

Artless



THE ODYSSEY OF A
REPUBLICAN
CULTURAL CREATIVE

a memoir by

Gary D. Cole

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A MEMOIR BY

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Artless: The Odyssey of a Republican Cultural Creative
by Gary D. Cole

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WASHINGTON (NEARLY)

I was about to start the perfect job. All my friends said they could not imagine a better fit. After two decades of laboring in the trenches of the performing arts and Republican politics, I had been offered the position of Deputy Chairman for Grants & Awards at the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) in the administration of President George W. Bush. I would be in charge of a program that annually awarded over \$60 million to arts organizations all around the country—a miniscule sum in the overall federal budget, but an enormous amount relative to total arts funding. I would have the chance to apply on a national scale what I had learned in Portland, Oregon, co-founding and shaping two innovative theater organizations and working for years on the political front lines. I was the right guy in the right place.

The offer came on a Monday in early June '03 while I was at my parents' home outside of Chicago. Our family was still giddy in the wake of my brother's wedding that weekend, ending a long

bachelorhood that my mother feared would be everlasting. There happened to be some champagne in the fridge, and we toasted a fabulous opportunity that had come along after a period of bitter struggle. A few years before, I had left a successful law practice to launch a company that captured outstanding new theater on digital video and to manage the construction of a new performance space for the nonprofit theater I headed. Both projects had taken a far greater toll on my marriage, emotional state, and pocketbook than anticipated, and we celebrated an office that offered a graceful transition from the strains of arts entrepreneurship and brought my wife and two young children closer to family in the East and Midwest.

This job was also the ultimate validation of my belief that I could be both a devoted arts professional and a dedicated Republican. I was well aware that the arts and Republican politics were an unusual combination, but in my view a valid one. I understood that the Republicans had traditionally been the party of the Establishment—of conventional success in society—and that artists more often than not were outsiders and outcasts. I knew, painfully, that virtually no one I worked with in the theater world was registered Republican and that their reaction to my politics was usually some mixture of amazement and contempt.

But I was a Republican because I subscribed to two fundamental values: personal liberty and responsibility and skepticism of government. These I also considered—and still consider—to be at the heart of artistic creation. To me art is undiluted, uncompromised individual expression. The artist cannot hide behind the corporate veil or organizational cloak, but is laid bare through direct communication with those who experience the art, whether it be a viewer standing before a painting or an audience member awash in the sounds of a musical composition. The artist has no choice but to accept responsibility for the work of art. Govern-

ment's corresponding obligation is to offer the freedom that allows artists to create according to the dictates of their art, which is why a healthy skepticism is always in order. Governments—good, bad, or indifferent—have a tendency to support those who support them and attach strings to their patronage. Undue reliance on governmental largesse tends to produce art that is a captive of that government, rather than a product of the robust and unflinching independence that is the hallmark of great art.

The writer David Brooks wrote in the *Atlantic* that “any Republican who contemplates a career in academia these days is both a hero and a fool.” I will admit to occasional feelings of both heroism and folly as a lone Republican in the theater, a sea of those otherwise registered. Despite the comparable political imbalance, however, academia is not the arts. Art by its very nature tends to be decentralized and dispersed, not institutionalized into the massive edifice that is the modern university. An artist does not need to be a card-carrying member of a thought-conforming faculty in order to make art. Art tends to exist at the margins of society, and at the margin it is possible to take risks and defy orthodoxy in a manner academics would brave at their peril.

On an admittedly small scale, I had practiced in the arts what I had preached in politics. I had shaped a nonprofit performing arts organization that reflected my values, and the result was one of the rising theater companies in Portland. Through entrepreneurship I had sought to expand the audience for the arts by putting great new theater on digital video, and my company had achieved national recognition (if not yet, alas, profitability). I had demonstrated that not only was there no contradiction between my devotion to the arts and Republican politics, but that the two could flourish in tandem.

Or so I thought, as I sipped champagne and basked in a congratulatory glow that June afternoon. I soon found that I had been

sadly, and utterly, mistaken. The divergent strands of art and Republicanism that I had woven into the fabric of my identity over the past twenty years came wildly unraveled. I was left holding the frayed ends, numb at what proved to be a short-lived tenure as a senior Bush administration official. Very short-lived.

It took me month after excruciating month to come to grips with the demolition of my personal mythology. Not only had I not proven myself to be that singular being, a Republican artist (or at least an artistic Republican) able to reach the top rank of both pursuits, but I was now jobless and directionless. I regrouped as best I could, selling our home in Portland and resettling in the Carolinas, where my wife's family has deep roots.

At first I clung to my hurt and my anger, both boon companions who, unlike my former Republican comrades, had not deserted me. I was devastated by my treatment at the hands of the Bush gang and prepared to denounce the administration as the intolerant, pandering, brutal, cowardly, reactionary regime that roughly half the country believed them to be. I could not bring myself to watch the news programs to which I had formerly been addicted, but when I did see images of the President I beheld not the tough, decisive leader I had campaigned for but the smug, narrow-minded jackass so many of my colleagues in the arts saw in the White House. The nation's bookshelves were groaning with weighty tomes blasting the mendacity of Bush and his fellow travelers, and I found myself primed and ready to add to the chorus.

Then, as I settled into a routine in my new home—taking my children to sports and dance practice, discovering different regional rhythms in the local press, finding new runs through the woods—the bitterness began to subside. Perhaps, I thought, I'll just walk away from it all and, though not a Christian, simply turn the other cheek. I immersed myself in a childhood memoir about my years as a paperboy for the *Chicago Tribune*, my first ef-

fort at writing since the completion of the play that had led to the founding of my theater company. The memories of once beloved customers along my old paper route were a balm to my wounded spirit.

But I hadn't walked away from much in life, and even after a few months of emotional convalescence, I could tell I wasn't going to be able to do it here. What a little distance from the fray enabled me to see, though, was that my disastrous turn in the Bush administration had forced a choice of paths, a choice I had been unable or unwilling or uncalled upon to make in over twenty years of straddling the contrarian and the conformist, fringe theater and the CIA, Judaism and Christianity, and (to borrow once again from David Brooks) the bohemian and the bourgeois. I felt compelled to retrace the steps of my odyssey as a Republican cultural creative, both to arrive at closure over the ruin of my grand aspirations and to give a personal account of one man's rugged hike along cultural fault lines.

I have by no means relaxed my views of the Bush administration. I do believe my story, the story of a Republican insider and grassroots arts entrepreneur whose bid for high-ranking office tumbled into our country's yawning culture gap, has something to offer to the debate over the character of this administration, and I will gladly air my opinions.

But I have come to believe that I owe George Bush and his confederates a debt of gratitude, as they did me a great service in dictating a choice in my life. The arts are where I belong, at least as much family obligations, available resources, and creative talents will allow. Had I remained in a senior position at the NEA, I am convinced I would have been called upon to act as a censor of the arts, charged with ensuring that potentially controversial grant applications were buried deep in the bowels of the bureaucracy. I have come to realize that I had spent far too long champi-

oning liberty both in the arts and as a Republican to compromise myself as Bush & Co. would have had me do.

So I lost the perfect job. But I found that after years of driving on both sides of the center line without incident, a spectacular crash had guided me to the right, or perhaps I should say the proper, side of the road. I may not have been the right guy, but after slipping off the high wire of a balancing act that had opened back in college, I had finally landed in the right place.

BERKELEY

My odyssey begins as it ends, in an attempt to serve a Bush. I was standing on a street corner in Berkeley, California in '80 trying to persuade passersby to register as Republicans. St. Jude must have been smiling somewhere. If ever there were a cause more lost than this one, it had escaped my notice.

I was in Berkeley attending the University of California during my junior year abroad. Berkeley was technically still part of the United States, I knew, but for someone who had grown up in a placid, conventional suburb outside of Chicago and spent his first two years in college at a leafy campus in rural New England this was a lot more abroad than the south of France. "Berserkley," as it was fondly known, was celebrated/notorious for its People's Park demonstrations against the Vietnam War in the late sixties. Many of the radicals and rabblers had never left town. They could be found—graying and fraying—among the gaggle of alternative/organic/holistic establishments off Telegraph Avenue that bore no

resemblance to any downtown I had ever set foot in.

I had come to Berkeley to find something that was missing in my sheltered collegiate life. My school, Williams College, was a wonderful place: a picture postcard campus full of bright, motivated, well-rounded star students who wore their elite status with casual grace. I had found great friends, academic challenge, and terrific sweaters.

But not fulfillment. The provincial nature of Williamstown, an isolated village of 1,500 in far northwestern Massachusetts, had begun to wear by my second year. Diversity was not then the household buzzword it has since become. Despite some efforts on the college's part, the greatest mark of differentiation within the student body was whether you had gone to a rural, donor-enriched prep school or a suburban, property tax-enriched public school. Williams seemed the beaten path, and I needed a detour. I craved the pulse, the rough-and-tumble, of a big city, major university campus.

I figured Berkeley was about as far as I could go in the opposite direction—geographically, culturally, socially—and still get a first-rate education. The University of California system was regarded as one of the best in the country, and Berkeley (aka Cal) was its flagship school. Thinker of big thoughts that I deemed myself to be, I had chosen philosophy as my major, and the university had an internationally acclaimed department. The Bay Area still held the promise of romance and redemption that had bewitched so many, including my own parents when they fled Cleveland for San Francisco in the late fifties and had contrived to conceive me there.

Cal accepted me as a transfer student (they sadly didn't consider themselves a junior year abroad location), and I arrived in town during the summer of '79. A family friend had wangled me a job as a busboy in a coffeehouse/restaurant in San Francisco's bustling Union Street district, and I commuted via bus from a frat

house in the Berkeley hills that rented dirt-cheap rooms over the summer. As the new guy, I invariably drew the worst shifts, sometimes closing the restaurant well after midnight on Saturday night and then opening it for brunch early on Sunday morning. Several times I just brought my sleeping bag, pushed back the tables, and slept on the floor—a little fitfully, as the restaurant next door was operated as a halfway house for ex-convicts. When I did take the bus back to Berkeley after a late shift, I found walking up Bancroft Way after midnight to be a scene out of *The King of Hearts*—wraith-like figures darting across the street and disappearing into the mist, faint whispers and muffled echoes, distant laughter.

I soon discovered I was not in Williamstown anymore. After I'd been at the restaurant a few weeks one of the older waiters came up to me with the weekend section in hand. He said he had a date Friday night with someone about my age and wondered if I could make any movie suggestions. I looked over the listings and pointed out two or three films that looked good to me. He chose one, thanked me, and said: "I'm sure he'll love it!" I somehow managed to stifle my gasp. Guys dating guys was well beyond my social ken. When I shared this news with one of the cooks, he welcomed me to San Francisco and said that he and I were probably the only straight guys working at the place. He then flashed a lecherous, conspiratorial grin and remarked that the waitresses, most of them very pretty and in their twenties or thirties, knew the lousy odds for women in this town and needed to be consoled from time to time.

My Williams background did come in handy in one respect. I had taken Music 101 my freshman year and by the end of the term could distinguish Bach from Brahms with some regularity. The restaurant featured Baroque music as its soundtrack, and I was amazed at the number of times patrons would motion me over and ask me to identify the composer of whatever was then

playing. I often knew the answer, but even when I didn't I was amazed at how often "It sounds like Vivaldi" would command a nice extra tip (if the waiter deigned to share it with me).

Once school started, I was both thrilled with the novelty of it all and petrified by knowing virtually no one in this sea of humanity so far from my moorings. I wound up living in a group house a mile or so south of campus that turned out to be across the street from the local Hare Krishna Temple. Occasionally I would be awakened early in the morning by the sounds of chanting and drum-beating coming from our saffron-robed neighbors. I sometimes answered in kind in the heat of the day by shouting epic utterances from Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* from our roof deck, stripped to the waist and sporting mirror shades. I found the Krishna local color more amusing than annoying until federal authorities seized a submachine gun from the back of the headman's Porsche, after which I kept the Nietzsche to a dull roar.

Williams students are always busy, the result of years of relentless résumé building, and I was chafing at the relative inactivity of just hitting the books and people-watching. I had run track at Williams, but I figured that the Berkeley team was not in dire need of a mediocre sprinter from a Division III school. I had also served on the Williams Lecture Committee, where my signal achievement had been helping to land a speech by celebrity alum George Steinbrenner (which he then proceeded to cancel the day before the event after publicity had been out for weeks), but there seemed to be too much bureaucracy in the comparable organization at Cal. I decided to sign on as a reporter for the *Daily Californian*, the university's student newspaper. I lucked into a plum first assignment, covering a reported plutonium leak at the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory operated by the university system, but soon found myself on an obscure campus finance beat

with articles well below the fold and well after the front page. I actually enjoyed my little niche of bond issue and financial aid stories, as it gave me an upfront look at the massive underbelly of the school and produced useful information for students about how they could afford to pay for college. But like any cub reporter, I craved the limelight.

It soon found me, in spite of myself. The *Daily Cal* was run largely by journalism grad students with sandals and beards who had been around in the glory days of Berkeley anti-war activism and saw the newspaper as an instrument of social change. We were in a presidential election cycle, and they devoted a healthy chunk of the paper to savaging the Republican presidential candidates, particularly former California Governor Ronald Reagan. This outraged the student government, which was dominated by conservative, Southern California, polo shirt and khaki-clad fraternity types who wanted the *Daily Cal* to cover campus activities. This sparked a delicious confrontation—rock-ribbed Orange County versus tie-dyed Berkeley—in which the student senate threatened to cut off the paper’s funding unless they curtailed their national political coverage and shifted their focus to the campus. The editors railed in high dudgeon against totalitarian censorship, but they finally capitulated.

Which meant they needed to find someone who was actually covering campus affairs. Which meant me. In a glorious stretch of four days, I had no fewer than five front-page stories, most dealing with threatened changes to federal student loan programs. I could barely contain my excitement as I pulled the top paper out of one of the campus kiosks to find yet another above-the-fold byline.

My enthusiasm was not shared by the editorial staff. I strolled into the newsroom one afternoon to find the paper’s political editor, who could have passed for Che Guevara, glaring at the day’s front page and cursing: “Who the @\$% is Gary Cole and what

the %\$#@ is this *&^% doing on the front page again?!!”

After a week or so, the student government relented. The paper got its appropriation, the editors went back to castigating Ronald Reagan, and my stories went back to page twenty-three.

The incident, however, had helped to pique my interest in the '80 presidential campaign. I was accustomed to following politics as a blood sport, raised as I was outside of Chicago in the heyday of Mayor Daley, but this would be the first election where I was actually old enough to give a thumb's up or down to the gladiators. I had a deeply rooted cynicism toward the Democratic Party, the product of soaking up years of manipulation and corruption on the pages of the *Chicago Tribune*. I had grown up viewing Republicans as good government reformers trying to make democracy function in the face of the dirty tricks of the Daley machine and its allies in organized labor. I felt little affinity for the congressional wing of the Democratic Party, which seemed dominated by Southern Dixiecrats like John Stennis of Mississippi, Herman Talmadge of Georgia, and Robert Byrd of West Virginia—hugely powerful masters of pork barrel politics with questionable records on civil rights.

The GOP, of course, was also the party of Abraham Lincoln, a demigod in my home state (its slogan is still the Land of Lincoln). The youth of Illinois were all schooled in Lincoln's courageous facing down of slaveholding Democrats in order to preserve the Union. Lincoln embodied the image of a progressive, reformist, freedom-loving party arrayed against the feudal Democratic forces of prejudice and exploitation.

There was an element of youthful revolt in my choice of party. My mother had rebelled against the reflexive Republicanism of my grandmother and was an unabashed liberal who had first exposed me to politics at a Eugene McCarthy “Clean for Gene” rally during the '68 presidential campaign. I had never set out to

poke Mom in the eye as such, but I had prided myself on my independence since I started making my own walking around money at the age of eight as a *Tribune* paperboy. I was determined to chart my own course politically, and it suited me fine if our trails should fork.

My poor opinion of Democrats had not been helped by the performance of President Carter. He struck me as a nice, well-meaning man who was hopelessly out of his depth dealing with an international crisis in Iran and an economy wracked by gasoline shocks and double-digit inflation and interest rates. I understood why the voters had responded to the cesspool of Watergate by electing a total outsider untainted by the scandals in Washington, but I thought the result was an overmatched administration that was woefully short on credentials.

And credentials meant a great deal to me. I may have been the product of a privileged background, the son of a children's heart doctor and a Wellesley-educated educator, the beneficiary of one of the nation's best public school systems in the Chicago suburb of Winnetka, but I had worked hard to build the record that got me into Williams. I had strived to punch the right tickets—the grades, the after-school organizations, the community involvement—and I had a natural affinity for those who had taken the route of well-rounded achievement.

So when I went to size up the field of potential Republican opponents to Jimmy Carter, I quickly settled on George Bush. He seemed to have done it all—congressman, ambassador, CIA head, war hero—and preserved a certain grace and dignity throughout. He was the perfect successor to the hapless Carter, a seasoned hand who could restore order and confidence in Washington. He had formidable competition in the Republican primaries, but Ronald Reagan struck me as a Hollywood B-movie lightweight, Bob Dole as a dark hatchet man, John Connally as a slick Texas

operator, Phil Crane (my former congressman) as nice hair/little substance, John Anderson as a principled no-hoper, and Howard Baker as a captive of the legislative branch.

I beat a path to the Bush volunteer corps, which landed me—shiny campaign button on blue oxford shirt and all—on that Berkeley street corner urging passing pedestrians to register Republican so they could vote for Bush in the primary. I might have stood a chance had I set up my table on Prospect or Piedmont where the fraternities had their houses, but off Telegraph I was mercilessly heckled. The only comparable abuse I had witnessed was of visiting team outfielders by the bleacher bums in Wrigley Field, and at least the players were paid for their pains. I stuck by my man, however, through that dismal exercise in futility and the hard slog of the primaries. Once it became clear that Reagan would gain the nomination, I naively assumed that my candidate would obey his own admonitions about the former movie star's dangerous inexperience and lack of substance and spurn any offer to serve on his ticket. I was devastated when Bush agreed to become Reagan's running mate. I grasped at some intuitive level that a man with a first-rate résumé should not turn down another impressive credential, but I was left with a sickening feeling of betrayal and little desire to watch two men with big smiles and small track records duke it out in the fall.

WILLIAMSTOWN

I needed tangible evidence of the transformation I had undergone in Berkeley. As I contemplated my return to Williams and my old friends, I felt compelled to demonstrate that I was not the shallow sophomoric suburbanite they'd known before. As I couldn't very well wear my *Daily Cal* clippings around my neck, I did what countless generations of men had done before me to display their manhood: I grew a beard (or rather a wispy collection of reddish whiskers that made for an untidy tangle around my chin but left an almost Lincolneseque void above my lip).

Despite its mustache-challenged appearance, my new foliage served its purpose. As I passed my classmates on campus, I would get those quizzical looks that said, "This person looks familiar, but who the hell is he?" This was exactly the effect I had sought to produce. I'd spent a year at the intellectual and cultural powerhouse that was Berkeley, after all, not gawking with tourists in Provence.

The beard soon came in handy in other respects. Shortly after school started I saw an audition notice for the Drama Department's fall play, George Bernard Shaw's classic *Major Barbara*. I had served as the equivalent of a spear carrier in the chorus of a few high school musicals and had been roped by a friend into playing the Third Shepherd in the Medieval Club's Christmas pageant, but I had never attempted serious theater before. My year away from the track team had left neither I nor the team in desperate need of each other, however, and working a beat on the *Williams Record* held little appeal after my flirtation with the big time at the *Daily Cal*. More critically, I felt that taking a part in a play would showcase some of the flair, the new dimension, the added stature, that I had gained at Berkeley. I checked out the script and prepared to audition.

Thanks in large part to the beard, I believe, I was cast as the broken-down old Cockney Peter Shirley. Peter is ministered to by the aristocratic Salvation Army Major Barbara Undershaft (played by Carolyn McCormick, who went on to minister to the criminally insane as a psychiatrist on *Law & Order*). I struggled as a well-fed child of privilege to reach the impoverished despair of this failing man, but thrived on the wit of Shaw's dialogue, the immediacy of the interaction with my fellow actors, and the intensity of the rehearsal process. Not to mention the cast party, which was a marked improvement on most of the keg-centered festivities on campus.

Socializing with the theater crowd, however, had its perils. One night after a few post-performance drinks with the cast, I headed back to the dorm around eleven thirty to find one of my classmates shooting baskets out back. Perhaps spurred by my slight inebriation and gray hair and beard (I had yet to remove my make-up), he challenged me to a game of one-on-one. Basking in the glow of my performance and emboldened by a five-

inch height advantage, I took the bait. I did not reckon on my diminutive adversary driving to the hoop and then unexpectedly stopping and bringing his head up into my chin, which sank my teeth right into my lower lip. Blood flowed freely. My opponent, who was pre-med, decided to put his march to victory on hold and escort me to the infirmary. The expression of the nurse on duty at the sight of this twenty-year-old student—grizzled beard stained with blood, gray-sprayed hair wild and unkempt, rivulets of wrinkle make-up and perspiration streaming down the nose—had nothing on Macbeth seeing Banquo's ghost.

Above all else, I relished those performances where Peter Shirley and I flowed into one another, when I had no consciousness of playing a part and no awareness of the audience beyond the lights. This happened on only a few nights during the run of *Major Barbara*. Most of the time I could not rid my mind of the distractions of my day, of the presence of my girlfriend in the audience, of another actor's inability to use deodorant. During these performances I delivered my lines competently, but I knew I had left something on stage.

I was exhausted after the play closed, but I felt a tremendous sense of loss. I had never been part of a group that had labored so intensely and melded so cohesively, only to go our separate ways after a few short months. It wasn't so much that the cast and crew were to be my lifelong friends, but that we had made a huge mutual commitment that so quickly dissolved into nothingness. Even sports had not produced this sense of shared sacrifice for me, in part because a track team is pretty much a collection of individual competitors, but also because of the element of artistic expression that somehow charged me spiritually more than any physical competition ever had. I longed to recapture that unity, that merging of self and character, which had occurred on stage during those few fleeting performances.

The Drama Department had other thoughts in mind. They decided to stage Harold Pinter's *Old Times* as their winter show, a dark comedy that featured three actors, exactly one of whom was a man. My kinship with my fellow *Major Barbara* performers soon gave way to ruthless competition for the one male part, which did not appear to require a beard. I made the callback round of auditions, but when the cast list was posted on the bulletin board of the department, my name was not on it.

I was certainly not shocked by the outcome, but I was surprised at how disappointed I was. My career on stage had consisted of one production, but already I had a sense of expectation and even entitlement. I railed at the Drama Department for selecting a college play that had so few opportunities for students and determined that I would not be denied in the spring.

In the meantime, I had accepted an invitation to move in with some friends to a converted farmhouse a few miles from the college. They had asked me to join them when I returned from Berkeley, but I was hesitant to go off campus after being away from the school for a year. A few months of dorm life soon cured me of my reluctance.

This house was notorious. During my time in Williamstown it had been the lair of a succession of hockey and lacrosse players, hard-partying seniors who had hit the social apex of a hierarchical small college and played it for all it was worth. These were still Williams guys, of course, so they cared about their careers to come, but they knew that the die had largely been cast by senior year, most certainly by the second semester.

My housemates were the in-crowd. They were successful athletes from prestigious prep schools. They had money, looks, and girls. Everyone knew who they were. They captained major sports teams. They drove Saabs. Williams College had officially banned fraternities in the sixties because they had effectively monopo-

lized the school's social life, but this ersatz farm was for all intents and purposes a frat house in exile.

I felt at home there. Several of my housemates were good friends, and I got on well with the rest. While admittedly not at their level, I had been an athlete, so I did not feel out of place in a jock house. After the relative asceticism of Berkeley, the jam-packed parties, the six-pack croquet competitions under headlights after dark, and the impromptu five-iron competitions over the pond out back were a hell of a lot of fun.

But I was a Jew in a house of WASPs, and I felt it keenly. Not because I wore my Jewishness on my sleeve. My family had done much to assimilate, including punching that surest of tickets to the American mainstream: sports. My paternal grandfather, a third baseman on the Case Engineering college baseball team in Cleveland, had changed his name from Cohn or Cohen to Cole early in life to improve his job prospects. My maternal grandfather had gone to Washington & Lee University in Virginia, one of the bastions of the South's Protestant aristocracy, and went on to become one of the original owners of the Cleveland Browns football franchise. My father had been an outstanding swimmer in high school and at the University of Michigan and had been rushed by a number of Gentile fraternities who had no idea he was Jewish.

While my parents had both grown up within a Jewish social circle in the upper middle class Cleveland suburb of Shaker Heights, neither family was religious. As a teenager my mother had gone through some sort of confirmation ceremony, but not a bat mitzvah, and my father had almost no religious education. Our short-lived efforts to celebrate the Sabbath when I was a boy had been aborted because my mother couldn't stop snickering at my father's atrocious Hebrew pronunciation. I had attended Sunday school for a year or two, but stopped going one weekend and never went back.

My parents had chosen in the early sixties to buy a home in the upscale Chicago suburb of Winnetka, which had a small Jewish population, rather than in the more traditional Jewish enclaves of Highland Park and Glencoe. This had a huge impact on my upbringing. Most of my friends growing up were not Jewish, and I developed very little sense of Jewish identity. I knew my ancestry, of course, and at some unspoken level was proud to be part of a people who had survived and accomplished so much, but my ethnic heritage and religion came to be topics I preferred to avoid. When the conversation would turn in this direction, there was a slightly sickening sensation in the pit of my stomach. I usually managed to escape outright lies about my background through a deft facility in changing the subject or by simply naming the countries from which my ancestors had emigrated—Austria, Germany, Russia, France. I found it easy with a WASPy last name to blend in with non-Jews, and I did.

Life on the frat-house farm was of a different order of magnitude, however. I had always lived in a setting where there were other Jews around, in Winnetka or in the dorms at Williams, not to mention the radicals of Berkeley. This was the first time I had gone solo in the rites of assimilation, and I felt the self-inflicted sting of stereotype—I'm the brainy one, the one with the hooked nose (at least as much a product of a boyhood collision with a line drive as heredity, but there it was), the one whose thick black hair furled instead of flowed. My newfound enthusiasm for the theater only added to the sense of otherness. My housemates didn't quite know how to place my love of the stage; nor did I, for that matter.

Which didn't stop me from going full-bore in the auditions for the spring show *Ondine*, Jean Giraudoux's fanciful tale of a water nymph that had been a vehicle for Audrey Hepburn in the fifties. The beard came through once again. I landed the plum role of the King of the Sea, which allowed me to clap my hands and

conjure up all sorts of whiz-bang special effects. It was tremendous fun and offered a higher billing in the program than the relative bit player Peter Shirley. Most of my housemates attended and had far more to say about the sheer costume of the well-endowed actress playing Ondine than my stirring performance.

The close of the show brought the now familiar sense of let-down, although less severe with second semester senior festivities in full swing. I drank prodigious quantities of beer and whiled away the days until graduation whacking golf and croquet balls on the lawns of the farm. My maternal grandmother, a staunch Republican like her industrialist father before her, had never seen my Berkeley-inspired facial growth. I was slated to pick her up at the Albany airport and drive her to Williamstown for my graduation. I found I couldn't face her sporting my current foliage. On the spur of the moment I cut off the beard and felt that delicious tingle of newly unsheathed skin as the June breeze rustled through the lowered windows of my Honda Civic.

LONDON

I couldn't decide what to do for an encore. The theater had been an exhilarating excursion, but supporting roles in two small college productions did not appear to make a career. I suffered from the achiever's complex of expecting predictable returns from optimum efforts, and the contingent life of a struggling actor living from audition to audition was just too speculative for me. And frankly, I was hardly God's gift to acting.

As I neared my graduation from Williams, I hit on the notion of a year in London. I had spent a year in grade school there with my family during a sabbatical my father had taken and had become a confirmed Anglophile. Our family had sidestepped its heritage, so a country that so zealously embraced its own was startling and intoxicating. Good Jewish boy that I was, I had considered enrolling in law school, but I was tired of the familiar cycle of class/homework/exam that had been my daily grind for fifteen years. The nation was mired in recession in '81, and the job market was

dismal. I figured if I were just going to wind up in some stop-gap position, it may as well be in London.

I got lucky. It turned out that a family friend had strong ties to a prominent English law firm and arranged an interview with their New York partner. I was amazed when they offered me a one-year internship in their home office in London. My amazement was tempered a bit when I learned that the offer was for £5,200 for the whole year, about \$8,000 at the current exchange rate. My needs were modest, however, and the mother of another family friend was willing to provide room and board at her flat in west London at a reasonable rate.

I was treated like all of the English law graduates, which meant poorly. My paltry excuse for a desk was in the same office with a more senior attorney. Under the English system, lawyers generally study law at university for three years, then attend law school for a year before doing a two-year apprenticeship called pupillage for barristers (the bewigged and berobed lawyers who write briefs and argue in court) or articled clerkship (pronounced “clarkship”) for solicitors (basically all other lawyers). My firm were solicitors, so I was thrown in with a group of some thirty Oxford and Cambridge graduates who were “doing their articles.”

My innocence abroad vanished rapidly. One of the first cases I worked on featured a munitions manufacturer who had terminated one of their agents in South America. The agency contract called for a commission of fifteen percent, of which one percent was actually to be paid to the agent and the remaining fourteen percent was to line the pockets of various generalissimos. The terminated agent was apparently not as adept at bribery and graft as his successor, who managed to land a major arms deal a few months after his appointment. The terminated agent had the effrontery to claim that he was the one who had greased the skids for the deal and brought suit in English court demanding that he

receive the full commission. The manufacturer, a public company, had no intention of letting the lawsuit see the light of day and touch off a major scandal, but they were concerned that settling the case and paying off the disgruntled agent would violate the English version of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. We consulted an eminent barrister, who in the paneled majesty of his chambers reasoned this way and that in his plummy upper class accent before finally concluding that, on balance, the payoff could be supported. The client breathed a sigh of relief and cut a check.

My boss was swallowed by a huge case involving a swindle of the ruling family of a wealthy Middle Eastern country to the tune of several hundred million dollars. The malefactors blew mind-boggling sums on the international commodity markets, some days commanding more than half the trading volume in certain precious metals on major exchanges. The investigation occupied a squadron of lawyers in our department, including one mild-mannered solicitor who was feted extravagantly during one of his trips to the region. At the end of one evening of feasting, he was reportedly offered the services of a beautiful young woman. A happily married man, he respectfully declined and retired to his room. After he'd gotten ready for bed he heard a knock. He opened the door and found a boy who couldn't have been more than nine or ten. His hosts had assumed that if he were not interested in the attentions of lovely young girl...

These high-stakes, globe-spanning cases, and others involving Iraqi gun-running and currency speculation, were heady stuff for a callow, now beardless twenty-one-year-old fresh out of college. My adventures in international intrigue by day were accompanied by an orgy of theatergoing by night. I was astounded by how central the theater was to English culture. Major stars appeared in West End plays, openings were grand events, and reviews (which I'd never paid much attention to as a *Tribune* paper-

boy) were matters of serious consequence. I was captivated by the palatial London theaters, with their multi-tiered balconies, gilded ceilings, and plush seats—a far cry from the presentable but modest venue on the Williams campus. Theater was a force to be reckoned with in London, and it took me by storm.

I confess to having retained my student ID, which I justified by my intention to return to school the following year and by the poverty imposed by my lordly \$8,000 annual salary. Thus armed, I roamed the streets of London on an underpowered moped, darting into the narrowest of parking spaces and dashing up just before curtain for student rush tickets to the hottest shows of that season (and a number of others less celebrated): the breakthrough performance of Rupert Everett in *Another Country*, Julian Mitchell's ode to the British public school, communism, and cricket; Trevor Eve's brilliant lead in Mark Medoff's groundbreaking *Children of a Lesser God*; Brian Friel's moving take on Ireland and British colonialism, *Translations*.

But the shows that packed the greatest punch for me that year were revivals of two classic British comedies: Noel Coward's *Present Laughter* and Shaw's *Arms and the Man*. Wit, sparkle, repartee, retort—the elegance and effortlessness of expression were exhilarating, although as I left the theater I sensed the relative poverty of my own vocabulary. I felt a particular kinship with the *Arms and the Man* production, as I was, of course, in some small way a recent Shaw veteran myself.

Shaw's musings on the perilous romance of war took on a special relevance that spring, as the Falklands crisis erupted off the coast of Argentina. The Argentine government invaded the Falkland Islands, which were occupied by fewer than 2,000 inhabitants of mostly British origin. Britain then appeared to be wallowing in a mire of self-loathing, the product of years of imperial shrinkage, class warfare, and economic stagnation. The Falklands

affair looked to be another exercise in defeatism, as the initial military assessment was that these remote islands in the South Atlantic were too far off to recapture.

Margaret Thatcher, at that time only a few years into her first term as Prime Minister, saw things differently. She rallied public opinion in favor of launching a task force to repel the Argentine aggression. I followed the conflict intently and saw the collateral impact firsthand at my firm, as a number of our clients were stymied by the British government's decision to freeze Argentine assets.

For me, the Falklands crisis was a powerful lesson in national pride. Whatever the merits of their claim, the Argentines had used military force without apparent provocation and in clear contravention of the wishes of the Falklands inhabitants. Though I was conscious at some level of the tinpot nature of the affair—dispatching gunships to regain tiny sheep-dominated specks of rock thousands of miles distant—I was struck by the collective lifting of spirit in a nation that so desperately needed it. I hadn't seen much national pride in my own country in recent years—the legacy of Vietnam, Watergate, oil shocks, stagflation—and it was refreshing to see a patriotic outpouring in support of a just cause. It wasn't lost on me that it was a conservative government that had shown such bold leadership.

The Falklands also provided a striking illustration of personal responsibility. Lord Carrington, the distinguished Foreign Secretary in Prime Minister Thatcher's cabinet, resigned because he felt he had not prepared Britain sufficiently to deter the invasion. No one else seemed to fault him severely, but he believed that someone had to accept responsibility for the fiasco, and he was the man in charge of the relevant ministry. I was floored that someone would sacrifice his own career when he was not directly at fault, which contrasted so dramatically with President Nix-

on's refusal to resign until Watergate had reduced the nation to a stew of partisan vitriol.

I flirted with the prospect of remaining at my firm and becoming a British lawyer, but I was not an expatriate at heart. I had taken my detour and felt ready to return to the main road. I left London with rich memories of honorable conservatives in government and fabulous plays in the theaters.

PALO ALTO

I decided that if practicing law in America could be anything like the dizzying rush I had experienced in London, that was the profession for me. I applied from England, was accepted at Stanford Law School, and arrived in Palo Alto in the fall of '82. I soon achieved a certain notoriety as the very first person called on in my section's very first class. I never did live down my slightly stuttering summary of the facts of that first case, *Vosburg v. Putney*: "One Putney kicked one Vosburg in the shin..." I was thereafter and forever dubbed: "one Cole."

In the pressure cooker of the first year in law school, I was astounded to find an audition notice posted on the school bulletin board for a series of one-act plays by the legendary Bertholt Brecht. I had assumed my career as an actor was over. I had not reckoned with a rumpled, roly-poly, gay, Jewish theater junkie who ended up in my class. Marc Fajer, the notice-poster and director, had directed numerous plays as a Stanford undergraduate

but failed to gain admission to the prestigious graduate directing program at the University of Washington. He had, however, managed to get himself into Stanford Law, where he decided to take out his frustrated thespian ambitions on the rest of us.

The response to the audition notice from his risk-averse, career-driven fellow law students was underwhelming, so Marc brought in a few ringers from elsewhere on campus to fill out the cast. He cajoled the law school administration into letting him use a classroom as our theater, which prompted some quizzical looks from passing library-bound students as we belted out our lines in rehearsal. Marc somehow devised a rehearsal schedule that worked around the cast's class schedules, exams, and job interviews, although love of the greasepaint and the roar of the crowd was not going to stop a cast member paying a healthy five-figure tuition from accepting a flyback to New York for a top-dollar job. His rehearsals included time devoted to touching exercises and physical game-playing, which may have gone down well in the bohemian Drama Department of his undergraduate days but were viewed askance by the more buttoned-down law student types.

Our production of Brecht did not make anyone forget Marlene Dietrich in *The Three Penny Opera*, and it felt peculiar performing by night in a room where we law students had been grilled by day, but we acquitted ourselves respectably and emboldened Marc to expand our repertoire. Our second year featured productions of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (a natural for a law school crowd with its "pound of flesh" trial scene), starring a brave professor as Shylock and a type-cast dean as the Duke, and Lanford Wilson's *The Hot L Baltimore*, where I returned to my crusty codger acting origins playing the checker-wielding old coot Mr. Morse.

Our law school plays introduced me to some graduate students in the Drama Department, where I was also cast in a few shows. The most memorable of these was a medieval French farce

called *Master Pierre Pathelin*. The grad student who directed the play claimed it would originally have been performed by roving theater troupes that would have rotated the parts among the various company members. Accordingly, she rehearsed the show so that each of us would play different parts in turn. This proved to be an androgynous nightmare and was nixed by the Drama Department powers that be after a few weeks, but the experience came in handy one Saturday night when an actress failed to show up for performance. As her character, a busty French peasant woman, appeared only in the first act of the play and mine (a malicious judge) appeared only in the second act, I was asked by the director to strap on her yellow wig and enormous hook-on breasts and do my best. I somehow made it through the evening, although the gorgeous French folk song sung by the absent actress (whose parents were from France) became a raucous version of “Frère Jacques,” the only French song I knew.

Despite this frenetic acting schedule, I did manage to make it to most of my classes and keep up a grade point average that would not disgrace a Jewish mother. I had discovered by my second year at Stanford that what I enjoyed about the law was not poring over cases, but dealing directly with flesh and blood clients and the endless variation of fact patterns that human nature could produce. It was an easy decision not to go out for the Law Review, which left me time for theater and my other chief pastime, the Stanford Law Forum. The Law Forum was the law school’s public events organization and had traditionally focused on high-minded speeches by judges and eminent practitioners. I was a more shameless huckster than my predecessors as president and—despite a limited budget—deployed the prestige of Stanford to attract a motley crew of personalities, including: the celebrated trial lawyer Gerry Spence (who arrived from Jackson, Wyoming clad head to toe in buckskin), Antonin Scalia (before his ascension to

the Supreme Court), the loathsome McCarthy-era hatchet man Roy Cohn (a tiny, reptilian man who crawled from the back of the largest stretch limousine I had ever seen), divorce lawyer to the stars Marvin Mitchelson, and Communist Party USA head Gus Hall (whose mammoth Mesabi Range miner's paw engulfed mine when we shook hands).

I had little time in my schedule for politics, but the Law Forum did extend an invitation on a non-partisan basis to all of the presidential candidates to speak on the Stanford campus during the '84 campaign. We had no takers during the primaries, but the Mondale campaign decided after the convention in San Francisco that they would do their first joint appearance with the vanquished insurgent Gary Hart at Stanford in the fall. The campaign had enlisted the support of the usual suspects among the area Democratic groups, but they needed a bona fide student organization to serve as host because the university event staff who would set up lights, sound, and seating could only be paid through transfers from a university account. Somehow, the Law Forum ended up as the campus host for this marquee appearance, and I spent over a week dealing with oily advance men and earpiece-dangling Secret Service types.

The cost of the event far exceeded the Law Forum's annual budget, and I had received solemn promises from the Mondale campaign that we would have cash in hand to cover virtually all expenses well before the scheduled date. Days passed, and despite repeated assurances, no funds arrived. I was accustomed to shady dealing by Democrats as a boy growing up on the outskirts of the Chicago political machine, but not this close and personal. Finally, I was summoned to a dingy motel room near the San Francisco airport the night before the event and told that there had been a snafu and that no money would be available until after the joint appearance. With the beady, bloodshot eyes of the advance team

trained on me, I said that I would have to consider canceling the event, as the Law Forum couldn't cover the cost itself. They called my bluff. They knew I would be crucified on campus if I pulled the plug.

The weather soon avenged their treachery. An unrelenting downpour started several hours before the event and forced us indoors. The capacity of Stanford's Memorial Auditorium was far less than the campaign had expected outdoors and the spirits of the drenched crowd were low. Walter's daughter Eleanor Mondale was up on stage with me, however, and she looked terrific. Perhaps predictably, Vice President Bush campaigned in San Francisco the following day under brilliant sunshine. Months after the election, we finally got our payment thanks to an advance man who had stashed away some campaign funds for us in case we got stiffed.

My final year as a law student also brought the plum codger role of Polonius, sadly not in *Hamlet* but in Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*, Marc's last law school production. I felt born to say Polonius's celebrated line, "Though this be madness, yet there is method in it." This seemed an apt slogan for my job search, which was then in full swing. I had spent the summers after my first and second years at Stanford at large firms in Chicago, San Francisco, and Washington, DC (splitting my second summer between two cities). I thought the fall of my third year would be a leisurely process of elimination, as all three firms had made me attractive offers for a permanent job.

Then I saw a notice on the placement office bulletin board for interviews with the General Counsel's Office at the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). This gave me pause. I had been a trifle bored with my summer clerkships. The money was great, the lawyers sharp, and the offices top-drawer, but the work had given me nothing of the rush of international intrigue that had thrilled me

in London. I had no idea what a lawyer for the CIA would do, but it sounded alluring and mysterious at a time when my other options seemed predictable and uninspiring. I signed up for an interview, figuring that at least I could tell my grandchildren I'd had a meeting with "The Agency."

I arrived at the scheduled time only to find Marc Fajer stationed at a table near the interview room, protesting the CIA's presence on campus on behalf of the Gay & Lesbian Law Students Association. I was taken aback. I knew the CIA was a controversial agency, of course, but I'd not heard about any brouhaha over sexual preference. Marc was a close friend, as well as my long-time partner in theater, and the thought of crossing his impromptu picket line was troubling. At the same time, I was mighty curious to hear what these spooks had to say and see whether it was even worth considering a detour from the conventional law firm path. I hesitated briefly, then told my friend I would have to speak with him later about the CIA's policies and went on through the door.

The interviewer—a gray, unassuming man in a dark suit and red tie—was low-key, but he knew his pitch. He understood his competition at a school like Stanford were the big-time law firms, and he deftly undercut them at every turn. He could tell he was dealing with a young and impressionable prospect who wanted something more out of his career than just status and money, and he managed to blend foreign adventure, patriotism, and top-secret missions into an enticing concoction that was much more subtle than "Be all that you can be."

I walked out of the interview thinking, "Why the hell not?" I was single, and while the money was far less than the law firms were offering (\$26,500 versus as much as \$60,000), I could still afford to service my student loans. The economy had roared back from the doldrums of the early eighties, and law firms were snap-

ping up bodies out of schools like Stanford willy-nilly. I figured that I could try it for a few years and if it weren't to my liking, I could always head back to the private sector and find something worthwhile. The Agency made me an offer later in the fall, and I leaned strongly towards accepting it.

I still had to deal with two influential figures in my life: my mother and Marc Fajer. Mom, true to her bleeding heart, was convinced that the CIA and their fellow rogues at the FBI were a plague on Western civilization and sent me the grassy knoll conspiracy books to prove it. I loved my mother, but I was just as prepared to rebel against her as she had been to revolt against my rock-ribbed conservative grandmother.

Marc was in some ways a tougher challenge. I learned that the CIA's policy was to consider a person's sexual orientation in the recruitment process if the applicant were not out of the closet. The rationale was that sexual orientation could be a basis for blackmail if not previously disclosed to family members, friends, or business associates. While this struck me as supportable, if not compelling, Marc contended that this was just a smokescreen and that the real policy was to bar homosexuals altogether.

Curiously, Marc had a lot more evidence about discrimination by private firms than he did about the CIA. He had conducted an informal survey by sending some firms a résumé that highlighted his involvement with gay and lesbian organizations and other firms a résumé that made no mention of this aspect of his life. The rejection rate for the "gay" résumé was substantially higher than for the "straight" one. I argued to Marc that, whatever the sins of the CIA, they were not guilty of hypocrisy. At least they had the guts (as well as the legal responsibility) to articulate their policy publicly. The law firm discrimination struck me as more insidious, as they maintained a public face of tolerance while privately ensuring that gays and lesbians did not enter their workforce.

Many of my friends at Stanford had no time for Marc or his activism. These were my teammates in intramural sports and my golfing buddies on the Stanford course—essentially the Stanford Law School equivalent of my jock housemates at Williams, although more diverse. I understood their reaction to Marc, as he was easy to stereotype: a militantly gay, Jewish, artsy, non-athletic liberal from Long Island. I did not defend his politics, as they were not my own, but I felt a kinship with him as a co-conspirator in this strange and wonderful process of creating theater productions in the halls of Stanford Law School.

Marc's objections to the CIA's hiring policies, however, seemed speculative and short on data. The lure of involvement in clandestine operations and foreign travel was real. I accepted, to the supportive bemusement of my friends and the derision of a number of left-leaning classmates. The contempt was mutual. I felt that those who derided my public service talked a good game about going to law school to make a difference and then ended up accepting a fancy law firm job for big bucks. I resisted asking them how they planned to change the world billing 2,500 hours a year on Wall Street. As it happened, I—the Republican—was the only person in my class of 175 or so at Stanford to take a federal agency job right out of law school.

But first I had to run the security clearance gauntlet. This meant, among other things, passing a lie detector test, which made me queasy. I wasn't worried about being fingered as a foreign agent; it was the youthful inhaling I was concerned about. I came of age in the seventies, and virtually everyone I knew had smoked pot at least a few times and experimented with harder stuff. Suffice it to say that I was no better or worse than my peers. I checked with some family friends, and the advice that came back was that it was far worse to conceal the indiscretions of youth and register false answers on the polygraph than to just make a clean

breast of it. The key, several people said, was how frequently and how recently you had taken drugs. The answer to avoid was the one given by one of my classmates who had interviewed for a State Department job: asked how long ago he had taken illicit drugs, he had responded, "Uhh...last night." He'd apparently had a very happy birthday the day before.

The Agency flew me back to the DC area and put me up at a nondescript hotel in Northern Virginia. On the appointed day I was ushered into the main reception area at CIA headquarters in Langley, complete with the celebrated seal, the inlaid floor, and the hush of a sacred site. I felt like an extra on a very familiar movie set. I went through a fairly benign physical examination, then the scene shifted from body to mind. Some very earnest-looking psychologists administered a battery of tests apparently designed to ensure that my psyche fell within the standard deviation of non-deviancy. I resisted the temptation to take the tack of an old high school friend, who in his disgust at being subjected to a Rorschach test in order to gain admittance to a Texas university responded to each ink blot by saying "tree" until faced with a drawing that had red dots, to which he declared "apple tree." I seemed to pass muster, although I could tell nothing from their expressions. Then I was told that my lie detector test had been scheduled for the following day to ensure they had enough time. This put my already jangled nerves in a state of disarray. Were those funny mushrooms ingested in a burst of post-graduation exaltation going to come back to haunt me?

I spent a restless night and returned to headquarters the following day. The polygraph room was dark, quiet, and clinical. The operator was polite, but his expression betrayed even less than the shrinks' of the day before. He strapped me into the machine and began the familiar litany of obvious questions. Suddenly we moved from my mother's maiden name to contacts with foreign

nationals. I would think we had exhausted a particular subject, then a few minutes later he would come right back to it. I seemingly relived every moment I had spent abroad before he finally turned to the fateful subject. As a Jew I was unfamiliar with the ritual of confession, but I felt a certain electrified catharsis as I poured out my sorry tale of summer camp counselor nights off, red-lit college dorm rooms, and that one night of nasal passages poised over somebody's cracked mirror. I held nothing back. At one point I thought I caught a gleam in the operator's eye, as if to say, "Is that all you've got, buddy?" The better part of four hours later, he released me.

Then came an agonizing wait. My offer from the CIA had arrived in early December and was contingent on clearing security. I was told that it usually took three months or so to complete the clearance process, but that mine might take longer because of my time overseas. March and April came and went, and I still had no confirmed offer. My friends had long ago locked up their jobs and spent much of their time on the Stanford golf course. The law firms where I'd spent my summers had graciously extended back-up offers, but they could not keep these open indefinitely.

Amidst the uncertainty, I had the theater. Marc's last hurrah as a Stanford director was an outdoor campus touring production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and he forgave my employment transgressions sufficiently to typecast me as the aged windbag and stickler for Greek legal strictures, Egeus. This was my eighth and final play in three years as a Stanford law student. My clearance finally came through during the run of the show, and I celebrated at one marathon cast party. It was a little peculiar sitting in a hot tub explaining to undergraduate actors who had heard me on stage declaiming the virtues of the laws of Athens that I was off to become a CIA attorney, but they had just witnessed stranger wonders in the Athenian wood.

(NEAR) LANGLEY

I loved the ceremony of becoming a CIA employee. I took my oath in October '85. Others may have resented the solemn briefings, the regulations reviews, and the new badge rituals, but to me it was all part of the wonder of being admitted to a secret society.

My affiliation with the Agency, however, was not a secret. As a CIA attorney, I was an overt employee, which meant that I could publicly acknowledge my employer. This was not to be advertised, though. If questions about my employment were to come up in conversation, I was initially to say only that I worked for the government. If asked what branch of the government, I was to say only that I was in the national security area. It was only if a direct question were put to me about my agency that I was to let non-employees know that I was with the CIA.

I fell afoul of secrecy regulations my third day on the job. When I was a clerk at a Washington, DC law firm reveling in the

relative leisure of the summer program, I called up a Stanford classmate who was working at another firm. As he and I were both from Chicago and die-hard Cubs fans, I thought I would be cute and leave a message that Ernie Banks—the legendary Cubs slugger—had called. His secretary was evidently not a baseball fan, as she dutifully wrote down the message without batting an eyelash. This led to a series of messages back and forth throughout the summer, with each of us leaving the names of increasingly obscure Cubs players.

My friend had accepted a position at the law firm where he'd spent the summer, and I decided to call him from my new CIA office. He was out, so I left a message that Rich Nye had called. Nye was an undistinguished pitcher who had been with the Cubs during their notorious collapse in '69. His most notable distinction was being traded to the Montreal Expos for the immortal Boots Day. Nye was obscure, but my buddy was a Cubs fanatic and I figured he would surely recognize the name.

I was wrong. He called my office number and got my secretary, as I was doing research in the library. He asked for Rich Nye. My secretary said, "Who?" He asked again for Rich Nye. She told him that there was no Rich Nye at this number. He asked what company this was. Our staff were trained to answer the phone "Office of General Counsel." He predictably asked "Office of General Counsel of where?" She just repeated "Office of General Counsel." At this point the light finally went off above his head. He said "Is this the CIA?"

I returned from the library to find my boss sitting in my office. He shut the door and with a grim expression asked, "Who is Rich Nye?" I couldn't believe this was happening to me, particularly not in my first week on the job. I stuttered out an abject explanation of our little inside baseball message charade. He said, "I hope you understand, Mr. Cole, that this agency has very strict

rules against the unauthorized use of cover names.” I was about to dig a hole under my desk when he burst out laughing, as did my secretary, who was listening outside the door. She had told the whole story to my boss, who thought this was a capital opportunity to yank the chain of the new kid. My heart left my throat, and I felt like I had survived some sort of weird hazing ritual.

My boss’s boss was the General Counsel, Stanley Sporkin. Stan was an unusual choice to be the Agency’s top lawyer. He had been the hard-charging head of the enforcement section at the Securities & Exchange Commission (SEC) when William Casey was the chair. After President Reagan rewarded Casey for his service on the ’80 campaign by naming him Director of Central Intelligence, Casey tapped Stan to be his General Counsel. An SEC enforcer needs to be aggressive, pugnacious, and bombastic. As I soon learned, a CIA General Counsel needs to be conciliatory, self-effacing, and low-key in an agency not celebrated for involving lawyers in its day-to-day affairs. Stan’s style had not endeared him to the Deputy Directors who ran the four directorates within the Agency: Operations, Intelligence, Administration, and Science & Technology.

The result was internal exile. The General Counsel’s office had been banished from headquarters to an outbuilding near the suburban shopping enclave of Tyson’s Corner. I had looked forward to the glamour of roaming the storied hallways of Langley. Instead, I found myself in what seemed to be an annex of Bloomingdale’s, which would have made for great shopping on my lunch hour if I could have afforded it on my government salary.

To be fair to Stan, part of the unneighborly response of the Deputy Directors could be attributed to envy. Because of their time together at the SEC, Stan enjoyed a unique personal relationship with Director Casey and was granted a level of access that the other brass could only dream about. Also, the Office of Gen-

eral Counsel had grown at a rate that far outstripped most other Agency components. For years, it had been a small, low profile shop staffed largely by CIA careerists from other Agency divisions who had gone to law school at night on the company's nickel. My boss had been one of those, the office's ninth or tenth attorney who had started his career as an intelligence analyst.

Watergate and other Vietnam Era scandals changed all that. The regulatory and compliance burden imposed on the Agency increased dramatically, and there was a corresponding explosion in the number of lawyers hired by the General Counsel's Office. Stan beefed up the recruiting program in an effort to attract outsiders from top law schools who, like me, were looking for an alternative to law-firm servitude. This growth spurt occurred at a time when other Agency components, particularly the Operations directorate, had suffered through a brutal housecleaning under President Carter and his Director of Central Intelligence, Stansfield Turner.

The lawyers in our office were not actually barred from headquarters, of course. Shuttle buses ran there on a regular schedule, and we were called on to attend our fair share of meetings and briefings. But much of the business of an agency like the CIA is conducted in whispers and nods along the corridors of headquarters. Most of that whispering and nodding was taking place beyond our earshot.

Stan tried to make the best of it. He pushed a program of placing General Counsel lawyers within Agency divisions, where they effectively served as in-house counsel. In some cases this succeeded in getting our office in the loop. In other cases the out-placed lawyer "went native" and took his cues from the head of that division, not his superiors in the General Counsel's office.

Despite a long career spent in government service, Stan was not bureaucratic, which was both a virtue and his undoing. When

faced with a tough problem, he would gather his chief lieutenants in his office, lean back in his swivel chair, join his fingertips in an A-frame just below his chin, and close his eyes while they debated the prudent course of action. Just when you thought he had nodded off, he would vault forward in his chair, bark out a course of action, and send everyone packing. If he thought one of his section chiefs had a bright idea, he would tell him to run with it, even if the brainstorm encroached on the traditional turf of one of the other chiefs. The result was sectional warfare and barely controlled chaos. The five or so top managers in the office were constantly jockeying for position and looking to pick off client accounts that would expand their fiefdoms. They were outwardly civil to one another, but behind closed doors there was constant scheming for targets of opportunity.

One afternoon a few months after I arrived at the Agency, my boss called his assistant chief and me into his office. It was clear from the cat-ate-the-canary grin on his face that he thought he had pulled off a major coup. Stan had asked him to prepare a draft finding. I looked puzzled. The assistant chief explained that a finding was an authorization signed by the President approving the use of covert action. Covert action, I knew, meant activities conducted or sponsored by the government in support of friendly states or groups, or against hostile states or groups, in such a manner that official US involvement was not apparent and could be disclaimed. The vast majority of the CIA's operations consisted of intelligence collection in some shape or form, using human sources or technical devices to gather information overseas. Covert action was different. Covert action was intended to secretly influence events abroad, not simply find out what was happening or likely to happen.

It was covert action, not intelligence collection, that had touched off many of the major scandals affecting the CIA.

Most intelligence gathering by the CIA and other national security agencies was not particularly controversial, as long as it was directed against foreign nationals and conducted overseas. But assassinations, coups, and insurrections have a way of jangling the nerves, especially among legislators who don't learn about the actions until after the fact. As a result of perceived abuses in covert action by the CIA, Congress had fashioned legislation requiring the President to issue a written finding of national security need before a covert action program could be undertaken. In fact, virtually all of the controversial covert actions that had earned the CIA a reputation as a rogue agency had been approved by the President, who had found it convenient to use the Agency's clandestine capabilities to conceal official US government involvement. But the legislation now required a paper trail, Capitol Hill's preferred means of exercising oversight.

The problem for my boss was that this paper trail was not typically handled by our section of the General Counsel's Office. Our division's stock in trade was intelligence collection directed against US nationals, who were entitled to constitutional protections that the rest of the world did not enjoy. We worked primarily with operations and technical types who wanted to search the house, tap the phone, or open the mail of US citizens or permanent residents overseas suspected of collaboration with unfriendly foreign governments. This was exactly the sort of work I had hoped to do in signing on as a CIA lawyer—sensitive, top level, plenty of cloak (if not dagger). But it had nothing to do with covert action, which was customarily handled by another division within the General Counsel's Office. My boss chortled that there was something big cooking involving assistance to friendly elements in Iran and that he had managed to cut his chief rival in the office out of the loop.

So it was left to the assistant chief and me to cobble together a finding authorizing, in vague and general terms, some sort of covert assistance program to potential allies within Iran. I was new at this game, but even I knew this was big stuff. At that time, Iran was running neck-and-neck with the Soviet Union as “Foreign Enemy Number One.” Memories of the ’79 seizure of the US Embassy and American hostages by Khomeini’s regime were still vivid. Iran was thought to be behind much of the terrorist activity in the Middle East, including the truck bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut that killed over 240 servicemen and the kidnapping and execution of CIA officer William Buckley, also in Lebanon. The Iran-Iraq War had been slogging on for over five years, and although the US was officially neutral in the conflict, it was well known throughout the intelligence community that the President did not intend to let Iran prevail.

The difficulty facing us was one encountered by any lawyers taking on a new type of matter: we had no form. All of the findings within the General Counsel’s Office were kept in safes controlled by the hated rival division. The assistant chief knew there was no way he could coax samples out of the other division, as he would be immediately suspect as a confederate of our boss. He devised an operation that called for me—an innocent newcomer to this long-simmering civil war—to play dumb and ask a fellow foot soldier in the rival division if I could have a look at a few findings out of curiosity. To our amazement, the stratagem worked. I was able to hold on to a couple of old findings long enough to work up a draft that looked like it had been prepared by somebody who knew what he was doing. It was long on ends and woefully short on means, but we had only the few scraps fed to us by our boss and figured the powers that be could fill in the gaps.

Our boss was thrilled with our work product and took it up to Stan. Over the next month or so our boss, a grizzled CIA ca-

reerist, gave us wide-eyed reports of meetings he had had downtown with a Marine lieutenant colonel named Oliver North. He expressed astonishment at the degree to which North had managed to wrap senior CIA operations officials around his finger. He also gave salivating descriptions of North's secretary, a luscious blonde named Fawn Hall.

Part of the wrangling over this period was whether our finding could authorize prior covert action. I was not given much detail, but it appeared that some of the assistance to friendly Iranians had already taken place. Stan and my boss asked me to research the doctrine of *nunc pro tunc*—an ominous sounding legal doctrine (from the Latin meaning “now for then”)—under which certain judgments can be given retroactive effect. It struck me as a stretch to invoke a doctrine in the context of a highly sensitive presidential finding that was supposed to apply to ministerial court actions, and I said so. I later learned that my superiors took a different view.

I happened to be in Stan's office one day when Stan's secretary announced that Oliver North was on the line. Stan picked up and said, “Hi, Ollie, this is Stan.” He paused for a moment and then quipped, “Stan and Ollie—what a team!” He little knew how prophetic his reference to Laurel and Hardy would prove to be.

DC (ONSTAGE)

The daytime drama of national security had not curbed my appetite for theater. I saw an audition notice for a little known David Mamet play, *The Water Engine*, to be produced near the Palisades area of DC where I was sharing a house with some law school friends. I badly missed the camaraderie of a theater cast. My CIA employment barred me from all sorts of extracurricular activities, in particular partisan politics, but I saw no restriction on being in a play. I worked hard, usually from eight to six or six thirty, but my evenings and weekends were generally free for rehearsal or performance. I auditioned and was cast in the ensemble.

This was my first acting venture outside of university theater, and I was in for a nasty shock. I was accustomed to rumor and innuendo—which are rife in any show—but not to bold-faced lies. The producers made promise after promise—about the production budget, actor pay, technical capabilities, marketing—each of which they proceeded to break. I think they meant well, but they

were so intent on appearing as big shots in front of their admiring cast that they could not own up to any shortcomings.

The cast consisted mainly of naïve recent college graduates who were just thrilled to be in a show. A few quit in disgust, but most of us just rolled with the broken promises, even when the producers could not deliver a heated rehearsal space in the dead of winter. The Mamet play was supposed to mark the launch of a new company, and some of the stalwarts hoped that by sticking it out through the hell of this production they would get in on the ground floor of the company. I wanted no part of the producers after the project, but there were some good people in the cast and the show itself—set as a radio play about the undoing of an inventor of an engine that runs on water—was well worth the chapped lips and ego. An incidental benefit was the opportunity to learn the state song of my own Illinois (actually written into the script by Mamet).

The cast bonded in the face of common adversity, and several members became friends. One invited me to the opening of a late night show he went on to direct at the Source Theater. He said it was called *Batman Versus The League of Doom* and was basically a theatrical send-up of the old sixties TV series, which had been a staple of my childhood after-school viewing. I didn't see how it was possible to parody the over-the-top antics of Adam West, Burt Ward, Cesar Romero, and the rest, but I was keen to find out. The Source was a gritty, no frills black box theater in a tough neighborhood on DC's NW 14th Street corridor. My actor/director buddy had told me that Walter Mondale's son Billy had been cast as a henchman of one of the villains. As it turned out, the henchmen were subtly dubbed "Dumb" and "Fuck," with Billy cast as "Fuck." As we filed into our tattered seats after eleven thirty, we noticed none other than Walter and Joan Mondale seated a few rows from us, bewildered frozen grins locked on their faces, hop-

ing that no one would recognize them as the parents of “Fuck” (who, to his credit, delivered admirable *pows* and *bifs* in the obligatory fight scenes).

The production was uneven, to put it mildly, but I loved the energy and intensity of the small space and the immediacy of the actors just a few feet in front of me. I hadn’t seen much “fringe” theater; most of my theatergoing had been in London at major West End venues made affordable by my ersatz student ID. My parents had taken me to a few small theater shows in high school, most memorably a production by Steppenwolf Theatre (long before they hit the big time) of Pinter’s *The Caretaker*. The production starred Gary Sinise and was put on in a basement space so cramped that an actor inadvertently whacked me in the leg with a golf club in the middle of the performance. The offender bowed in my direction during the curtain call, but it still hurt like hell.

I soon became a regular at the Source, which offered a wildly varied season at prices I could afford on my government salary. Their productions ranged from Clifford Odets to Shakespeare to late night shows even more outrageous than *Batman Versus The League of Doom*. Their crowning achievement during this period was a madcap, Monty Python-esque production of *Titus Andronicus*, with body parts flying off at a clip reminiscent of the celebrated “Anyone for tennis?” sketch. My appetite whetted, I started venturing to some of the other small theaters in the DC area, including The Studio and the Woolly Mammoth.

It was a delicious life, roaming the hushed corridors of the CIA by day and the dingy lobbies of fringe theaters at night. I was conscious of mingling in utterly different worlds, and yet I felt no sense of contradiction or crossed purposes. I took my job seriously and subscribed fully to the critical mission of the Agency. The Soviet Union had not yet crumbled and was still vigorously recruiting agents in the US; I was proud to have served my coun-

try on some of its most sensitive counterintelligence cases. But my patriotism didn't keep me from appreciating great theater that poked and prodded authority figures, whether from hundreds of years ago or last week, or from performing with actors whose political views might have been diametrically opposed to my own.

My colleagues at the CIA were bemused rather than threatened by my involvement in theater. They were mostly conservative suburbanites who rarely ventured into DC after dark and viewed my bohemian nightlife as endearingly exotic. They couldn't imagine themselves rehearsing in unheated halls in winter or venturing to a crummy neighborhood for a midnight show, but they got a kick out of the fact that one of their own was actually doing it.

I heard little about the Iran finding after my boss's fevered reports regarding his encounters with Oliver North and Fawn Hall. There was a buzz all around the office, however, about the Contras. The CIA had formed a major task force dedicated to Central America, with the primary aim of destabilizing and ultimately overthrowing the Sandinista regime headed by Daniel Ortega. There was a mobilization of bodies from all over the Agency for the Central American Task Force, including several lawyers from our office. My boss bewailed these developments, as the Task Force account had gone to a rival chieftain.

Our division focused on the narrow intersection between foreign intelligence collection and the Constitution. Most intelligence gathering overseas is directed at foreign nationals who do not enjoy the benefits of constitutional protection against unlawful search and seizure. The CIA can tap their phones, open their mail, and search their homes with impunity under US law. US citizens and permanent resident aliens (called, in the trade, "US persons") do not, however, lose their constitutional rights just because they happen to leave the country. If the CIA wanted to wiretap or search the residence of a US person overseas, it

had to follow certain procedures laid out in a presidential executive order requiring a determination by the Attorney General that the person was an agent of a foreign power. Our job was to work with our operations clients to make the case that the target of the tap, search, or other surveillance met the agent of a foreign power standard.

This could be electrifying work, particularly when the opportunity for an operation arose suddenly and we had to dash down to the Department of Justice and make our case orally to the Attorney General's chief intelligence advisor. Our division also had the choice assignment of traveling to CIA stations all over the world and briefing operations types about the executive order and its procedures. The rogue agency scandals of the seventies resulted in a mandate that stations be briefed every several years, so the lawyers in our area were regularly criss-crossing the globe spreading constitutional good cheer.

I had to pay my dues for the better part of a year before landing one of these plum foreign tours. The European circuits were the most popular, for obvious reasons, and the more senior lawyers had a monopoly on these. As the junior guy in the division, I drew an Asian trip. When traveling outside the country, CIA employees were entitled to a daily allowance, which was set on a country-by-country basis. If the employee spent more than the per diem, it came out of his pocket; if he spent less, he could keep the difference. The officer I was traveling with decided that we would share a room on the road in order to save money. He was considerably more senior than I, so I had no choice but to go along with his economizing.

This arrangement worked fine until we hit Bangkok. My roommate decided that he wanted to visit Patpong, the notorious red light district. He corralled me and a third person traveling with us to join him. It soon became clear that his interest in

the area was not merely cultural. The third guy and I left him to his courtship rituals and headed back to the hotel for a nightcap. We closed the bar, and I wearily took the elevator up to my room only to find a “Do Not Disturb” sign on the door, obviously placed there by my solicitous roomie. I went back to the lobby, but there was nothing open and I was not up for braving the heat and humidity of steamy Bangkok for a nocturnal promenade. I returned to the room to find the sign still hanging in the door. I finally tumbled into a chair and dozed off until my thoughtful fellow traveler roused me well after three in the morning and announced that I could now enter the bedroom. I had been briefed on many occupational hazards of serving in the CIA, but not this one.

The saving grace on this tour was a visit to Australia, where we stopped over in Sydney for a weekend after briefings in Canberra and Wellington, New Zealand. I noticed that a production of Mamet’s *Glengarry Glen Ross* was playing at the celebrated Sydney Opera House, and I had to see how the Australians handled one of America’s finest contemporary plays. They did a creditable job, although it was painful for a Chicago boy to hear Aussies trying to imitate the speech patterns of Mayor Daley.

One of the other major accounts of our division was the War on Drugs, which was just starting to gather force in Washington under the patronage of Nancy Reagan. Intelligence agencies were reluctant players in these hostilities because of concerns about compromising sources. If a CIA source on foreign intelligence matters in a country involved in drug trafficking also provided information about drug dealing, he might have to testify at trial if his information led to a prosecution: the US Constitution mandates that the accused in a criminal trial have the right to confront those testifying against him. Having a source testify in open court would obviously expose his cooperation with the US Government and destroy his future usefulness to the CIA. Of course,

this sort of exposure could also occur in the context of an espionage trial, but those prosecutions were rare and more closely related to the mission of the Agency.

We were tasked to develop ways to share intelligence information with other agencies while still protecting the identities of sources. Despite the bureaucratic infighting, this was heady stuff that involved highly classified intelligence and helped get me out of the shabby confines of our Tyson's Corner annex. I was usually asked to accompany the National Intelligence Officer for Counternarcotics, the intelligence community's point person on drugs, to monthly meetings with other War on Drugs big shots, including the Justice Department's chief criminal lawyer, William Weld, and FBI Director William Webster.

I was impressed by these upper-echelon political appointees, in particular by Weld, who had been the US Attorney in Boston before coming to Washington. The caliber of some top-level appointments like Weld had helped to build my enthusiasm for the Reagan administration. My '80 candidate George Bush had denounced Reagan's "voodoo economics" during the campaign, and the deficit-defying manipulations of budget boy wonder David Stockman had done little to prove him wrong. I was a true fiscal conservative and was appalled at the explosion in federal debt during Reagan's first few years in office. But after the initial supply-side orgy, it seemed that the administration had hit its stride and let grown-ups like James Baker hold sway. Carter had been a notorious micro-manager and appeared to view the role of President as administrator-in-chief. Reagan's style of setting broad policy outlines and then letting seasoned professionals do their jobs was a welcome contrast and seemed a more effective conception of the presidency.

And then it all started to collapse. In the fall of '86 the Nicaraguan army shot down an American cargo plane whose surviving crew member claimed he was working for the CIA. Shortly af-

terward an obscure Middle East publication reported that the US had sold arms to Iran. Attorney General Ed Meese then disclosed that proceeds from the Iranian arms sales had been used to fund the Contras, and the feeding frenzy erupted.

Our office was engulfed by the scandal. We were bombarded by requests for information and document production by the newly appointed independent counsel, Lawrence Walsh, and by the congressional committees investigating the affair. CIA lawyers were constantly on call to squire panicked operations officers to interviews with investigators. The senior lawyers in the office seemed to be in perpetual meetings with the new General Counsel (Stan had since been appointed a federal judge) and usually emerged from these marathon sessions with dazed looks.

I soon figured out from reading the *Washington Post* exactly what I had worked on just a few months after joining the Agency. The CIA had engaged in covert action by facilitating, at the behest of Oliver North, the shipment of arms to Iran. There had been no presidential finding to authorize this action as required by law. When Stan learned what had happened, he rightly concluded that a finding was necessary, preferably one that approved the shipment that had already occurred. That's what had led to my little drafting project.

I became a person of interest to the independent counsel and the congressional committees. I was interviewed at length by investigators who went over in minute detail whom I had spoken to and when. The experience was simply gut-wrenching. I knew I had done nothing wrong—on the contrary, I had worked to secure a presidential approval required by law. But as careers were being destroyed right and left by the scandal, I wondered whether I would be forever tainted as a lawyer, even though I had been only twenty-five when given the fateful assignment. Some old hands were saying that this was the worst crisis at the Agency since Wa-

tergate, perhaps even including Watergate. The fact that CIA Director Casey had conveniently died of brain cancer before the investigations got fully under way only added to the furor. My personal agony was compounded by the fact that I could not discuss my situation with anyone other than my colleagues at the Agency, each of whom was scrambling to cover his own backside.

In the midst of the madness, it occurred to me that there might be the germ of a play here. I was drawn not so much to the scandal itself, which despite its titillating facts I found in many ways depressingly mundane, particularly as the gears of the Washington scandal machine ground on. What intrigued me most was the Contra cause that was the root of the matter, one of a host of insurrections in developing countries that had been the playground of CIA operatives for decades and the chief battlegrounds of the Cold War. Ideological purity and naked power lust, socialist rhetoric and the harsh realities of race and class, the rule of law and the redress of colonial inequities—all of these bubbled up out of the Agency's involvement in Nicaragua (and Honduras, and Guatemala, and a multitude of other countries around the globe) in a simmering stew that I savored.

But I was acting, not writing. The arctic production of *The Water Engine* had not cured me of the bug to perform. I answered an audition notice for *The Merchant of Venice*, an old favorite from my law school days, and was stunned when I was cast as Bassanio, one of the leads and a far cry from my usual crusty codgers and other line-limited character types. I soon found out why I had risen to such prominence. The cast of the Mamet production had been replete with bright young things who, if asked their profession, would have responded “actor/actress,” even though they hadn't come within hailing range of making a living at their chosen craft. That show had been a way station on a journey that may have led them to New York or Los Angeles or Chicago in a quest

for stardom. They took movement classes, method classes, dialect classes, anything offered by charismatic thespian gurus who might lead them to better things. Some of them were quite good (far better than I), although almost all would likely have to pack it in a few years hence.

My compatriots in *The Merchant of Venice* were retired civil servants, bored housewives, doe-eyed collegians, and boozing sybarites, all drawn together in that strange and wonderful pageant of deluded grandeur known as community theater. The company was presided over by a delightfully daft couple who squabbled constantly but held on for dear life to the modest franchise they had created. An able-bodied male in his twenties with most of his hair and some semblance of acting chops was a rare thing in these parts, and I was rewarded for my relative virility. My deft portrayal of Bassanio begat a role as the blazing youth Damis in *Moliere's Tartuffe*, in which the absent-minded retiree playing the title character was so manifestly inept that those of us on stage with him often had to grit our teeth to keep from bursting into laughter.

And yet, despite the mangled dialogue, indifferent production values, empty fraying red plush seats, and addled director/producer spousal unit, there were performances when I felt amazingly privileged to be up on a stage somewhere speaking the lines of two of the greatest writers who had ever lived. Those evenings I was somehow able to suspend my own disbelief, although I suspect the audience was not similarly affected.

I sensed a creeping addiction to these proffers of plum roles amidst mediocrity and decided to kick the habit before it was too late. I landed the part of Richard the Lionheart in the classic *The Lion in Winter* with the St. Mark's Players, who performed in a lovely Episcopal church on Capitol Hill near the condo I had purchased after my housemates moved away or married. This, too,

was community theater, but the beauty of the church setting and the sense of mission born of association with a congregation (some of whom participated in the productions) gave it an entirely different feel from the Guffman-esque sensibilities of my prior venue. The St. Mark's folks viewed their plays not simply as a pleasant diversion for the audience or a nice hobby for the performers, but as an instrument of self-exploration supported by faith. This lent a gravity and spirituality to the process of creating theater that I had not previously experienced, although thankfully it did not stop the cast from going out for the occasional beer. As a non-practicing Jew I felt a little out of place in a company with this Christian theological dimension, but it was not as if they tried to convert me at every rehearsal.

My evening plunges into community theater were a welcome escape from the daily turmoil of Iran/Contra. As the sordid details of the affair appeared on the front page of the *Post* (far and away my best source for information, even as an Agency insider), it became clear that Oliver North, a Marine lieutenant colonel in a town where lieutenant colonels were a dime a dozen, had bewitched many of the top brass in the CIA Operations directorate into enabling his wild schemes to keep the Contras afloat at whatever cost. Whether these seasoned Agency clients of ours—a number of whom either lost their jobs or were indicted—danced to his tune because they thought Director Casey had supplied North his flute or because they shared his maniacal devotion to the Contra cause, I could not tell.

It also became evident that my office had served as North's lawyers because the legal department of the National Security Council where he worked had no clue regarding the legal requirements for covert action. We paid a heavy price for taking on this account, in demotions, man-hours, and loss of morale. Stan, then a sitting judge, spent the better part of an excruciating day testify-

ing before the congressional committees about our involvement. I was too small a fish to be mentioned by name in his testimony, but I felt the taint.

I began to think it was time to move on. The Agency seemed paralyzed. William Webster, a former judge, had been brought over from the FBI to right the ship and project an image of propriety, but the CIA was neither the FBI nor a federal court and he seemed to be starting from scratch. Ironically, the advent of his regime gave me my best access to the Director's office, as he decided to keep to the tradition—started when he was a judge and continued during his tenure at the FBI—of hiring young lawyers to serve as clerks. His callow clerks, of roughly my age and educational background, were viewed askance by the steely-eyed CIA veterans they were supposed to be monitoring and welcomed a friendly face from familiar territory.

My division was finding it hard to get our requests for searches and wiretaps through the Department of Justice. Even time-sensitive applications could languish for weeks. Attorney General Meese was heavily implicated in Iran/Contra and appeared to spend most of his day fending off the independent counsel and the hounds baying on Capitol Hill. His top lieutenants—Lowell Jensen and Weld—also seemed consumed by the scandal and ultimately decided to resign before their own careers went up in flames.

It was profoundly disillusioning for an idealistic twenty-something to be serving in an agency and administration in such a state of dysfunction. Those who might have been my mentors were obsessed with saving their own skins. And at a far higher level, the Reagan mystique of remaining above the fray, setting broad guidelines and leaving it to capable deputies to fill in the gaps, had been exposed as a yawning vacuum filled by grasping subalterns like Oliver North.

I also discovered an allergy to bureaucracy. I was still fasci-

nated with the CIA and loved the one-on-one contact with operations and technical types who had foregone lucrative careers in the private sector for the singular world of clandestine activity. But in many ways it was just another huge Byzantine edifice, hide-bound by innumerable layers of management and crippled by the inevitable turf battles. Lack of turnover made things worse, as the lubricant of ever-changing political appointments that greased the operations of other agencies oiled few of the Agency's gears. Sadly, one of the few positions in the Agency that was subject to political appointment was the General Counsel, which meant that it was highly unlikely that an ambitious young lawyer like me would ever rise to the top spot in the office, barred as I was from involvement in political activity under the federal Hatch Act.

The crowning bureaucratic blow came one holiday weekend spent at the beach. I was scheduled to fly back from the coast very early on Tuesday morning, which still would have allowed me to get into work at a decent hour. Unfortunately, major storms grounded air traffic, and I ended up having to drive back to DC. I didn't get into the office until about one pm. Despite the fact that I worked at least an hour or more of uncompensated overtime every business day and sometimes on weekends, my boss still felt compelled to dock me a precious vacation day.

That did it. I flirted with working as a staffer on one of the congressional intelligence oversight committees, but the only available position there was filled shortly after I applied by someone on the chairman's personal staff who had no intelligence-related experience. I joked bitterly that I had one serious drawback for a job on Capitol Hill: I was qualified. I decided shortly afterward to start contacting DC law firms about a lateral move. I figured if I were going to head into private practice I'd better do it soon, as it wasn't like I was a Justice Department lawyer bringing marketable courtroom skills or an IRS maven with saleable

tax expertise. Mercifully for society at large, there wasn't much call for a background in wiretaps and counternarcotics assistance in the private sector. The same family friend who had helped me land the position in London steered me in the direction of one of the major DC firms, Covington & Burling, who were known for valuing governmental backgrounds in the hiring process, no matter how exotic. After several rounds of interviews, they made me an attractive offer that gave me full credit in terms of partnership track for the time I had spent at the Agency. The offer was particularly satisfying because Covington had passed on my bid to join them for a summer clerkship while I was at Stanford. I accepted over a sumptuous lunch at the Cosmos Club that I roguishly concluded by announcing, "You have hours to bill and I have people to kill." Thankfully that bit of youthful bravado did not result in their withdrawing the offer.

I wasn't looking forward to breaking the news to my boss, but I didn't think he would give me too much heat. I'd worked damned hard for a lot less than I could have made elsewhere and had lived through the hell of Iran/Contra courtesy of an assignment he had seen fit to give me. I was very wrong. He berated me for what seemed like an eternity. The Agency had devoted untold sums to my training and had lavished foreign travel opportunities upon me, he screamed, and this was how I repaid their generosity. At some level I had to admire the depth of his attachment to the institution that had been his life, but it also laid bare the tunnel vision that had been the Agency's undoing in Iran/Contra. I knew in my heart that my account with the CIA was square. I left with a clear conscience and a hope that I had not been tarred for life.

ABROAD

I hadn't experienced much of an interior creative life as an actor of modest talents. I plumbed the depths of my assigned roles as best I could, but most of the time I was striving to project an external appearance that would be passable for an audience of hopefully limited discrimination. Every once in a while I would strike an emotional chord that surprised me in its reverberation, but mostly I contented myself with a command of language that came naturally to a lawyer.

To my surprise, the trauma of Iran/Contra sparked an internal dialogue that germinated the seed of a play about revolution in the Third World. In the waning months of my time at the CIA, I began to shape the contours of a script that took as its point of departure the bitter colonial legacy and deep social fissures the Agency had been called on to exploit in Central America and beyond. To me, the high water mark of playwriting had been those productions of Shaw and Coward I had seen in London, and I

wondered if I could somehow present this rich subject with wit and sparkle rather than ideology and dogma.

I knew from my law school classmates in private practice that the jolly outings and catered parties of the summer clerkship programs had given way to the merciless grind of the partnership track. While I thought that the experience of working with aggressive CIA officers would serve me well in dealing with demanding private sector clients, I understood that I would have a lot of catching up to do in learning new areas of the law and grasping the inner workings of a law firm. I concluded that if I wasn't going to have the time to grow as an actor, it was time to put acting aside. I didn't see how I would have much chance to develop my meager dramatic talents while billing the expected 2000 plus hours a year. It had been hard enough moonlighting on stage while working government hours.

But I wasn't prepared to let go of the theater. Part of this need was preserving my own self-image. I couldn't accept that I was just a lawyer, just as I couldn't accept that I was just a Williams undergraduate or just a Stanford law student. I knew there had to be something more to me than that, some special dimension made manifest through the performing arts. Part was simple stress reduction: I needed an outlet away from the pressures of a busy law practice, and I could lose myself in theater in a way that no amount of running or tennis could achieve. And part, I dared to hope, was the presence of a genuine creative spark within me that made me more than just an artistic dilettante.

I decided it was time to write. Writing offered a way to remain engaged in the theater at my own pace and on my own terms. I could work when it was right for me. I would not be dependent on the casting and scheduling whims of some director. But I could still with justification view myself as a theater person with skin in the artistic game.

I was painfully aware, however, of the reality that I had never written a play in my life, or for that matter anything else that had not been assigned to me in school or by my superior at work. I was at a loss how I would ever begin, particularly when faced with the prospect of launching my career in private practice at a major national law firm not known for treating its associates with kid gloves.

The only way this play was ever going to be anything other than a glorious ice-breaker at cocktail parties was to stave off the servitude of law firm life a little longer and just start writing. My new employer, Covington & Burling, had prospered without my services for the better part of the century, so I asked if they could manage without me a few months more. They graciously agreed.

I didn't fancy hanging around Washington, DC. I needed to put some distance between me and the Iran/Contra-ravaged Reagan administration. I also didn't feel like staring at the walls of my 540-square-foot condominium for months on end. The steamy heat of a DC summer was just around the corner, and the clatter of my cheap wall unit air conditioner did not seem conducive to the creation of great theater.

I had to go abroad. The glamour of nursing a cheap glass of red wine at a fashionably shabby sidewalk café, several days' stubble on my cheeks, pensively poised over my writer's pad, simultaneously savoring and deflecting the admiring glances of smoldering beauties at nearby tables wondering at my masterpiece in the making, was irresistible. While I was hardly flush after several years of civil service salary and student loan payments, I figured I could rent my condo for a few months, cover my mortgage, and have a little money left over. I mapped out an itinerary that was fanciful, picturesque, and relatively cheap: Spain, Portugal, Egypt, and Israel.

But first, I decided, I needed to draw together my two key formative influences as a theater artist: London and Marc Fajer. It

would be a major splurge, as I could not in good conscience deploy my Stanford Law student ID three years after graduation, but I needed inspiration and companionship before embarking on my playwriting adventure. We drank in the West End to the dregs, hitting seven shows in as many days, including a stirring revival of Sondheim's *Company* and the opening of Stoppard's *Arcadia*.

The week was exhilarating, but intimidating as hell. As I saw Marc off and prepared to make for the Continent, I wondered how I would ever come close to the caliber of writing I had just witnessed. Anal lawyer that I was, I had prepared an outline for the play (yes, on a yellow legal pad) so that I would not face the torment of a blank page without a clue as to where to begin. I was a great admirer of the classical structure of Shakespearean comedies such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which often opened in the ordered world of a court, then shifted to the wilds of the forest as some crisis shattered the familiar order, then returned to the court as the growth of the characters conferred a wisdom and self-knowledge that restored the former order, but richer and deeper than before.

The central characters in my play were to be the members of a British expatriate family in some unnamed developing nation embroiled in civil unrest. The father, Rupert Pudgethorpe, is the canny executive in charge of a major multinational's operations in the country. He is a bluff, hearty, cunning man of middle age whose workaholic tendencies leave his long-suffering wife Rita alone and afraid amidst the increasing violence of the capital city where they live in comfort. Their clever, trendy daughter Nancy is back for the summer from her studies at an upper-crust British university, where she has picked up a lot of clever slogans and a stylish black leather wardrobe. Rupert decides to play Cupid by matching Nancy with his earnest young assistant Wilkinson, a dogged up-and-comer in the company. Nancy finds Wilkinson

too corporate for her bohemian tastes and blasts her father and the company for propping up a corrupt regime. He, in turn, reproaches her for her ignorance of a complex political environment that offers no genuine democratic alternatives and in which their company makes a healthy profit but also provides desperately needed employment.

I had laid things out this far when I arrived in Madrid. I knew I wanted to introduce a cell of revolutionaries into the plot and somehow devise a kidnapping conspiracy in which the rebels would prey on Rita's loneliness and Nancy's naiveté. The action would then shift to the rebels' den, where the two women would confront their captors and come to grips with the contrast between the dark reality of the country in which they were interlopers and their own sheltered lifestyle. They could then return to their former lives, chastened but endowed with new perspective. Rupert and Rita would reconcile, of course, and Nancy would be smitten with the worthy Wilkinson.

I pictured the first act as almost a drawing room comedy, with quick-witted repartee among the members of the Pudgethorpe family playing off the sincerity of Wilkinson as a comic foil. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the wit and elegance that kicks off the play would give way to the rage and confusion of rebellion until the audience—by the second act—genuinely has no idea whether the third act will bring total chaos or restoration of the comfortable order that began the play.

I was well aware of the irony of rambling through Spain and Portugal, two of the most egregious colonial powers, as I tried to fashion my First World meets Third World script. I knew that Spain, in particular, had foisted an extractive aristocracy on its colonies in Nicaragua, Honduras, and other sites of CIA covert action in which a tiny percentage of the population controlled almost all of the wealth and land.

But what a country in which to write and travel on little money—a languid pace, gracious restaurants offering sumptuous paella washed down with a bottle of local vintage at modest prices, rich history and dazzling Moorish and imperial sights offered with minimal hype, refuge in the genius of Zurbaran and Velasquez. I soon slipped into an easy rhythm of travel in the morning hours after a late breakfast, a light beer-dappled lunch followed by several hours of longhand writing at the table, a little post-siesta sight-seeing followed by feet up and a good book at the pensione or hostel, then a hearty dinner over wine at a budget restaurant I had spotted during the day. If inspiration exceeded intoxication, I would write for another hour or so after dinner before turning in or, on rare occasion, trying a Spanish disco, which didn't seem to hit its stride until after midnight even on a weeknight.

I began to find a voice. It was halting at first, and annoyingly pedantic. My greatest struggle was to introduce my themes—the imbalance of socialist ideology and post-colonial reality, the potential of capitalism to be reformist or reactionary, the power of the individual to make choices even under great organizational pressure—without reducing my characters to mere mouthpieces for a particular point of view. This was my only serious criticism of Shaw, whose brilliance in dialogue in my view occasionally strayed into propagandizing. I found I had a good feel for the British characters, who were more familiar to me in class and attitude, but lost my way in developing the rebels. Rightly or wrongly, I had made the decision not to identify the country in which the play occurs. I wanted to avoid easy stereotypes and point up the universality of the themes I was exploring. The lack of an ethnic identity, however, made it more difficult for me to picture the rebels in my mind and give them flesh and blood.

I passed from Spain into Portugal, which offered many of the traveler's virtues of Spain at even more reasonable prices and with

comparatively little tourist fanfare. I soon discovered the meditative powers of port wine, which certainly endowed me with a sense of enhanced artistic sensibilities (if, as I later re-read my Portuguese period, little in the way of additional substance). My only complaint about Portugal was that I was mugged at knife-point in Lisbon near the train station. I made the likely ill-advised decision to utilize my college sprinting skills and dash across the street. I got away, but spent the next several days looking over my shoulder, nerves too jangled to write. I chuckled at the random violence featured prominently in my play rendering me unfit to work on it.

I had planned to fly from Lisbon to Cairo to begin the Middle Eastern leg of my travels, and I had been told that it was far cheaper to buy a Lisbon-Cairo ticket in Portugal than to purchase in advance in the United States. Wrong. The major airlines were quoting around \$700 for a one-way ticket to Egypt, which would have strained my bohemian budget. I came across one little-advertised alternative. Czechoslovakian Airlines, the national Czech carrier, offered a bizarre package that featured a morning flight on Monday from Lisbon to Prague, then had you cooling your heels Monday and Tuesday night and all day Wednesday at the airport hotel before flying from Prague to Cairo after midnight on Wednesday and arriving in the wee hours of the morning on Thursday. Total cost charged by this hard-currency starved Eastern bloc country: \$220, including two nights accommodation. I was at one of those precious moments in life where I had more time than money, so Czechoslovakian Airlines it was. I had sampled the pleasures of Pilsner Urquell in London and figured I could hang out at the airport hotel with a nice buzz on and attempt to come to terms with those elusive rebels.

I left Lisbon early Monday in the company of a motley collection of ill-tailored, stony-eyed Soviet apparatchiks and Third World

satellite-dwellers clad in improbable combinations of Western and traditional dress. Neither the plane nor the crew inspired much confidence, but we somehow made it to Prague, where I made inquiries as to the location of the airport hotel. I was advised by some humorless desk clerks that I would not be lodging at the airport hotel. Mildly alarmed, I pressed for details. I would be taken by bus to downtown Prague, I was informed, where I would be put up at a hotel in the city center. Would I be able to look around Prague during my stay, I asked? But of course, came the huffy reply.

I was dumfounded. Not six weeks before, I had been a full-fledged, top-secret-clearance-carrying employee of the CIA. This was the summer of '88, well over a year before Havel's Velvet Revolution and the fall of the Berlin Wall. If I had applied in the United States for a tourist visa to see the sights of Prague, I would have been laughed out of the embassy. And here I was, the guest of the Czech Government for over two days on their nickel with the run of the capital. And they threw in free meals, for good measure!

The rebels started to take better shape in my rambles past the Austro-Hungarian palaces of Prague. I came up with the plot device of inserting a pair of rebel girlfriends as maids in the Pudgethorpe household. They used their position to play on the vulnerabilities of Nancy and Rita and introduce them to two rebels, a dashing young romantic (A) and an urbane old socialist politician (B), who served as the instruments of the kidnapping. The conspiracy was masterminded by a third rebel, a hard-core, jargon-spouting ideologue (C), and enforced by a gun-toting brute (D), who is rewarded by the movement for his violent propensities. I still struggled to move these characters (who were identified by letter only, not by name) from mere types to well-delineated individuals, but the action of the play was gathering a nice momentum.

I survived the midnight flight to Cairo but found it difficult to concentrate in the thick of the dust, heat, and unend-

ing stream of humanity of the Egyptian capital. I was a little ashamed that I could not write a play set in the Third World in the face of Third World conditions. I didn't hit my stride creatively until I took a creaking passenger train south a long the Nile to Luxor, where I ventured out with mad dogs and Englishmen in midday 120 degree heat to view the celebrated tombs, and in particular Aswan. I lounged for hours in a riverside café sipping delicious tropical fruit drinks, fanned by the Nile breeze, the lilting rhythms of Bob Marley playing gently in the background of this oddly endearing Afro/Arab city, and filled page after yellow legal page. I was in such a groove that I almost passed on the long bus ride to the temples of Ramses II at Abu Simbel. Thankfully I had the sense to take a break and witness one of the most awe-inspiring sights I shall ever see—massive marvels of ego and engineering.

The tension of the second act builds as the rebels find the Pudgethorpe women to be a far cry from the docile victims they had expected. There is no response to their ransom demands until Rupert and Wilkinson suddenly arrive at the rebel den with a suitcase containing far less than had been demanded. The rebels are about to reject this out of hand until Rupert advises them that the rebel chief himself had clued him in to their whereabouts. It turns out that he had been paying off the rebel leader for years (to the dismay of the priggish Wilkinson, who had no idea there was a corporate slush fund). The other rebels are aghast to learn that the chief had rejected the kidnapping plot (because of the threat to Pudgethorpe's payoffs), and that the mastermind (C) had decided to go ahead with it anyway in the hopes of making a big score and boosting his stock in the movement. (D), the gun-toting brute, decides to take charge at this point. Things turn ugly as he brandishes his gun and grabs Nancy. The act ends in a sudden blackout and the sound of gunfire.

I was sorry to leave the soothing cafes of Egypt and take the bus across the Sinai Desert to Jerusalem. I wasn't sure why I had included Israel on my itinerary. It seemed a place—as a Jew—I should want to visit, but I felt out of place as soon as I arrived. I knew I was in denial regarding my own ethnic identity, but denial was easier to sustain in the melting pot of the United States, where everyone had to some extent turned his back on the old country in order to become an American. For the first time in my life, I was in the midst of Jews who, unlike me, were entirely at home in their own skins. In Israel I should have been at ease as a Jew among Jews, but instead I felt even more alien than in Czechoslovakia or Egypt, where I had been just another American tourist. It was stirring to witness a strong, vibrant nation built by a people who had been shunned and slaughtered for so long around the world, but I struggled to accept these people as my own, despite the obvious physical similarities.

My grandparents had not been devout, but their civic and social lives had revolved around the Jewish community of Cleveland—membership in a Jewish country club, service on the board of the Jewish hospital, leadership in Jewish charities—they knew who they were and from whence they had come. My parents had deliberately moved away from this environment, joining an integrated pool and tennis club in the Chicago suburbs, socializing with non-Jewish friends (although most of their circle were Jews), and embracing Christmas in our household. They identified themselves as Jews, but had broadened their sense of community. I was one generation further removed from my roots, a gap widened by a set of WASP childhood friends, a traditionally WASP college, and an Anglophilia born of my years in London. Judaism to me was an inconvenient heirloom, one which I knew I should find room for in my house but preferred to leave boxed in the attic.

I reached the height of my ambivalence on an intense day trip to the desert fortress of Masada, where Jewish zealots during the revolt against Roman rule committed mass suicide rather than submit to capture. I rose at dawn and reached the fortress, a desolate rock rising above the Dead Sea, before the temperature reached intolerable levels so that I could take the steep ancient access route to the summit known as the “Snake Path.” For reasons I could not explain I felt an urge to run the path once I began my ascent and managed to keep my legs churning over almost the entire stony, serpentine route. Spent and drenched with sweat as I scoured the ruins, I pictured the stark contrast between the gaudy luxury of Herod’s palace built by the Romans and the desperate poverty of the starving, besieged zealots who later occupied it.

As I looked on at this awful site of collective self-sacrifice, I wondered why Jews had been fated to two millennia of isolation and persecution. I viewed Masada as a terrible symbol of the separation and suffering that seemed a constant in Jewish history. At the same time that I felt a kinship with the indomitable Jewish fighters who had resisted valiantly against impossible odds, I also saw this lonely rock as a monument to the wisdom of assimilation—my assimilation.

I left Israel both more proud and more ashamed to be a Jew. The intensity of coming to grips with Israel hampered my output somewhat, but I was able to work out the basic contours of the third act. The scene shifts from the rebel den back to the Pudgethorpe home, where we learn over a celebratory dinner that Wilkinson had leveled the sadist D with a shot from a disguised gun. In the ensuing melee, the mastermind (C) is knocked cold by Rupert, Nancy finishes off one of the maids, and the other maid is left sobbing by her fallen boyfriend, D. The two remaining rebels, A and B, had been coerced into participating in the kidnapping plot and are only too pleased to let the Pudgethorpes

escape. Wilkinson's bravery is not lost on Nancy, who had previously found him unprepossessing. Rupert is chastised by both his daughter and Wilkinson for paying off the rebels, which he not only defends as necessary to corporate survival amidst chaos but also reveals to have been part of a grander strategy authorized by the board that included bribes to the government as well. Shortly after this confession, Rupert receives word that news of the bribery scheme has hit the papers in England and that the board has made him the public scapegoat. Rita rejoices at the news of his firing, which will enable them to leave the strife-filled country and retire to more congenial surroundings. Rebels A and B then return in something of a coda to express their regrets to Nancy and Rita for their complicity in the kidnapping, and all who deserve to live happily ever after do.

I flew back to DC with the tanned self-assurance of a globe-trotting writer and a sheaf of scrawled yellow legal pages to support my conceit. Before submitting to the will of Covington & Burling I had a few weeks, which I spent fleshing out my plot lines and filling in gaps. I hit a couple of shows at the Source and the Studio and found myself entering the theater with an extra bounce in my step that announced my new status as a bona fide playwright.

DC (OFFSTAGE)

Covington & Burling, while an admirably eclectic firm, was unimpressed by my literary attainments. They were paying me a fourth-year associate's salary to work in two legal practice areas, corporate and real estate, in which I had precisely zero years of experience (my work in London having been entirely focused on litigation). I had cleverly contended in the interviewing process that my work at the CIA would serve me well advising on business deals, as an intelligence operation (I suggested) was essentially a transaction for which necessary resources, approvals, and documentation had to be drawn together by a skilled attorney. The argument was a trifle specious, but they accepted it and placed me accordingly.

The adjustment from life at the Agency was jarring. On the positive side, I had resources at my disposal I could not have dreamed of as a civil servant: a secretary who actually did my work instead of saying she might get to it if she ever reached the

bottom of my boss's out-basket, an in-house word processing center open nights and weekends, overnight and courier services at my beck and call, reimbursed meals if I had to work late, catered training lunches, a real leather office chair. The setting was magnificent. Covington had a wonderful collection of Oriental rugs lining the corridors, not to mention mahogany grandfather clocks and other client confidence-inspiring antiques.

On the negative side, I was now a slave to the billable hour. The pressure of tracking every moment of my day in five-minute intervals was intense, particularly when I already felt far behind the other associates in my class regarding practice area knowledge. When I left the office at the CIA, I literally left my work behind me, as it was prohibited to take classified material out of a secure area. In private practice, the projects seemed always with me, through evenings, weekends, and holidays.

I had looked forward to getting involved in Republican politics, an activity forbidden as a federal civil servant, but found I had little time. I did join with a few Stanford classmates to host a fundraiser for our former professor Tom Campbell, who was running for Congress in Pete McCloskey's old Silicon Valley district. I didn't know much about Tom's politics, but he was without question the most impressive person I had ever met: bachelor's and master's degrees in economics from the University of Chicago, law degree from Harvard (where he edited the *Harvard Law Review*), clerkships on the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals and with Justice Byron White on the U.S. Supreme Court, private practice with a major Chicago law firm while earning his Ph.D. in economics from the University of Chicago, White House Fellow, Director of the Federal Bureau of Competition at the FTC, and Stanford Law School professor at age thirty-one. Tom always reminded me of the humorist Tom Lehrer's line about Mozart: "When he was my age he'd been dead for six years."

Tom had been a great mentor to me at Stanford while I weighed the CIA offer. When I reminded him of his counseling me to take the Agency job over the objections of my mother, he told me of a conversation with his father just after he'd made the decision to run for Congress. His father, a Democratic stalwart from Chicago's heavily Catholic South Side, had been the longest serving federal judge in the country, appointed by FDR in the thirties. When Tom told his father that he planned to run as a Republican, Judge Campbell stared at him for what seemed an eternity before finally hissing, "And do you plan to become a Protestant too?"

Even if I'd had time, there were no meaningful opportunities to become involved in local politics as a Republican. I lived in the District of Columbia, where George Bush had barely reached a double-digit share of the vote during the '88 presidential election. I learned that being involved in Republican politics in DC meant hosting fundraisers for politicians from somewhere else—something that was unappealing to me. About all I had time for outside the practice of law was tinkering with my play, which I had dubbed *Bodyhold* (a riff on the kidnapping conspiracy). I became an overnight authority on playwriting competitions, of which there were an amazing variety, all with slightly different requirements as to synopses, excerpts, cover letters, et al. At first I was a passionate serial applicant, firing off weighty packages all over the country. As rejection letters began to stream in, I became more selective in the contests I chose to enter, but my acceptance ratio remained dismal. The pain of rejection in these competitions was compounded by the lack of feedback on my script. Form letter after form letter would arrive, with no comment on the quality of my work.

As the stars began to fade from my eyes, it occurred to me that I might fare better trying to build relationships with local

theater professionals, who were better situated to help me develop my script. I made a list of the artistic directors at the smaller theaters around the area, many of which I had been frequenting for several years—the Source, the Studio, the Woolly Mammoth, the Olney Theatre in suburban Maryland—and began a relentless cultivation campaign. No one knew who I was, however, as my leading roles in community theater had not translated to reviews in the pages of the *Washington Post*. Also, *Bodyhold* featured ten actors (the three Pudgethorpes, Wilkinson, four rebels, and two maids), which I learned is a daunting number for all but the major regional companies, who were out of my league. The fact that *Bodyhold* was in many ways a traditional play, in essence a classically structured drawing room comedy, didn't help. It did not cry out as new, trendy, or cutting edge.

About the only useful purpose my playwriting served at this time was as a novel ice-breaker at cocktail parties. When people learned of my theater background, almost invariably they would ask why I was not doing courtroom work; they assumed that an actor would make a crackerjack trial lawyer. I—with a self-deprecating shrug—would reply that they might reach a different conclusion had they actually seen me on stage. More earnestly, I would point out that acting for me was a form of artistic expression, and while there was considerable craft in trial lawyering, there was little art. If my interlocutor had not yet left for the restroom or a refill on the Scotch, I would close my rejoinder by observing that there could be as much drama in the negotiation of a business deal as in any courtroom potboiler.

Fortunately I was never pressed on this point, as I had only one anecdote in my storeroom of dramatic business negotiations. Shortly after I arrived at Covington, I was assigned to be the junior associate on a massive real estate transaction in which our client, IBM, was contributing two huge parcels of land in subur-

ban DC to joint ventures with a prominent New York developer. My job, as the low man on the totem pole, was to review the property management and marketing agreements used in previous joint ventures between our client and this developer, who had done a number of projects together. I closeted myself with a sheaf of these bulky and tedious documents and was well armed when the time came to negotiate this aspect of the deal. We gathered in the breathtaking Park Avenue offices of the developer, in soft leather armchairs around an enormous marble conference table overlooking Central Park. There was an entourage of at least seven on the developer's side of the table. On our side, there was an IBM real estate officer, to his right the Covington real estate partner, to his right the Covington senior associate, and to his right, lowly me.

The developer major-domo stood up and in an aggrieved tone announced their dismay that we were taking such and such a position on these contracts, as the parties had never done it that way before. I had a serious adrenaline rush. I fished in my briefcase and pulled out an agreement that had been used in a joint project a few years back and had exactly the provisions we were seeking. I handed it to the senior associate, whose eyes lit up. He excitedly passed the document to the partner, who could barely contain himself in showing it to the client. The client then quietly interrupted and pointed out that, in fact, we had done it precisely that way on the XYZ deal.

The developer honcho barely paused for breath before snidely replying that, as we all knew, the XYZ project was an extraordinary deal and that approaches taken there had never been followed again. With racing pulse I rummaged in my briefcase and pulled out yet another agreement on yet another joint project that had been negotiated in exactly the same way. I handed it to the senior associate, who nearly fell out of his chair before passing it to

the partner, who was in a state of hysterical delirium as he pointed out the critical sections to the client. The client brandished the contract and, in a voice that could have cut ice, suggested that they might want to review their files, as here was yet another precedent for doing things our way. There was stunned silence on the developer side of the vast marble expanse and a visible deflation of their entire delegation. Their principal meekly requested a break in a voice that was barely audible; they then fled the room en masse. The client and partner almost hugged me as we rejoiced in the rout.

As I began to get a measure of comfort in private practice, I found that my dealings with the tough hombres of the CIA's Operations Directorate served me well. I was accustomed to smart, aggressive, determined clients who knew what they wanted and were damned if some punk lawyer was going to stand in their way. I had learned to stand my ground and shift the focus from the wishful to the achievable. Private sector clients were more dollar than mission driven, which actually made it easier to secure a good result.

My Agency background also proved helpful in working with the firm's partners. They sensed I'd been tested, which seemed to make them less inclined to yank my chain just for the sake of doing so. One notable exception was a senior partner who was notorious for calling associates and even junior partners to his office and then having them sit there while he took phone call after phone call. On several such occasions I would start to get up from my chair after cooling my heels for a half hour or more; he would imperiously motion me to stay seated. I learned to take work with me any time I was summoned by him. One morning I was in his office discussing a deal when he took a call on his speakerphone. A sprightly woman's voice came on the line and announced that she was calling to confirm his appointment for an enema on

Thursday morning. I bit my lip until his secretary, who happened to be standing in the doorway, burst out laughing, at which point I couldn't hold it in any longer. He turned to us and whispered, "It's hard getting old." He never took another call in my presence.

I had enormous admiration, however, for the older partners at Covington. They were men of parts. They had led rich, full lives, moving between the private and public sectors. Heading agencies and chairing commissions, they combined a prosperous legal practice with service to their country and community. They epitomized what a Washington lawyer should be: both a skilled professional and a committed citizen.

I aspired to be like these men, but grew troubled by the profile of partners a generation below them. These younger partners were terrific lawyers—sharp, savvy, and deft in their handling of clients—but they seemed consumed by their practice. They often billed well over 2,000 hours a year, which to the layperson might look like a work schedule of only forty hours per week for fifty weeks but in fact meant the attorney was spending far longer at the office because of departmental meetings, personnel issues, and other administrative matters that could not be billed. I sensed that many of them had come to DC out of law school because of a passion for public policy, but for most of them this had come to mean attending the occasional political fundraiser or hosting a dinner party that might include an administration official or a journalist. They were in the nation's capital, but not truly of it.

It was clear to me that this was not the fault of the law firm. Covington & Burling is an extraordinary firm with a commitment to public service perhaps unrivaled in the nation. One of the firm's leading lights in its early days had been Secretary of State Dean Acheson, for whom a firm conference room filled with Acheson photographs is named. They regularly hire lawyers like me who had served in government and had no private practice

experience. They were one of the few firms anywhere that allows associates to count time spent on pro bono matters toward the billable hour expectation (although the pro bono work tends toward more progressive causes such as death penalty appeals and legal services clinics, which irked the few conservatives at the firm). They have a diverse client base, ranging from the National Football League (Paul Tagliabue was a long-time Covington partner who became the NFL commissioner shortly after I joined the firm) to a host of state governments. The feel of the place was often more like a university with a brainy faculty than a profit-driven law firm.

As I came to understand the DC legal market better, I saw that it wasn't really the fault of these younger partners. The reality was that DC was a much more competitive place to be a law firm partner than when most of the senior partners had started practice. A myriad of large, well-funded, aggressive firms from outside the area had set up Washington offices and were actively poaching accounts that had traditionally belonged to the old-line DC firms like Covington and Arnold & Porter. The explosion of private sector "Beltway Bandits," particularly in the suburbs of Northern Virginia, made corporate legal work a more critical element of law firm practice than it had been in Washington a decade or two earlier, and New York- or Chicago-based firms had stronger corporate groups than DC firms did. Partners in their thirties, forties, and fifties had little choice but to grind it out if they were going to hold their own against the competitors snarling at their door.

But that didn't make it any more attractive for a young associate like me. I had come to Washington for the thrill and intrigue of working for the CIA. That was now in the past. I was eager to resume my involvement in Republican politics now that I was free of the Hatch Act. However, I had little time for politics and saw little chance for meaningful involvement in Washington even

when I did.

Acting and then writing had conferred a certain luster on my life in DC, but that was fading. I was correct in my assessment that private practice left no time for performing, and I had begun to despair about my play ever seeing the light of day. I knew I lacked patience as a writer. Most playwrights labor for a decade or more before seeing any of their work produced. Many live for the experience of writing itself; an actual production is secondary. I am not that sort of person. Theater to me is performance, and a play that is not performed is the proverbial sound of one hand clapping. I was not prepared to let my play go, though, because I was not yet ready to give up the image of myself as a theater person.

The watershed event came when Covington offered me the chance to go to Japan for eighteen months. They had formed an association with a Japanese law firm and developed the relationship by posting a series of Covington lawyers in the Japanese firm's office in Tokyo. It was a fantastic opportunity that would have cemented my partnership prospects. I would travel, learn a new language (and with Japanese investment then at its height in the US, it was viewed as a very good language to learn), and rub shoulders with a host of investment bankers, consultants, and other great contacts. It was a chance to indulge the love of foreign adventure that had taken me to London and Langley.

But it was not what I wanted to do. I wanted to become part of a community, to be a player in local politics, to be a mover and shaker on the business and civic scene, to lead the sort of multifaceted life that I so admired in the older generation of Covington partners. Later in life I might choose to return to DC, but it would likely be through a high-level executive appointment that was the fruit of years of political cultivation. And I was hungry to see my play produced. I knew I could go to Japan for a year and a

half and then leave Covington, but that would be grossly unfair to the firm that had trained me so well and given me a chance as a young lawyer coming out of the CIA skilled only in wiretaps and counternarcotics. They clearly expected whoever took the Japanese rotation to remain with the firm and help build that foreign relationship.

I also wanted to start a family. I had met Amy Bassett on a blind date during my CIA days. She was then working in computers at the IRS, so we joked that we were the ultimate Big Brother couple. We fit. She was gentle where I was aggressive, spatial where I was verbal, and intuitive where I was analytical. Amy had grown up in Baltimore and then in the DC suburbs. Her father had been an architect who'd gone on to a distinguished career in urban planning. She had studied design at college, but after a few frustrating years as a slave at a large architectural firm, had gone back to school to get a master's degree in information technology. She'd moved into my snug condo as I started at Covington in the fall of '88, and I had proposed (at the landmark Occidental Restaurant in the Willard Hotel) just before Christmas that year.

We were married outdoors in front of a modest crowd of ninety-five in September of '89 at the wonderfully named Turning Point Inn, in the country south of Frederick, Maryland. She was a lightly practicing Episcopalian and I was a non-practicing Jew, so we decided to have a justice of the peace officiate. We wrote our own ceremony, including a reading by me from Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*. A handbell choir played beautifully, although they decided to bring along a trumpet player who was ghastly. We rode off in a motorcycle sidecar on our way to a honeymoon in Sweden and Finland, chosen by Amy (with minimal input from me) because of her love of Scandinavian design. I did, however, get to select the soundtrack for our reception, including our song: Al

Green's Let's Stay Together.

By the time the opportunity in Japan was presented, we were eager to have children. Amy was a few years older than I, so there seemed little reason to wait. Bringing up baby in a cramped apartment in Tokyo was not enticing to me, although Amy was more game to try it than I was. I passed on the chance, to the astonishment of my Covington friends. I told them it was because I needed more of a chance to develop my corporate and real estate skill set, but I think they knew that was a smokescreen. Another lawyer at the firm leapt at the chance and was heartily congratulated on his good fortune.

I started scouring a map of the United States. Amy and I had each rejected the other's first choices (my hometown of Chicago, which was not neutral territory for her, and her college town of Richmond, which was too Southern for me). I wanted a city that was smaller than DC, which would make it easier to get plugged into the community, but large enough to offer the amenities of a major metropolitan area. I wanted an economy that seemed to be on its way up, where an enterprising young lawyer could build a practice. I wanted a state where Republicans were not an endangered species and where conservatives and moderates could co-exist. I considered myself fiercely conservative on fiscal issues and more moderate on social issues and didn't want to be subject to a barrage of political litmus tests. I wanted a culture that was open to outsiders, where your family didn't have to go back generations in order to be taken seriously and make an impact. We both loved urban living, but as products of public school systems didn't want to feel forced to send our kids to private schools in the city.

I also wanted a city that had a critical mass of small theater companies. Even though I felt my play would be appealing to the more traditional audiences of major regional theaters, it was a long

shot that such a company would take a chance on an unproven script by an unknown playwright. My best chance, I felt, was with up-and-coming companies working in venues seating 100–150. They had enough resources to do a solid job with the script but were small enough to consider taking a risk on new work.

Portland, Oregon quickly went to the top of our list. Portland was in the top twenty-five metro areas in the country, but seemed manageable and accessible. Technology investment, particularly from Intel and other Silicon Valley companies, had been pouring into the state and had revived an economy that for decades had been heavily dependent on forest products. Oregon was represented in the Senate by two powerful Republicans, Mark Hatfield and Bob Packwood, both of whom were widely respected and viewed as open-minded, non-ideological coalition builders. I had visited Portland while in law school, and the casual atmosphere of the city contrasted nicely with the more formal, tradition-bound style of the East Coast. And Portland's middle class not only had not abandoned the city's public school system, they seemed to embrace it.

In early '90, Amy and I made an exploratory visit that confirmed our favorable impressions. I made a close study of the theater listings during our visit and discovered a number of smaller companies offering an eclectic range of productions. I only had time to attend one of these, but liked what I saw. We decided that I should send out my résumé, which brought a round of job interviews that summer. My concerns about an Iran/Contra taint seemed unfounded, as almost no one asked me about my time at the CIA. I accepted an offer from a highly regarded Portland firm, Ball Janik & Novack, that at only twenty-five lawyers was dwarfed by Covington but had an impressive number of attorneys from national law schools.

There was, however, major reverse sticker shock. The sala-

ry offered by my new firm was almost exactly half of what I was making at Covington, and our plan was that Amy (who had a good job at the IRS) would not have to work outside the home. I received a call from the loan processor working on the mortgage for our new house, who said, “Do you realize, Mr. Cole, that your household income moving from Washington to Portland will shrink by over two-thirds?” I admitted that, sadly, I was aware of that dismal fact.

I thankfully did not have to endure the exit tongue-lashing from the Covington partners that I had received from my CIA boss. Their response, as I made the rounds, was plain befuddlement—why would anyone want to leave one of the finest firms in the country and one of the great centers of legal activity for a humble provincial practice in a remote state best known for large evergreens? I was tempted to trot out my best Polonius rendition of “Though this be madness, yet there is method in it,” but I contented myself with a smile, a shrug, and an elliptical comment about family and community.

A NEW MAN IN TOWN

I arrived in Oregon, thirty years of age, with the wind in my sails. I had rolled the dice a little in my twenties and the gamble had paid off. Instead of taking the beaten path of a safe, high-dollar law firm job out of law school, I had skated on the thin ice of the CIA and thrived. I'd enjoyed top-flight assignments and foreign travel. I had borne low-level witness to one of the great government scandals of the century and had survived, seemingly untainted. The CIA gambit had actually improved my hiring prospects, as I'd gone on to land a job at one of the nation's finest law firms—a firm that had passed on me as a law student. I had taken my career seriously but had not abandoned my passion for theater, where I had managed to trade an actor's greasepaint for a playwright's pen. And I got the girl, the lovely woman beside me in our road-weary old Saab as we pulled up to our first home, a 1920s Cape Cod in a charming neighborhood on Portland's east side.

We had barely moved in when we learned that Amy was pregnant. This news made the grind of the bar review class easier to bear. The fact that I had passed the California bar out of Stanford, been admitted to the DC bar, and practiced law for five years didn't cut any ice in Oregon, which required me to take its full exam. Ball Janik had agreed to let me finish the bar and settle into our home before beginning work.

Then, three months into her pregnancy and two days before the bar exam, Amy miscarried. She'd had one miscarriage before, but that had been just days after we'd found out she was pregnant, before we'd really had a chance to take in the news. This time we had already started mapping out changes to the house to prepare for our new arrival, and the miscarriage hit us hard. The bar exam seemed a trivial exercise after the hell we'd been through the forty-eight hours before. What had been planned as a weekend of post-exam celebrating on the coast turned into hours of consoling each other as we trudged down the beach.

This trimmed my sails more than I knew. I'd grown accustomed to catching the breaks and found myself ill prepared for this sort of blow, which seemed totally beyond my control—I responded by redoubling my efforts in areas I could do something about: building my legal career and becoming a player in Republican politics and the community. One of Ball Janik's major clients was a fast-growing forest products company called Crown Pacific. Shortly after I arrived, Crown had signed a letter of intent to buy a company in Central Oregon that owned one of the finest remaining stands of Ponderosa pine in the country. With my corporate and real estate background, I was a good match for the project and drew the assignment. It was a wonderful introduction to an industry so vital to Oregon and so alien to someone reared far from the magnificent forests of the Northwest. A fascinating twist to the deal was the seller's ownership of the little company town

of Gilchrist, Oregon, which our client had no interest in buying. We had to devise ways of separating the town from the mill that had been its lifeblood for decades, including the roads, utility systems, and town governance.

Additionally, I threw my name into the political arena. Tom Campbell, now in Congress, had given me a letter of introduction to the state Republican Party. He was kind enough to embellish my modest contributions in the way that only a congressman can. The state party chair, an investor and entrepreneur named Craig Berkman, and his executive director seemed impressed with my credentials and introduced me to a Portland-based group of Republican activists. In short order I was rubbing shoulders with state legislators, lobbyists, campaign operatives, pollsters, rumor-mongers, and gossips—the motley crew that lubricates the machinery of local politics.

I soon learned that Republicans in Portland were not exactly a thundering herd. The divide that exists in many states between liberal urban areas and conservative rural sections was even more pronounced in Oregon. The state's population is concentrated in the Willamette Valley, with heavy Democratic majorities in Portland—easily the largest city in the state—and Eugene—home of the University of Oregon and sort of a down-market version of Berkeley. For over a decade Portland had been a magnet for progressive refugees from around the country, in particular environmental stalwarts keen on preserving the awesome beauty of the state's forests. The odds of a Republican holding office in the city of Portland or in Multnomah County, in which most of Portland sits, were about as high as the state repealing its contrarian bans on sales tax and self-serve gasoline.

Republicans held the upper hand in the vast rural expanse east of the Cascade Mountains, but the area was lightly populated. The Republican senators Mark Hatfield and Bob Packwood had

entered public life before the great tilt leftward in the Willamette Valley and were able to hold on to their offices through a shrewd balancing act and the accumulation of political clout—Hatfield in the Appropriations Committee and Packwood in the Finance Committee. By the time I arrived, all statewide offices other than the U.S. Senate seats were held by Democrats, who also controlled a majority of the five-member congressional delegation.

The declining fortunes of Republicans at the state level had emboldened religious conservatives, who claimed that the party's failings were due to a drift away from core social values. Shortly before I arrived, these conservatives had run a third party candidate in the governor's race in '90 that destroyed the prospects of the distinguished moderate Republican nominee, Attorney General Dave Frohnmayer (brother of then NEA Chairman John Frohnmayer). The social conservatives had also declared war on the state party leadership and had targeted the chairman Craig Berkman for removal.

Out of these sagging electoral fortunes and internecine warfare, however, came opportunity. The fiscal conservative/social moderate wing of the party was desperate for new foot soldiers who brought energy and passion to the arena. I was sympathetic to this branch of the party, but considered myself a classic "Big Tent" Republican. I had had little religious upbringing, but felt comfortable working with people of strong faith. I identified myself as pro-choice, but considered this to be an issue of personal conscience and conviction, not a point of candidate disqualification. I told everyone I met that I was prepared to knock on doors, lick stamps, work call banks, and in any other way subordinate my Stanford Law-enhanced ego to the greater good of electing Republicans—of whatever stripe.

It was oddly thrilling being in a community so foreign to me. We knew literally no one when we arrived and had no fam-

ily there. The ways and means of Portland were a great mystery, and I eagerly sought data—as well as rumor and innuendo—to get a better grasp of my surroundings. It was a complex jigsaw of competing interests, values, and personalities, and I had brief moments of triumph as little pieces came into focus.

Of course, I wanted to be a piece of the puzzle myself. I had rejected the money and prestige of Covington to be a player in a real community. I approached Craig Berkman—a close-mouthed self-made man given to an assortment of impeccably tailored suits with eye-catching handkerchiefs on some occasions and gaudy open-necked shirts with gold chains on others—and asked for his help in getting involved in civic groups. He handed me over to his significant other Karen Hinsdale, a gracious woman whose wine industry connections and philanthropic spirit seemed to put her on intimate terms with the entire town. Karen was then on the board of the foundation for Portland State University, the only public university in the metro area, and asked whether the foundation might be of interest to me. As both my parents had been educators and I had rarely seen a top-rank city without a well-funded university, I said that I would, but I thought I had no chance of being admitted to the board. I was a mid-level law firm associate with no family connections whose modest salary and student loan burden did not permit major contributions. I pictured the glittering foundation boards of Northwestern or the University of Chicago and assumed that PSU's foundation, while perhaps a notch below those great heights, would be out of my reach.

Karen smiled indulgently at my ignorance of Portland, asked for my bio, arranged a meeting with the foundation president, and in short order had me attending my first board meeting. This is not a city that stands on ceremony, she said. Portlanders prize their Oregon Trail lineage, but don't disqualify newcomers from civic life and do value talent as well as treasure. Portland State Univer-

sity, she explained, started as a teacher's college and had only recently become a full-fledged university. It struggled as a commuter school in the shadow of the state's two major universities, the University of Oregon and Oregon State University, whose rabid alumni competed for slots on their foundation boards. PSU's board had attracted a few big players in town, but it needed new blood who had no prejudices regarding its status. Karen also introduced me to Waverly Children's Home, a venerable institution in Portland that had started as a home for foundlings in the late nineteenth century and had developed into a multifaceted children's services agency. I soon joined Karen on the Waverly board as well.

While in Washington I had attended a few events sponsored by the local Williams College alumni association and was curious to see the strength of the Oregon association. I soon learned why Portland events listed in the college alumni publication always referred to Portland, Maine. Some young turks had built up the local association a few years back, but their interest and energy level had waned, leaving the organization in a state of benign neglect. I joined up with two other younger alums who wanted to revive the group and made plans to expand our membership and schedule more events.

One of my fellow Williams enthusiasts, Bruce Davis, decided to run for the state legislature in a suburban Portland district, which gave me the chance for my first grassroots political campaign. This was total war on a scale that was easy to grasp, and I loved it. Bruce's opponent in the Republican primary was a lawyer who had made a fortunate marriage to the daughter of a prominent area businessman and had run for the legislature twice before, giving him a substantial advantage in name recognition. He had managed to make a lot of enemies during his prior campaigns, however, and was viewed by lobbyists as a loose cannon. Bruce had done a nice job of courting the lobby as a bright, enter-

prising alternative (he had an MBA from Yale and had worked on Wall Street), had built up a significant fundraising edge, and had landed several key endorsements.

Amy and I went door to door, stamped mailers, and cheered on the weary candidate. Bruce let me sit in on strategy sessions with his campaign manager; my lack of hands-on political experience did not stop me from expressing my opinion. The major question in the closing weeks of the campaign was whether to go negative on our opponent. Bruce had run an upbeat campaign, focusing on his credentials and local support. While our opponent had high negatives, Bruce thought our resources were best used to keep pushing the positive. It also looked as if the opponent was short on money and would be hard-pressed to go on the offensive himself.

We miscalculated—badly. The opponent threw a ton of family money into the campaign in the last week and put out a scathing hit piece on Bruce. We had no funds left to respond and no time to do so anyway. The momentum shifted, and Bruce was finished.

It was a bitter lesson, but great schooling. I thrived on the intensity of the campaign, the incredible concentration of energy and resources on a single day's voting, the interplay of low-hitting hostilities and high-minded rhetoric. More than anything, I savored being a player—a combatant in the fray—not just a faceless name on the host committee of another predictable DC fundraiser.

There were also major statewide campaigns that '92 election year, including the re-election bids of George Bush and Bob Packwood. I had made solid inroads into the local Republican scene, but I hadn't paid enough dues to merit a leadership position on those campaigns. This didn't bother me, as I enjoyed the intimate scale of Bruce's legislative race and figured I'd have more chances in the next election cycle.

And frankly, I had found it hard to shake the ambivalence toward President Bush that dated back to his '80 bid for the White House. I had respect for him personally as a decent, honorable man who had compiled a fine record of public service and had shown great resolve in the Gulf War, but politically he seemed to have lost his way. He couldn't decide whether he was the Eastern Establishment, good-government moderate of his forebears or the Texas populist conservative of his later-in-life oilman persona. He sensed that social conservatives distrusted him because of his prep school/Yale/silver spoon heritage, which only made it more difficult for him to reconcile these divergent strains in his background. Rather than blazing his own trail, he waffled, which led to Patrick Buchanan's brutal assault from the right in the '92 primaries. I admired Buchanan as a withering commentator, but his candidacy took an awful toll on the President. Bush, of course, helped to dig his own grave by giving Buchanan a prime-time speaking slot at the Convention in Houston, which shamed the party with its anti-gay vitriol.

Despite, or perhaps because of, my relentless networking in the community and politics, I found it hard to get out and promote my play. The steady stream of rejection letters had taken its toll, and my confidence in the script had faltered. The rebels were still stuck somewhere between full-fledged characters and idealized types, and I decided to impose a moratorium on marketing and see if I couldn't flesh them out more fully. Somewhere between the crunch of billable hours and the escalating rounds of board and committee meetings, I tried to squeeze in time for revisions.

However, I could feel my theater identity slipping away. There had always been an element of opposition in my turning to theater: I'm not just a Stanford law student, I'm an actor. I'm not just an associate at a prestigious law firm, I'm a writer. But with the

move to Portland, I felt less compelled to hold on to this maverick streak, as I had already set a bold course in leaving the comfort and status of Covington for my new role as a small city player.

And Amy was pregnant once again. She was already some five months along, and all signs were positive. Soon I would be adding fatherhood to my lengthy list of responsibilities; it seemed like there would be little time for playwriting or promoting. I was disappointed in myself, because I had come west with such resolve to pursue *Bodyhold*, but as hard as I was pushing in so many other areas I couldn't beat myself up too badly.

Then Amy miscarried again. We had decided to do amniocentesis because of her age and concerns about Down's Syndrome. Within days of the procedure, the baby's development stopped, and the doctors told us that the fetus would have to be removed from the womb. I felt a crushing, aching emptiness as I drove my wife to the hospital for this final indignity. Raising a family had been central to our conception of ourselves and our marriage. We had looked forward to playing out the traditional roles of parents of a prior generation: Amy as the devoted, stay-at-home mom and I as the man-in-the-dark-suit provider. These icons were now in pieces. After this third successive miscarriage, it looked as if we would never become parents.

We dug deep. We said the right things about remaining committed to one another come what may, and I think most of the time we meant them. But both of us faced the awful realization that the pretty family pictures we had painted in our heads when swearing to love, honor, and cherish were not the images likely to accompany us into middle age.

To counter the numbness I fell back on familiar comforts: the box scores, the bridge column, the morning run, the *South Seas* short stories of Somerset Maugham. To my surprise, I found I needed my play. Perhaps it was another form of opposi-

tion: I'm not just another childless professional, I'm a produced playwright. But I suspect it was something more, my grieving psyche seeking refuge in those idyllic rhythms of longhand creation by the banks of the Nile. I plunged into a reshaping of the rebels and soon had a script that I thought might be ready for the Portland market.

But month after disheartening month, I found that the Portland market did not appear ready for me. The Oregon style of rejection differed from DC, where artistic directors would not hesitate to tell you they had no time for or interest in your project (or simply would not respond at all). Portland theater types were more responsive, but decidedly more oblique: *there is some very promising writing here, maybe we could arrange a reading sometime in the future, you know we have a new play festival in the summer so by all means submit it then*. I would try to grab hold of these slender threads, only to find in each case that they spooled away.

I sought to modulate my pitch to suit the different cadence of the Northwest. I had discovered this difference in the office as well, where the intensity forged in competitive environments at Williams, Stanford, and Covington played well with the Ball Janik partners but less so with those beneath me in the firm pecking order. I gradually learned that quiet suggestions and subtle nudges were more likely to win friends and influence people in the Northwest than the full frontal assault I had practiced on the Eastern seaboard.

After these tantalizing leads for *Bodyhold* came to naught, I decided I had to join forces with a director to have any hope of being produced. I had learned through my networking that readings, not the cold call equivalent of sending an unsolicited script, were more likely to generate interest in a play. A reading presents a play in a mode much closer to performance than black type-script on a white page and shows that a director and some actors

thought enough of the script to prepare it for an audience. But I had never directed, nor had any aspirations to, and I knew almost no actors in town.

One evening I took in a production of Christopher Fry's *The Lady's Not for Burning* at the second stage (called, a little naughtily, the "Blue Room") of the Portland Civic Theatre. I had heard of Fry's brilliant play, but had never had the chance to see it live. I was dazzled by the playwright's verbal facility—every bit the equal of the Shaw and Coward wordplay that had first turned my head in London a decade ago. I was impressed at how tightly the director had exercised control over his actors, who could have gone well over the top if left to their own devices, while allowing Fry's wondrous verse to shine. I flattered myself by thinking that a director who had the command of language to pull off this show could do a very nice job indeed with my play.

I made my way to the tattered and dreary lobby of the theater after the show, ready to display my newfound Portland-style capacity for gentle suasion. But as soon as I found the director, a soft-spoken giant of a man with a wispy beard and longish hair that suggested abiding youthful fancies, I reverted to my usual oral battery. I gushed on about the similarities between Fry's play and my own as the director—who had introduced himself as Robert Holden—stood there, cornered, a polite grin frozen on his face. Thankfully Mr. Holden had insufficient playwright avoidance skills to make a quick escape and was too kind not to share his address and phone number with me.

I dispatched the latest copy of the script to him and waited. And waited. I knew I had come on too strong in our first meeting, so like a high school swain angling for a date, I tried to play it as cool as I could. There were plenty of other potential directors in Portland, of course, but something had clicked at *The Lady's Not For Burning* that told me this was the guy. After several months,

however, I had reached the limits of my cool. I called. He graciously acknowledged receiving the script, but no, he had not yet had time to read it. Would I call back in a few weeks? I did and was put off again and again.

This was intolerable. In DC I had put up with such treatment because I understood myself to be a nobody, just one of the horde of high-priced, big firm associates. But dammit, in Portland I was becoming a somebody. I was on the partnership track at a prestigious downtown firm logging big-time hours on acquisition after acquisition for our major client Crown Pacific. At Portland State I was introducing some of the alumni development practices that worked so well for Williams College in order to boost the university's anemic annual giving rate. At Waverly I was hard at work coming up with auction packages for their big yearly fundraiser. Our new team had breathed life into the moribund Williams alumni association. And I was a definite up-and-comer in local Republican circles.

Bob Holden was blissfully unaware of my lustrous résumé. My credentials and connections meant nothing to him. But he finally called to tell me that my script did. In a quiet, almost diffident voice, he said that he'd been struck with the fluency of my language and the bold twists of the plot. He, too, had struggled a little with the anchoring of the rebels, but he thought the project had promise and would be pleased to take whatever next step I had in mind.

We met several times at one another's homes and spent as much time learning about each other as we did discussing the script. Our backgrounds were radically different. His natural father had disappeared from view when he was young, and his mother, a brilliant but erratic commercial artist, had raised Bob and his two sisters alone. She moved the family incessantly, sometimes as often as five times a year. As Bob put it, whenever

his mother ran out of ways to rearrange the furniture, she decided it was time to move on. Bob had attended over twenty-five grade schools and three high schools, all in and around the Portland metro area. He had managed to overcome these formidable obstacles to win a scholarship to Reed College—an outstanding liberal arts school in Portland—but had to drop out when the college lost the funding for his program. He had enrolled as a theater major at a local community college, where he'd met his wife. When their first of three sons arrived, he dropped out of school just short of his degree to get a job as a truck driver at the window and door manufacturer where his stepfather worked. After several years on the road, he was promoted and ended up running the entire trucking division for the company, with responsibility for some thirty drivers.

But theater was his passion, and he devoted his evenings and weekends to acting and later directing. He had started theater companies and seen others go down in flames. He had been in smash hits that extended for months and flops that drew audiences in the single digits. He had shared the stage with just about anyone who was anyone in Portland theater, including Lindsay Wagner (who went on to become the Bionic Woman). He had seen many friends leave town for Los Angeles or New York, and seen most of them come back again, disheartened. He had an inexhaustible store of war stories and a treasure trove of green room gossip.

He was also an incorrigible liberal verging on socialist. He had been to San Francisco in the halcyon days of the Summer of Love and had the tie-dyed shirts to prove it. He had been a Teamster in his early truck driving days, and though he now found himself on the other side of the collective bargaining table as a member of management, it was clear where his sympathies lay. He couldn't remember the last time he had voted Republican, and

he remembered just about everything. It was good that we did not come to blows over politics, as Bob carried well over 300 pounds on a frame that was slightly over six feet.

Despite this odd coupling, we found a rhythm and decided to push the script in the direction of a staged reading, where *Bodyhold* might finally attract the interest of a local company. Bob suggested the interim step of holding a few informal readings at my home with actors, but with no audience present. This would give me an opportunity to hear for the first time how trained voices gave life to my internal dialogue.

On the appointed Saturday morning, the actors arrived in our charmingly bourgeois living room, which featured original stenciling by Amy and antique furniture of undistinguished provenance but pleasing walnut and mahogany appearance. Uncertain as to the protocol for such events, we had laid out a tea and coffee service that would have done any Junior League hostess proud. I began the festivities with a modest welcoming speech that I thought was appreciative without being servile.

No one appeared to roll his eyes, but it may just have been that I could not see through the bloodshot. It was clear that these were strange surroundings and an unfamiliar hour to these slightly scruffy creatures of the night and the quicker we got on from me to my script, the better. Bob took charge, gave a few pointed directions, and off they went.

God, what a rush. The cast was uneven, and their command of the material halting, but that morning they made my work tangible—work that after five years of non-presentation had seemed consigned to the ether. The repartee among the Pudgethorpe family members positively sang at times, and the actors laughed out loud at places I had hoped an audience would. Our living room was transformed from a conventional middle-class repository of our finer things to a chamber bewitched, bursting with wit and

élan. And I, for perhaps the first time ever, felt like a real artist, not simply a slumming lawyer poser.

There was no shortage of constructive criticism from the departing cast members as they gulped down their third cup of coffee and took their leave. There were plenty of misfires noted on my ever-present yellow legal pad. But both Bob and I came away with the sense that we had something worth our time and attention.

I massaged the script in parts, broke it up and gave it a thorough hammering in others. We reconvened the core group of actors for a second reading, with the inevitable last-minute drop-outs and substitutions. This second session was less exultant for me than the first but also more fruitful, as my ear was better attuned to the modulations of the actors, who in turn were more in sync with the script.

Bob and I decided after the second round of script revision that we were ready for a public reading. Bob had worked on and off for years with a hazard-prone but indestructible Portland theater impresario named Guy Peter Oakes, who ran a shoestring company called Paula Productions (allegedly named after a long departed girlfriend). Guy had been dogged for years by rumors of sexual indiscretions with those beneath the age of legal consent and had been in and out of a number of dingy, nondescript performance spaces. But he was a true-blue champion of new work and always open to making room for readings in his schedule. I knew I could go out and rent a more upscale venue, but I was concerned that would just make me look like some rich lawyer trying to buy notice for his little play (and on my over two-thirds reduced household income, I little felt like a rich lawyer in any event). I could have tried to suck up to the artistic directors of one of the more prestigious companies in town to see whether they would agree to host the reading, but I'd been trying to get a seat near the popular girls in the classroom of Portland theater for

two years and thought that my luck was unlikely to change. Paula Productions it was.

Casting the staged reading was chaotic. It had been relatively easy for Bob to prevail on old theater buddies for the odd Saturday session at my home, but a staged reading called for some degree of preparation. Readings are often scheduled on Monday evenings, as all theaters are dark then and actors have no performance conflicts, but we hoped to make a bigger splash than we thought could be achieved on a Monday. Actors are not generally compensated for readings—at least in markets the size of Portland—and usually do them because they think it might land them a hot part, they're looking for exposure, or they're friends with the writer, director, or someone in the cast. None of these reasons will get in the way of a good paying gig, however, as we found to our chagrin. We lost body after body as better opportunities came along. We had a wonderful Pudgethorpe, though, an actual Englishman who was a senior executive at Hewlett Packard by day and the closest thing the Northwest had to Alec Guinness by night.

As the audience filed in for the first of two readings scheduled on successive weekend evenings, I shuddered at how mismatched the Paula Productions seats were and how the lights looked more like a tacky, luau-themed beach party than a true theater setting. But my parents had flown in from Chicago, and I had imposed on a few bemused Republican friends, so I flashed a hearty grin and made them welcome. Tasteful invitations had gone out to artistic directors and producers all over town. While I didn't recognize any of them in the modest crowd, I hoped that was because the circle of my acquaintance in Portland had simply not extended far enough.

But damn, we gave them a show. Pudgethorpe was charming and self-possessed. Wilkinson was frightfully earnest. One of the maids—a bluesy black woman with a booming voice that I later

learned made her one of the leading vocalists in town—brought a sass and a brass to the scenes with the Pudgethorpe women that I'd never imagined. The audience gave a resounding ovation. My mother was in tears. I couldn't wait for the next night.

I should have. The chemistry had somehow altered. Lines that had been proven winners the evening before fell fatally flat. The rhythm of the cast, so steady and composed the first night, flailed and lurched. It was the same script, in the same venue, with the same actors, but it was as if the beautifully wrapped gift that had been handed to me the first performance had been re-packaged in an ill-fitting box with ripped second-hand tissue paper. And again, there was no sign of theater world VIPs.

Bob, the sage veteran, told me that the second evening's performance had actually been much stronger in places and that some cheap mugging had resulted in laughs the first night that were not worth holding on to. He declared himself well pleased and pronounced the script very close to performance level.

I returned to my familiar posture by the phone. I gave it a few weeks to let word of mouth about the readings take the ambling, coffee-stained path of Portland buzz. Then months. I summoned the courage to call a few of the leading lights and ask whether they had heard about the reading. No one had, although some agreed to take another look at the script. It was as if all our fevered preparations had never taken place.