled like a waterfall. So did my hair, but more slowly, down to my shoulders. I visited the mutual fund on spring break to see if I could have my job back. They didn't like the looks of the market, or the looks of me. It seems I had to look for something else to do, so I decided to go to Europe.

My cousin went to Europe the summer before. He bought a BSA in London and tooled around a lot of countries over there. Sounded cool. I wanted to be even cooler. I wanted to go to Afghanistan. I heard they had cheap hash in Afghanistan, which is out past Europe. I can now say with assurance that Afghanistan is not really out past Europe. It's out past everything. It's the gottverdummelt bottom of the world. But when I dreamed up this trip to Europe I didn't know that. I thought I was living in the bottom of the world.



I imagined wearing a long yellow scarf, 10 feet long, its ends fluttering wildly in the wind as I rode my BSA, so cool, down winding roads, past castles and vineyards, through mountain passes. A cigarette hanging from my lower lip. There were girls who wanted a ride. There were primitive villages and men wearing robes, selling black hash laced with opium. You could smoke it or eat it. I signed on to a Penn charter flight from New York to London, which probably went on to Tel Aviv. It was an El Al charter. Check out the picture. It's one of the only pieces of evidence I still have from the trip. Found it hidden away in a cabinet in my parent's house, after my dad died. I remember keeping a notebook during the trip, but it's gone. I think it was one of those grade school tablets made of lined newsprint, which, at the time, no one knew would slowly self-incinerate because there was so much acid in the paper. So even if I had saved the notebook, it would probably be just a pile of dust now, anyway.

Passport. Traveller's cheques. Plane tickets. I kept all those papers in a canvas money belt I wore around my waist, under my undershirt. If I wanted to cash a traveller's cheque or cross a border I had to undress in public. But I was paranoid. No one would steal my passport or money. I packed my Portable Nietzsche, my Ulysses, and my Blake: Complete Writings, Oxford Press. I still have them. Oh, and I got a letter of reference from a factory, assuring people I was a sober, reliable young man. My father owned that factory. Also, he still wanted to believe I was a sober, reliable young man, in spite of mounting evidence.

wasn't going to take any girls for a ride. Then again, none of the hitchhikers were girls. Somewhere around 20 miles outside of Paris the A1 became a cobblestone 4-lane highway, dense with cars. About the same time, clock towers and steeples began to strike noon, and rain began to slap my face. I had no idea how I was going to find my way into Paris, and I had no idea how I was going to endure the rain. Dismay and despair thickened the overcast air. Like Rimbaud (who I had not yet heard of), I took arms against justice and ran away. I turned around, found the Paris ring road, and hightailed it south towards Lyon. That action became known as "pulling a Paris."

I was scared in London, but I was terrified now. I remember practicing my French accent (whole lotta good that'll do) while saying prayers that welled up from my childhood (they probably didn't do any good either). The afternoon drizzled away. As another night approached, I again faced the dreaded reality of finding a cheap place to stay. Darkness swallowed me, as I spluttered through a small town on my lemon, sky-blue BSA. I saw a lone teenager. Desperation required I speak, and when English didn't work (even when I spoke it with a French accent) I resorted to drawing with a stone on the sidewalk. A triangle for a tent, then tilting my head on my hands, and closing my eyes. Two cavemen communicating for the first time. And there was light. He pointed this way, that way, the next way. In spite of everything, I found the campground, set up tent, crawled in like some kind of sodden stray dog, and closed my eyes. Trembling, I then knew a far better definition of lost than I knew when I said goodbye to my friends in Heathrow.

The next morning, passing through Lyon, the bike's chain broke. I pushed my lemon sky-blue BSA into a shop, where sneering men conveyed to me they'd repair it that day. Rather than be sneered at, I climbed a nasty hill to what looked like a cathedral. It turns out to have been the Fourvière, but I didn't know that at the time. Back at the mechanic, I expected to be relieved of an enormous sum of money. In fact, they charged me a mere 20 francs, a few dollars, and they tuned up the bike to boot. The spluttering and stalling required but a minor carburetor adjustment. My sky-blue BSA was a lemon no more. With the sun shining, I headed for the alps dividing southern France from Italy. I may have been sleepwalking, but at least for the moment, it wasn't a nightmare.

Riding is safer and easier than stopping. Miles roll up behind you. Destinations draw nearer. You don't need to splutter and stall with useless words, for which the only effective carburetor adjustment is a language course. Phrase books? They're useless! You learn to mimic a phrase in a book, and even if you somehow manage to say the words, you can't comprehend the answer.

"Where's a hotel? And don't say anything. Just point!"

That's what they ought to teach you to say in a phrase book.

I began to figure out how to eat. Forget restaurants. I couldn't understand the menus or the waiters. Bakeries and delis, that's how I learned to eat. I became very good at pointing and making various kinds of grunts that meant "yes" or "no" or "the one beside it." Rolls, cheeses, salamis, and many another delight. I learned to eat. I learned to grunt. I began to learn how to be a sub-human. But at least I was NOT a tourist.

I wanted to see Venice, but I couldn't find it on the map that I got from Italian customs. Milano? No way. Verona? Doubt it. Vicenza? Maybe. Venezia. Could be. I took a guess on Venezia, but halfway over a long, strange causeway to what appeared to be an island, I realized, no way! This couldn't be it. I turned around. Venice wasn't on my map, so it couldn't be that important, anyway. That action is now known as "pulling a Venice" or if I'm really down on myself, "pulling a Venezia." I made it to Trieste by late afternoon, found a campground on the Adriatic nestled in among cypress trees, set up tent, and pulled out my Nietzsche. I was supposed to have read some chapters of Zarathustra for a course the previous term. Better late than never.

Even in my state of deep sleepwalking, I knew Trieste was stunning. I stayed there a few days, sitting on the beach, reading, trying to philosophize with a hammer. Probably what I wrote was closer to philosophizing with a feather duster. No doubt, it's for the best that those musings are lost. I remember in a clear dreamy way trying to write and realizing my brain was cornmeal mush.

Heading down the coast of Yugoslavia. My jeans with torn knees and an American flag sewn on the butt caused a great uproar at customs. They even forgot to charge me for insurance. Or maybe you don't need insurance in a Communist state, since they don't allow accidents. The coast was sunny, arid, rocky, sometimes beautiful. The 2 lane road wound along the jagged cliffs fronting the Adriatic, with rarely a guardrail or wall between the road and 500 feet of rocky, bone-crushing crags. My thoughts oscillated between the stark reality of the landscape and equally stark fantasies of me flying over the edge to my death. In my dreams and in my imbibements I seemed to like going over the edge. Now, with the sun going over the edge, I rolled into a campground outside of Split. Office was closed. As I pitched my tent, a beautiful Dutch girl strolled over and introduced herself. She was hoping I'd stay for awhile. Was she sleepwalking, or were we both? I rolled out of the campground at sunrise before the office opened its shutters and the Dutch girl opened her eyes. Riding is safer and easier than talking.

Rushing to get to Dubrovnik I passed a car. As I was passing him, a Citroen roared past us both, sideswiping me. Some number of moments later I found that I was not dead. Rather, I was still rolling down the road, on my bike. Dreams are strange. About 30 seconds later I began trembling like a leaf. I pulled over onto the rocky berm. It was maybe 2 feet wide, cliff tumbling down from there. I decided the berm was more dangerous than the saddle. I rode on, knowing one of my doppelgangers was dead. How many of them did I have, before I became the doppelganger for some other lucky bastard?

Dubrovnik is quaint and charming. Or rather, Dubrovnik was quaint and charming until 1991. I, however, didn't see it in 1970. Trying to find my way into town, I got totally lost, so I pulled a Paris and turned east, up into the mountains. There was no direct way to Skopje, which was where I'd pick up the main highway south to Greece. But I found a shortcut, a little road wing up to a place called Pec (rhymes with wretch), where I could pick up the main route down to Skopje. And from there into Greece. And from there... to the way beyond.

Hot and sunny. Narrow pot-holed road. No traffic. Me, lost in the mountains of Yugoslavia. Definitely cool. Long hair blowing in the wind, Camel hanging from my lower lip, camera hanging around my neck. I began to wind out on the bike. Which is when I hit a melted tar patch. Bike slid out, and I rolled, horizontal, about 10 or 15 yards. Kiss the camera goodbye, not to mention my arm, back, shoulder, knees. I just lay there, too disgusted or scared to get up. A rickety pick-up, like something from the Beverly Hillbillies, came poking along. Guy would have run me over if he had been going faster than about 10, but he wasn't. Somehow he, or we, hauled the bike into the back of the truck. Then he hauled my sorry ass to a clinic maybe 20k down the road. I figured I was there for the night, and that sounded real good to me, but no, they just patched me up and sent me packing, free of charge. Dang, them Communists got something right. I wondered if the bike would start. Damn thing did. In this nightmare, nothing was going my way. Late afternoon and I found the shortcut I was looking for. Well, that was a good sign. Then the road turned to gravel. That was a bad sign. One k. Two k's. Looked like there was no end of gravel, when suddenly a loud clang woke me from my dreamy optimism.

I turned around to see the bike rack hanging off to one side, my backpack spilling its guts for the last 30 yards or more. I recovered the essential stuff I needed, my books mostly, and called it a day. Pushed the bike up a little ridge into a cow pasture, and set up my tent. I was down for the count, so I figured I might as well get comfortable. A million miles from nowhere, when a teenage boy appeared. Imagine what was going through his mind! A spaceship crashed in the back 40, or something. We talked, two cavemen grunting. He disappeared and a short while later reappeared, dreamlike, with warm, freshly squeezed milk, and a hunk of bread. Damn. That was a good meal! Then we pulled out our harmonicas and sang cowboy songs. Well, that's what it felt like as the stars came out, and I lay in my sleeping bag thinking about the way things are.

Next day I walked the bike about 5k to a village where, with a remarkably primitive welding setup, an ancient man repaired my bike rack. I figured that would last about 5 minutes, but it never broke. Gravel for about 70k to Pec, and then an open road, at least as open as it gets in Yugoslavia. Camped in Kavala, Greece for a couple of days, right on the beach. Sand was so hot it fried my feet, but I was more inclined to fry my feet (and read Shelley) than ride into Istanbul, where I couldn't pull a Paris, in any case. Istanbul stood directly in the way of Afghanistan. And I was bound to cross that wide Missouri, or misery, as the case may be.

Now beginneth the central tale, *The Live Adventures of Paranoid Pete*. From Kavala I rode into

Turkey. There the road grew still quieter, mostly horse drawn hay wagons. I entered an endless sea of bright sunflower fields in the waning light. At the Sea of Marmara, a hour or so from Istanbul I found a BP station. Some bikers told me you could sleep for free in BP stations in Turkey, and that's what I did. Up at 6am. I passed through Istanbul's fabled walls around 7:30, closing in on the hippy district with its cheap hotels and dangerous Turks, well before shops opened. On my way I came to the one and only stoplight in Istanbul. Everyone ignored it except me, which inspired a spirited chorus of honking behind me. Ahead of me, across a broad open plaza, I saw my hotel, the Gungor, widely acknowledged to be the cheapest hotel in the city. There, beside it, The Pudding Shop, famous in the literature of east-bound travelers for exchange of information and goods, and the posting of a thousand sorrows and 'where are you' notes. I went in, pointed at a bowl of pudding, and thereupon ate my first yogurt. Strange pudding these Turks make.

Actually, *now* beginneth *The Live Adventures of Paranoid Pete*. I stowed my bike in a guarded garage, checked into a dorm room at the Hotel Gungor, and set out for adventure. I heard I could sell my bike for double what I paid for it, even though selling European vehicles in Turkey was illegal. What? That doesn't apply to me, does it? Up the street an Austrian bummed a cigarette from me. "Wanna buy my bike?" He and his friends didn't have any money, but they knew pipple who did. We spent a couple hours trying to find those pipple before they smoked all my cigarettes and left me. Back in the Pudding Shop a notice caught my eye. "Bus to Kathmandu, leaving in 3 days. Looking for cool people to join us. Call Fred." Five hours in Istanbul and I had already hit the jackpot! A ride to Afghanistan and Nepal. I called Fred and signed up for the tour.

I spent the afternoon trying to make connections to sell my bike. In the shadows of evening, as I was walking down a grungy alley I saw a guy in a worn suit holding audience in front of a shop. He looked very drunk. When he saw me, he pointed and slurred, "Yu! Yu wan' hasheesh?"

"Me?" I looked behind me. Yeah, he was talking to me. "Aw gee, no, I don't want any."
"Aaaah! Yu wan' oooooopium!"

"Hey, thanks. Nah, not really." Not really?? Inside, I'm thinking, 'This is it! My first day in Istanbul I find a ride to Nepal, and now I find a hash motherload!' This was off the scale of my cool-o-meter. He read me. "Ah know; yu wan' hasheeeesh. Yu, me, frien'z (rolling the 'r'), yu, me brotherz (rolling those r's too). Yu eeeet me food, yu sleeeep me house. Yu pay nuuuuhhting."

I told him I'll be back at 10, when it was dark.

At 10 he was drunker still, and through his heavy slurring, I could make out that we were now even better buddies than before. I followed him through narrow cobblestone alleys; past ramshackle houses and apartment buildings with peeling stucco and broken windows. We turned into an old concrete building; wound around through many unlit stairways. In his apartment he disappeared for a moment and came back out into the livingroom with a gun. My voice went up about two octaves, and I squeaked, "*what's that for?*" I guess that was really a rhetorical question.

"*Me maahn-gh. Me beeeeg maahn-gh. Me ghum gha blah de blah...*" and he stuffed the gun in a drawer. Then he opened a shoebox filled with square plaques of brown hash, about a quarter inch thick.

"*Yu hav pepper?*"

I pulled out my treasured Bambu's and gave them to him. He rolled a very thick joint of tobacco and hash, then another one, and put the Bambu's in the drawer with the gun. When we finished both joints I was fading in and out of the 4 dimension, as I saw him pull out the gun again.

He staggered about babbling and waving the gun, and I stumbled out through the door as he shouted. I careened down many halls and stairs, tried doors, all locked; running, banging on doors in the dark maze of the building; more stairs, till somehow, I found a door out into an alley. I ran, best as my rubber legs would allow, up the street, around a corner, down another alley, and then began to slow down. I was safe, hidden somewhere behind broken walls in a slow-revolving 4th dimension, where dream and reality could not be distinguished. I passed an unshaven thug, and 10 steps down the alley I saw he was following me. I sped up my pace. He did too. He whistled, and then there were 2 of them; whistled again and 3 of them. I started running. They did too, faster than me.

The alley opened up into a wide plaza, and there at the far end, I saw the Hotel Gungor. Four old gomers walked out of a tea shop and I jumped right into their midst. Two of the thugs dropped back, but the third, in a greasy black-net tee shirt, grabbed the back of my shirt, threw me down and pulled out a gun. As he flashed his badge he shouted, "*Gimme the money, Lebowski.*" Oops, wrong dimension, "*Why yu wit dat mahn? What yu do at heem? Yu smoke sheet. Where it izz?*" I babbled my innocence. "*He was drunk. I just walked heem, ech, him home,*" I fairly whined. I wasn't holding, so I was momentarily safe, but my Bambu's were back in his room, and I was in 4th dimension paranoid hell.

"*We get yu, mahn. We get chu!*" the thug, or cop, or whatever, sneered, and walked off.

Back at the Gungor, I spent the next 6 hours in and out of a stinking bathroom down the hall. That's the OED's definition of "scared shitless". Sunrise, still stoned into the 4th dimension, I high geared out of Istanbul, back to the Greek border. As I rolled away from the armed Turkish soldiers at the border, I began to breathe for the first time that day. When I got to the Greek side, two border guards confronted me.

"Where's the hasheesh?"

I laughed out loud. I wanted to hug and kiss those guys. *"Me?? You think I'm crazy."* They didn't believe that for a second, but when I said, *"I am so glad to be out of Turkey,"* that was music to their nationalistic ears, and they waved me on. *"Enjoy our country,"* they said proudly, as I rolled away.

My live adventures didn't end there, but they took place in a different sort of dream. In Germany I found a hayloft to sleep in. Morning, I woke to a grizzled, skinny geezer waving a pitchfork in my face. But when I spoke tolerably able German to him, he relented. I could stay in his barn, *"aber kein rauchen."* Agreed. I wouldn't smoke. In Amsterdam, with an exchange of cash and a passing of keys, I handed my bike over to another sleepwalker, and hung out at the Dam with the united nations of hippidom. Hitched down to Paris with two girls; stayed there for a couple of days, crashing with a chick in the Cite Universitaire who dealt heroin. Hitched to Barcelona and then decided to go on to Malaga, where I stood out on the highway for 6 hours. Then I changed sides and got a ride immediately up into the Pyrenees. That became known as *'pulling a Malaga.'* Sleeping out in the Pyrenees, it was like I was inside Van Gogh's "Starry Night". Revisited Paris and Amsterdam, and the summer was over. Spent two nights in Heathrow, one because I didn't want to pay for a hotel, and one because the plane home was delayed 12 hours.

Epilogue. *"Let me be bounded by rooms no more..."*, but when I got back to school, there were rooms within rooms. But don't imagine, dear reader, that you now know the author. You may know a bit about Paranoid Pete but he disappeared into another dimension. I, on the other hand, rented an apartment above The Onion, a seedy bar just up from The Drug at 34th and Walnut. The building was condemned and my two roommates and I lived there cheaply but illegally the whole year. Shortly after moving in, I posted a sign on my door, "This is the room of an Exile" listing my almost 95 theses, mostly having to do with not tolerating foolishness, insincerity, or idle chitchat. Dipping my finger in red paint as if in blood, I wrote on the inside of my door, *"When all the clowns that you have commissioned have died in battle or in vain, and you want someone you don't have to talk to, won't you come see me Queen Jane?"* (Queen Jane Approximately.) About that time I also began three notebooks, a poetry notebook (I'm in my 26th now), a dream notebook, and a personal journal, as I began to write in earnest. I also left Wharton and organized an individualized major for myself. For the next year and a half I only took independent studies, one on one with professors in departments as diverse as chemistry, psychology, and religious studies.

I will tell you that re-creating myself was a profoundly painful experience, but I pursued that path uncompromisingly. Philosophizing with a hammer for real now, I forged serious changes into my soul. I am thankful every day for those changes. And for this too: that year I was visited by the first of two angels who have comforted me on my way, in spite of my fallen state. That first one lived with me till the second semester was over, when her mother called her home. I hope her reward has been great and enduring. The second was instructed to stay with me no matter what challenges I presented to her. Over time I have learned to walk in Her ways.

Afterthoughts and reality checks. New evidence has emerged. In a renewed quest to find my old photos and the name of the bike dealership in London, I searched all my file folders and boxes in the attic. Lo and behold, in a most unlikely place - my diary for my junior year - I found, folded up in the front flap, my complete summer journal, including the original composition of The Live Adventures of Paranoid Pete (where I deprecatingly referred to myself as "little PP"). While the journal brought to light many new details, there was nothing in it that required a re-writing of the story above. Like a strange and complicated dream pieced together in the sometimes harsh light of day, details may have been forgotten or altered, but the dreamy dysnarratives asserted themselves, revealing what they wanted to be revealed, and swallowing up the rest in the whirlpools of unmemory.

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