

“Sources”  
August 31, 2014

Today I want to introduce myself to you. I want to share, essentially, where I’m coming from. I want to give you an idea what people and experiences shaped and influenced my life so that you can weigh and evaluate and better understand what I’m saying.

I’ve narrowed my list down to 15, but it could be many more, or fewer. As I go through them, think about what your sources are. What are the touchstones of your life? As for me:

**(1) Geography**

I was born on June 9, 1950. A Beautiful day, according to my mom. Throughout my life, June 9 has always been a beautiful day. Late spring, balmy, warm and with still-lengthening daylight. *Where* I was born, I feel, was important: 2003 Chestnut Hills Drive, Cleveland Heights, Ohio. Chestnut Hills Drive is right along the edge of the Great Plains, demarcating the exact, precise boundary between the Allegheny Plateau to the east and—to the west—1000 miles of prairie. The late Vine Deloria, Jr., author of about a dozen books including *Custer Died For Your Sins* and *God is Red*, held that people, all of us, are manifestations of the earth. Our hymn #83, written by the great and beautifully poetic humanist Unitarian, Kenneth Patton, articulates the same idea when it sings out “We are the earth, upright and proud.” Deloria went on to propose that people’s dreams, their spirit, their whole way of connecting to life are all intimately connected to the land out of which they came and grew up. I think that’s true for me. And where I came from is right on the line between the east and west, looking west.

So my first source is Geography, and my second **(2)** is **FAMILY**.

3<sup>rd</sup> child – “tag a long”

2 Grandmothers:

Grandma      *paternal* grandmother (brains, legacy)

Anya            *maternal* grandmother      (heart, now)

Aunt Fran & Uncle Hal — off-beat, lived with a view of the GG Bridge

2 older sisters and a younger brother (we remain close, and in touch)

*Memories of my Mom*

Singing      torch songs (*My Blue Heaven, Always, The Man I Love*)

**STORIES (3)** (A.A. Milne, *Wind in the Willows*)

Later: stories about zany families coping & having fun

*Please Don’t Eat the Daisies, Cheaper by the Dozen*

+ more sensitive issues: *e.g., To Kill a Mockingbird*)

I carried it on with my daughter; last story, at about 13:

*A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*

My family was demonstrative and playful (roughhousing, “tricks”)

We had a cabin in NW Pennsylvania, the “Furrer Peace”

It was here where I got acquainted with my fourth source (4): **NATURE**

Tree House, long summers

In Cleve. across the street from my house there was a large wooded park:

I would play there all the time, alone or with a friend just playing.

I enjoyed many urban, civilized things, too:

Pop culture and pop heroes: cowboys especially

Baseball: Indians center fielder Jimmy Pearsall was my favorite player

I *still* love baseball.

Another source (5), though I wouldn’t have acknowledged it at the time, was my **Unitarian Universalist Church**.

My parents (and the church) held liberal social and economic views.

Pro civil rights pro labor United World Federalists

Billy Wallace story

The Shaker Heights Unitarian Church was no typical UU congregation

500+ kids in Sunday school

Robert Shaw Choral

“For the Beauty of the Earth”

My parents’ modernist views included respect for the work of *Sigmund Freud*

My sixth source is the first one that’s essentially an idea. (6) **Unconscious Motivation** – the idea that people are motivated by passions that are often unknown even to themselves.

My Dad, for all his charm and accomplishments, suffered from *recurrent depressions*

When I was 8 he left academia & went into the corporate world;

Suddenly he was away on business a lot.

His problems with depression and my simultaneous flirtations with delinquency led my aunt Fran to recommend *family therapy*

(Freud, Virginia Satir, family systems)

Freud’s great insight: people are motivated by deep, unconscious impulses.

And these *can* be brought to consciousness. People *can* grow in insight—becoming more revealed to themselves. More self-aware.

The strong civil rights emphasis at the Shaker Heights Unitarian Church plus a variety of personal factors eventually led my Mom, in the mid-‘60s, to go back to work as an inner-city librarian. She was one of the few working mothers I knew.

Meanwhile, I became very involved in activities at the local YMCA and, later, the Boy Scouts. Glenn Paine at the Y and Karl Bruch, my scoutmaster, were wonderful role models and, in their way, excellent surrogate dads. I became, over the years, quite adept at recognizing and reaching out to people like that. Boy Scouts I loved. Scouts inspired my social climbing instinct: I made it to Eagle.

Also important in who I became were some **GREAT TEACHERS (7)**

Mr. Fried      Mrs. Goodwin      Mr Olsen      Miss Landau

These public school teachers were excellent – they encouraged me to pursue excellence and stimulated my ambition: private school & high achievement

In the summer of '65 I landed my first job, at Beaumont Scout Reservation

- Working for a fool → taught me about *worker solidarity*
- I was introduced to Bob Dylan (folk music)

So now an eighth source: **(8) POETRY**

The use of imagery to activate the right hemisphere. I had read “The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere” and that kind of thing, but it wasn’t until I started listening to Dylan that I began to understand what poetry is actually about—learning to think metaphorically.

“If you seek understanding,” said my seminary teacher Bernie Loomer, “forget about the philosophers. Go to the poets.”

Walt Whitman 1855

*“There was a child went forth every day;  
and the first object he look’d upon, that object he became;  
and that object became part of him for the day, or a certain part of the day,  
or for many years, or stretching cycles of years.  
The early lilacs became part of this child,  
And grass, and white and red morning-glories, and white and red clover,  
and the song of the phoebe-bird,...*

And the fish suspending themselves so curiously below there, and the beautiful  
curious liquid,  
And the water-plants with their graceful flat heads, all became part of him...

His own parents, he that had father’d him and she that had conceiv’d him in her  
womb and birth’d him,  
They gave this child more of themselves than that,  
They gave him afterward every day, they became part of him...

The family usages, the language, the company, the furniture, the yearning and  
swelling heart,  
Affection that will not be gainsay’d...

These became a part of that child who went forth every day, and who now goes, and  
will always go forth every day.”

In seminary I studied the writings of George Herbert Mead, a pioneer social psychologist who taught at the University of Chicago in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Mead writes with great

insight about how self-conscious awareness occurs; how objects and people outside of us become incorporated internally—how they become us. As the Transcendentalist Unitarian poet Walt Whitman poetically described seventy-five years earlier.

*We* become objects to ourselves, too, which can, all too often, lead one to lose touch with his or her still small inner voice.

Poetry speaks to that inner voice and has a way of drawing it out self-expressively.

I had a great high school experience. The mid-'60s were in full swing

|              |                  |              |
|--------------|------------------|--------------|
| Great music: | British invasion | Motown       |
|              |                  | Leo's Casino |

Dances at the local Amory, Boston Mills,  
Vermillion, & Mentor-on-the-Lake, OH

|            |                               |
|------------|-------------------------------|
| Athletics: | “jock strap” theology         |
| Theater:   | <i>Ensemble</i> consciousness |

The greatest of my high school teachers, however, had to be **LOVE (9)**.

Helen Roby: breakthrough from isolation phone calls dreams  
All so wholesome  
(we were well-scrubbed Mid-westerners, after all...)

I graduated from high school in **1968**. That's #(10).

1968 was a very turbulent year:  
Tet Offensive, MLK, RFK, Chicago Convention, Fred Hampton  
It all radicalized me politically  
It was a very disruptive year for me personally:  
My dog died, Helen, graduation, dad's suicide, move, off to college...

The late '60s *was* a great time to go to college.

Freshman year was problematic, but soon I got squared away.  
Good friends                    *fantastic* teachers  
Jay Gomer Williams: I asked him what to make of...?

My eleventh source (11): **LSD**.

It was never a part of my lifestyle; in the words of Zen scholar

Alan Watts: “When you get the message, hang up the phone.”

Mr. Williams was a godsend because he provided a framework by which I could integrate these remarkable inner experiences into a deep cultural context:

William Blake, Meister Eckhart, and mostly *Carl G. Jung*.

C.G. Jung provided my first flashlight to help me find my way around the labyrinthine mystery of the psyche.

*Image* of the Collective Unconscious.

Important as reading Jung was, *even more important* was my very favorite teacher and mentor, John Mattingly.

He was a Classicist

Employed the Socratic method (with love)

He was a true philosopher: always learning...

“It’s the questions that are important. You work out the answers in your adulthood.” In the two years following graduation I spent many weekends with Mr. and Mrs. Mattingly. Extraordinary initiation into the life of the mind.

And then I left for California and seminary. More good teachers, and one in particular—who became a colleague, the Reverend Paul Sawyer. Paul Sawyer and Mr. Mattingly were my two **MENTORS (12)**: they, like all my other sources, became a part of me.

Three other sources: Number **(13)** would have to be the many special **CONGREGANTS** I’ve known over the years: women and men who taught me how to be a good minister. Yes, I learned a thing or two in seminary, reading theology, church history, and the like. I also learned a lot from my intern supervisor, the Reverend David Rankin, at the First Unitarian Church of San Francisco. And I’ve learned a lot reading Alban Institute books about congregational life. But when it comes to actually practicing parish ministry, by far my best teachers (and there have been many) have been the balanced, caring, and hard working church members over the years that helped me learn this craft. I could name a lot of them... but that would require another sermon....

One particular member of my family deserves a place of her own: **my daughter (14)**, Meredith, now a psychiatric social worker, thirty-four years of age, and a mother herself. The joys and terrors of parenthood... what can I say? It teaches you a lot, about what’s important (hanging in there) and what’s not (keeping up with the Joneses next door, *or* with their materialistic offspring). Our children see us better and more accurately than anyone else. They recognize their parents’ gifts and their limitations as well as anyone. They are biologically programmed to love their parents unequivocally—if their parents only pay attention. And not too much attention, becoming helicopter moms and dads in the process. Sing to them and read to them like my mother did. Make your home a welcoming place for their friends. One doesn’t need a fancy home, just a warm one, filled with music and laughter and the honest expression of emotions. This isn’t to say that discipline or order are not important—they’re very important. But such need never be harsh, only fair and directed towards keeping one’s whole family system on an even keel and where everyone—kids included—contribute to the greater family good. Mostly it was my daughter taught me these things.

One last source goes without saying, but, still, it has to be held up: my **FRIENDS (15)**. At the top of that list I include both of my former wives, Susan (Meredith’s mom) and later—and for over twice as long—Deborah. Many other friends, too, have been important throughout my life. Indeed, close friends are the most concrete example of grace that I’ve known. Just as I’ve learned a lot from love, I’ve also learned a lot when my heart’s been broken—and friends were there to commiserate, and help me through. When I’ve had struggles at work. When my father died; always friends helped me

through. Friends—to argue with, joust, dialogue, vent in front of, or just to go fishing with. “Show me your friends and I’ll show you whom you are,” my grandmother Anya used to say. I have been blessed with good friends all my life.

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These places, these people and events have all contributed to who I’ve become. They’re *my* sources; they’re *me*.

Who are you? Who (and what and where) are *your* sources” How did nature, poetry, stories, and your families nurture and encourage (or thwart and try to prevent) the enfoldment of each of your personalities? What other touchstones were there? Are there now?

Think about it. And let me know. And then, as I learned to do with my mentor Mr. Mattingly, we can begin to transverse the infinite landscape of our souls together.

So may it be. And so it is.

Shalom. Amen. Namaste.

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