A Writing Life
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Epilogue

From the near shore of the River Styx, as I await Charon, the Homeric boatman, I have surveyed the landscape of my writings from documents abetted by memory. Some of my work may not be superseded; some has been looted without attribution, cited by succeeding writers, forgotten (or perhaps still accessed) in libraries, available online in second-hand copies, abandoned in personal collections, or consigned to landfill under shopping centers which may have bookshops in which clerks cannot find any of my books—or audiobooks.

Readers somehow find them. I respond to queries even about the earliest books and requests to sign copies found second-hand. Radio and TV frugally fill vacant time with them, often replaying ancient interviews. Viewers tell me about them.

The past seems never past. When I objected in a Wall Street Journal op-ed column about the brutalizing of the no-doubt vicious Saddam Hussein, taken captive in Iraq in June 2003, as a violation of the Geneva Convention on treatment of prisoners of war (Saddam commanded his army), my Korean War past re-emerged, and Sean Hannity, for whom accuracy was never significant, invited me to argue with him on Fox TV. Later, Hannity would loyally defend Donald Trump’s thousands of lies from the White House.

Downsizing in 2015 from Beech Hill in Delaware where we relocated in 2003 to the Jenner’s Pond retirement community in Pennsylvania required disposing of two-thirds of my library, papers, correspondence,
pictures and memorabilia. Since 1982 my undergraduate college, now West Chester University, twenty-five minutes to the east, has housed my books and papers (and Rodelle’s), and continues to do so. If life is who you are, and what you have done with the possibilities available to you, the salvaged past is here.

Such indulgences go beyond memoirs, which, within limits, draw from within. In 1929, the year I was born, Werner Forssmann, in Germany, tested the physical limits of the human body by becoming the first to successfully perform a cardiac catheterization. He did it on himself, threading a thin tube though a vein in his arm until it pierced his right atrium. He used the tools of his trade to find out what made him work. (Skeptics derided him as a quack and it was decades before he was awarded a Nobel Prize for “Physiology or Medicine.”) As a memoirist, I have done my probing with words, and with words perhaps I have discovered a few things about myself. In the end, as I reach and pass my ninetieth year, words are what I leave behind.

Entering the foyer to the West Chester collections, one notes my photo portrait from 1973 on the wall, and my bust from 1964 on a table, both created by Samuel Sabean, once a Penn State colleague. (Years before, Sam had been the Director of the New Deal era Artists Project in Minnesota.) The immediate impression, even to me, is that I must be dead.

As I could not part with everything, my small study overflows with memories of the writing life. One is a reproduction of Whistler’s “Mother” portrait, in which Robert Gray, later a dean at UCLA, has inserted my head. Five frames display cartoons of Victoria which appeared in reviews of my life of the queen, from The Times of London to papers in Auckland, Melbourne and Johannesburg. There is a photo portrait of Disraeli’s illegitimate daughter Kate; the original program from 1906 of Shaw’s Don Juan in Hell, with his card; the first page, signed, of the score of John La Montaine’s bicentennial opera Be Glad.
Then, America; and a guest ticket to the House of Lords, signed by C. P. Snow. There is a cartoon of a very young Rodelle and Stanley, drawn at a party in Manhattan by a house artist to celebrate the Christmas 1959 issue of *Esquire*, in which appeared my publication, from manuscript, of Shaw’s early 1880s playlet, *Un Petit Drame*. Also the World War II draft registration card of Santa Claus, a real Missourian, given to me, framed, by a representative of the National Archives. Above me is the certificate awarding me a Bronze Star medal from the Korean War, and a head-and-shoulders drawing of me at seventeen by a girlfriend out of the very remote past.

On my desk is a photo portrait of Rodelle before we married, and a striking bronze cityscape medallion of Jerusalem, twice visited, once with Rodelle. Behind me on a bookshelf is a piece of pale grey Jerusalem stone, now a reminder of my 2017 book, *The Recovery of Palestine, 1917*. Also a small carved wooden Buddha from Korea and a medallion from Nihon University in Japan, showing Mount Fuji, visible from the campus. The past is present.