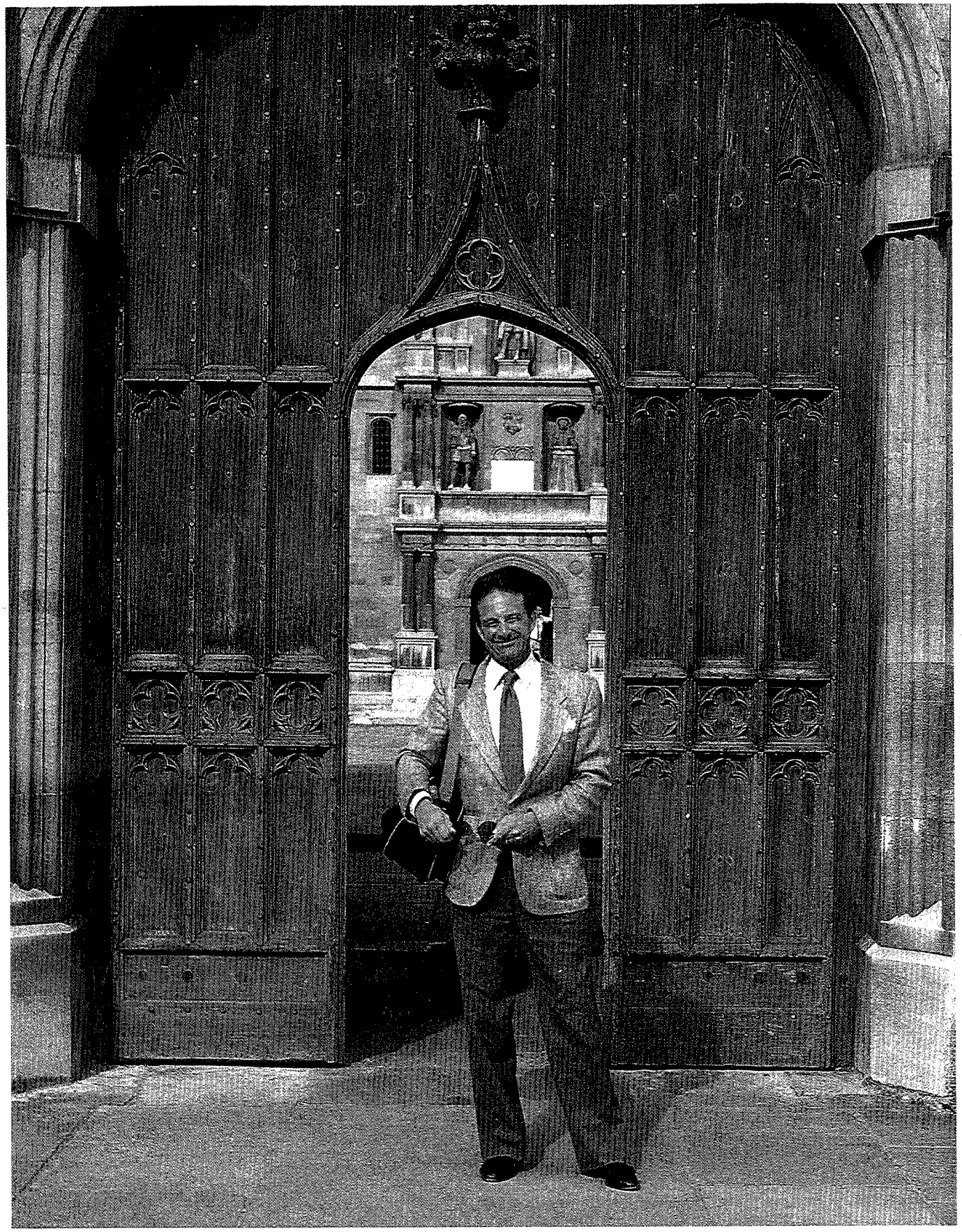

Mike Levin pauses in front of the main gate of Wadham College, where he spent two years as a Thouron Fellow more than two decades ago.

PHOTOGRAPH BY NORA JEAN LEVIN

MAGIC TIME

Responding to a summons from the hallowed halls of Wadham College, an American 'Old Member' returns to Oxford.

By Michael Levin

YOU CAN'T go home again, Thomas Wolfe said: even if the place and its people don't change, time's impact on the voyager is enough to make origins alien. But reunions can be happy exceptions to that rule—a chance to connect with witnesses who knew you before the masks were put on, the elaborate defenses constructed. That's especially true for reunions at Oxford, which (after 700 years) is not supposed to change, whose spires and traditions tend to become fixed in the mind.

Perhaps it's a phase of life that now, into my forties, these associations matter, that strolls along Locust Walk evoke pangs of nostalgia, or that I find myself collecting school ties once thought too obvious and overpriced. But I'd recently attended a high-school reunion at which the past became present—had seen that long-gone cafeteria recreated by men cracking the same poker jokes, who could still recite all the old P.T.C. routes because bus rides out of their neighborhood represented dreams of escape. Had discovered those years were like welds in metal, the strongest part of me, and stayed till four in the morning, reluctant to stop memory's flow.

So when an invitation came for the first reunion of American graduates of Wadham College at Oxford University—which I attended as a Thouron Fellow in 1964–66 and last saw 17 years ago—my response was foregone. Never mind that the terms of this invitation emerged in fits and starts, with the bumbling charm characteristic of Oxford approaching the topic of m-o-n-e-y. Or that I received three identical letters the same week from Sir Claus Moser, the new warden (president) of Wadham, successively addressed "Dear Levin," "Dear Michael," and "Dear Old Member"—all wanting "to know whether you might like to come; and in any case [urging me to] note the dates in your diaries." Jean and I were due in Europe anyway. Besides, we had been married in Oxford, and friends from Penn would be there on sabbatical. Our bags were packed before the final invitation arrived.

Herewith, then, is an account of our three hectic days in Oxford and some steps that surrounded them—an in-gathering that became a reunion in spades.

Wednesday, 3:00 p.m. We're finally on the road to Oxford, already behind schedule and running hard. Part of the reason we're late is that we've brought our teen-age son Jeremy, who's still limp as a noodle with jet lag. We've pressed on anyway, hauling him behind us like a sea-anchor. In 24 hours, we've done Kamikaze London—walked through Westminster Abbey, taken the boat from the Tower, dashed through the British Museum to see treasures he's read about. Within 48 hours, we've waltzed into Wimbledon on $6 general admission to see hours of tennis, topped by the Connors-Pernfors match, emerging sunburnt and stuffed with strawberries. And lunched in Pall Mall with Peter Williams, an old Wadham friend who was once a professional jockey and still looks a Welsh imp, all curly hair, dark eyes, and flashing teeth. "Hmm," said Jeremy between leonine yawns, already half-Anglicized, "Think I'll try the cold poached salmon . . . again."

Now we've gotten our rental Ford and put what we'd been told was the coldest, rainiest fortnight in English history behind us, sweaters and mackintoshes safely stowed. The sky is cerulean, the air cool and crystalline. But though I lived here two years, it still takes 15 minutes to remember right-hand drive and roaring down the

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'I spent my Oxford years with my head down, studying. I could have had its fields every morning, gone punting each week.'

opposite side of the road. In that slim quarter-hour, I whip round Cadogan Square against the current, into the fast heavy traffic of the Brompton Road. The pressure in our car shoots through the ceiling. "Go to the left! Go *left*!" shrieks Jean, covering her eyes. "Am!" I snap, sweating. "No, no!" she howls over the grind and clank of traffic, waving her map. "Center lane, center lane!" We rocket along between lorries and delivery vans, dodging potholes, trying to read postcard-size signs through billows of dust. From the back seat comes high-pitched laughter from a son bemused by the follies of his parents. "Hee-hee," it goes. "Hee-hee." Jeremy is the proud possessor of a new driver's license, and he is fully awake for the first time and unable to believe all these cars with no one in the driver's seat, all going the wrong way. "Here's a joke," he says gleefully: "How many people does it take to drive to Oxford? Three—two to yell, and one to giggle."

Wednesday, 5:00 p.m. Oxford was a Roman fort before it was a royal keep and university town, and its roads still follow the old curved paths. This used to be no problem, but half the streets are now closed to vehicles; and though we're here in one piece, rolling in stately fashion up the High Street, we're not quite there yet. I know a dozen ways to Wadham; I can't use any, it seems. Can't turn down Catte Street or Turl Street or get to the warren of lanes behind them. Can't go right on Cornmarket either, or reach the Broad Street which Wadham adjoins. I make a hurried U-turn, swing back, unaware this route has been closed to all but buses until three red double-deckers charge like rhinos behind me, honking and flashing their lights. We take evasive action, screech past the Martyrs' Memorial where Bloody Mary burned bishops as heretics, pull up before Wadham, and leap out, panting.

And suddenly, on foot, haste evaporates, a peace descends. It is not that cars contradict Oxford: the MG company started here, and its founder, Billy Morris, endowed a college, which bears his name. It is that some vital part of the place does not acknowledge their existence, moves in a time that has little to do with speed or short attention-spans. On foot in Oxford, you walk Albion rather than England, the realm of Blake and Spenser, Narnia and Taliesin, site of the convocation that led to Magna Charta, midwife of literature, Greece to our Renaissance. It is this side of Oxford that caused Sam Goldwyn to discard his prepared speech at Balliol College and declare that "For years, I've been known for saying 'Include me out'; but today, I am giving it up forever."

And today, this side of Oxford seems much more Keats's "finest city in the world" than Queen Victoria's "Old monkish place I have a horror of." The Sheldonian Theatre down the way gleams with refurbished glory, Saxon heads on its columns reflecting the level afternoon light. Delphinia and gladioli paint the quads the colors of English history, blood and gold. Wadham's Cotswold-stone façade glows with that inner warmth also seen in the building-blocks of Jerusalem.

In seconds, we're checked in at the lodge beneath the main gate, our bags whisked away by Willy the Porter, still pink-cheeked but balding and portly, remembering in me, as I recall in him, the young men we were. He asks what year I came up, to confirm that recollection. Whether you come from the north or the south, from Hong Kong or California, when you enter Oxford you "go up," just as graduates "go down." The ascent to Oxford is a state of mind.

As are the messages on the board that held Jean's telegrams before we married. One is from a Canadian professor who went down in the Fifties, was largely the reason I came to Wadham, and asserts he's passing through by chance. The other asks us to call Bettina Yaffe Hoerlin, former assistant vice president for health affairs at Penn, who's in Oxford as a visiting scholar at Green College but has achieved new personal triumphs rowing crew for the first time. She appears in minutes to take Jeremy for a bicycle tour with her own kids, who've known him since they were tots. "When's salmon?" he asks, as they depart. And we follow our bags to our room.

Our rooms, directly beneath my old one on the corner staircase in the original quad, alleged to have housed the architect Christopher Wren, whose monument is Restoration London. The stone sill is deeply bowed, worn as by water from centuries of passing feet. A large dim space lit by a single bulb, gray as a battleship, wainscots thickly painted, with a rug that seems woven from rats' fur, small bay windows, and two monastic bedrooms opposite the entryway. I have forgotten how the night chill gathers in this masonry to discharge itself before dawn, leaving you rigid beneath every blanket you can find. "Hideous, of course," I say later when asked how our rooms are, not realizing until the remark is out that this is what I have always thought. But at the moment, there is a bouquet of hand-picked wildflowers and a basket of fruit with a welcome note on the center desk, in a pool of Vermeer sun streaming from the west. The rooms look beautiful beyond compare.

It's less than 10 minutes since we arrived; and a good thing, too, since we're already late for the dinner with Princess Margaret that's the centerpiece of this affair. But not to worry: we jump into our formal duds, scrabbling for misplaced cufflinks—Oxford peace does not reach so far as the bottom of a suitcase—and sprint to the Warden's Garden, where festivities are set to begin.

Wednesday, 7:00 p.m. The College has had at least two great wardens since its founding in 1610 by Nicholas and Dorothy Wadham, a childless Somerset couple who sought a different posterity and hit the mark better than they knew. One was John Wilkes (warden, 1648–59), who formed a "philosophical clubbe" that became the Royal Society, wrote works on space travel, married Cromwell's sister, and made Wadham a sanctuary in an age of sectarian violence. The other was Maurice Bowra (warden, 1938–70), whose early, self-aggrandizing Oxford years furnished the model for disagreeable Master Samgrass in *Brideshead Revisited*. Bowra made Wadham famous by sheer force of wit, personality, and scholarship—and by gargantuan appetites that ranged from boys and girls to T'ang art and Sophoclean criticism. It is part of the Bowra legacy that a local limerick still rhymes "Wadham" with "Sodom," that he ended a wedding speech by remarking in that *basso profundo*, "Lovely couple. *I* know; I've slept with them both." Oxford being what it is, these details have burnished the legend, not diminished it.

An arresting new sculpture of Bowra sits in the leafy back quad. It catches the fire-hydrant physique, the fierce energy and intelligence of the man, shoulders hunched, head thrust forward. But the muscular torso has no legs or feet; it dwindles at the waist into the chair legs themselves, suggesting birth defects, amputations, a wheelchair without wheels. It is a brilliant, unsettling evocation of the power inner deformities can produce.

Now hopes are high Claus Moser may be the next great warden. For one thing, he looks and acts the part, a budding pianist who fled Nazi Germany to become statistician laureate, coauthor of British demo-

graphics and of the Robbins Report that opened up English higher education—a droll, rumpled, unflappable man, both shiny-domed and long-haired, fond of explaining he does not head a penal institution and of quoting Beerbohm to the effect that "I was a modest, good-humored boy—it was Oxford made me insufferable." For another, he has the passion and the persona: instantly accessible, able to put anyone at ease, his whole career staked on a vision of upward mobility threatened by Thatcher education cuts, on the belief that talent should be maximized, not efficiency. He is plainly not the kind of statistician who uses numbers the way a drunk uses lampposts, for support rather than illumination. Instead, he has used them as flamethrowers, to light decisions while clearing a path. Most important, he's also a businessman who raised 10 million pounds to revamp Covent Garden as head of the Royal Opera Society. For, at 800 students, Wadham has grown over the last 10 years from a small Oxford college to one of the largest (with, all the while, no increase in facilities or endowment) and desperately needs such skills. It's because of his work with her at the Royal Opera that Her Highness Margaret Rose, Countess of Snowden, is present tonight.

Sir Claus swings round to greet us, against shimmering grass and a crowd of black-robed Old Members straight from Seurat. In one corner of the garden are the actors Jeremy Irons and Susan Hampshire, chatting with the former British Ambassador to Japan. In the other are a gaggle of M.P.s and judges discussing fly fishing with the Ambassador to Norway, bemoaning the spread of catch-and-release. If Sir Thomas Beecham, another Old Member, were not interred, he'd doubtless be here, too. The place drips more names than a Nieman-Marcus catalogue.

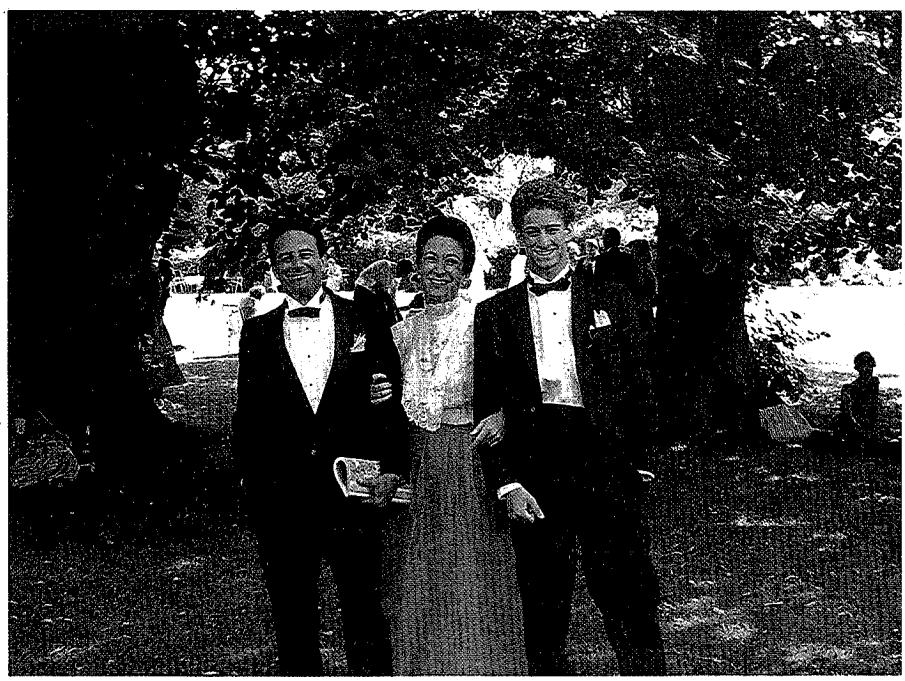
But here also is ex-roommate Ronnie Stewart, witness at my English civil marriage to Jean in 1966, who's given up British criminal law to found an enormously successful prep school in Manhattan and is wondering what to do with the rest of his life. Here is Bill Nitze, usher at our religious marriage in Philadelphia—the one to show parents we were not living in sin—who was our first dinner guest as a married couple in England, accompanied me to Harvard Law School before working for Mobil Oil around the world, and is bound for a new career in Washington. And though we're all on the cusp and life is changing for each of us, somehow nothing has changed. We resume conversations interrupted years ago; the links feel and look the same.

Without warning, we're cheek by jowl with Princess Margaret, being introduced. An American diplomatic reception would leave nothing to chance, providing detailed instructions on where to walk, stand, sit, blow your nose. Here it's assumed you can improvise all that. Do I bow? Nod? Salute? Does Jean shake hands, or curtsy? I emit what I hope is a friendly grunt, half-bending from the waist. But Her Royal Highness has the politician's talent for erasing barriers. Tiny and immaculate in rose-petal skin and a zillion dollars in diamonds, only a shadow of toughness at the corners of her mouth suggesting the private consolations a fishbowl existence has left her, she takes my hand, smiles up with huge blue eyes that are not the least vague or bored. "You don't seem such an Old Boy," she murmurs. We haven't been called Old Boys since the college was coeducated in the early Seventies. I know what she means, though. I laugh, giving the stock answer: "All my decay's on the inside." And we troop off to dinner in the Great Hall, which has just been repainted for the first time since it was built. The seventeenth-century tennis balls found wedged in its hammerbeams are now on display at the City Museum.

The last time I ate in hall, Wadham's bursar owned a Brussels-sprout farm, and a truckload of the little green critters was unloaded into a six-foot cauldron in the college kitchen each Monday morning. By Monday lunch, the cauldron was boiling. It boiled all week, with what floated to the top scooped off for meals until it was gone. But this evening, no sprouts are in sight, only smoked salmon (what else?), Coronation chicken, and four wines from the college cellars (another Bowra legacy), overseen by portraits of admirals, chancellors, and parliamentary speakers who've gone down to perpetuate Wadham on the playing fields of life.

A hundred Old Members, guests, and college dons chat amiably at three long refectory tables beneath the High Table, emperor penguins on a comfortable floe. At my end of one table are a svelte blonde filmmaker shooting a TV retrospective on the Munich Crisis; Pat Thompson, retiring Senior Fellow, convivial host to graduate students over weekly sherry during my stay here; and a Kensington Palace bodyguard. The talk is lively, ranging over race and class in Britain and America, Pat's wartime paratroop adventures, the uses of history in fiction, how the Princess is guarded. (Yes, they're with her wherever. No, she can't shake them. In crowds, they look for people patting or touching themselves—the sign of concealed weapons.) Conversation focuses on Munich, which Englishmen recall the way Americans remember Pearl Harbor: "even when they were five years old, they know exactly where they were, the tensions ran so high, they thought it was the end of the world, that things were ending forever." A furled umbrella meant hope rather than appeasement then.

Talk gets livelier still as we adjourn to a choirboy recital in the eighteenth-century music room, then for brandy in the old library, where I wrote bad short stories in a nook choked with first editions of Bunyan and Swift. Now, the room is cleared of



NORA JEAN LEVIN

In the Warden's Garden, Mike Levin, his wife Jean, and their son Jeremy attend a reception for Old Members.

shelves and dust; its shape unfolds clean as a psalm. Pat Thompson stoops lankily over Jean before a crowd milling about the entrance, wisps of gray hair about his ears; hitches his academic robes, deploying that donnish love of profanity with relish: "F__ it, my dear, let's go in." Ronnie delivers an abstract soliloquy on Apollo and Mammon, addressing life choices as obliquely as he always did. Bill reminds us how I stumbled through the east quad one night after too many half-and-halfs, apostrophizing the stars as "little ice cubes in the sky." The Princess, who was expected to depart after *Greensleves*, stays on, sipping Glenlivet, smoking cigarettes in a long onyx holder. I groan up Staircase VI to bed at two.

Thursday, 7:00 a.m. Before this summer is over, I will have completed luxuriant solitary runs along the Moskva, the Neva, the Thames Embankment, the Charles in Boston, Lucy Vincent Beach on Martha's Vineyard. None is as beautiful as this cool sunrise jog on the Isis before even the shopgirls are up, through fields of wildflowers haloed with mist, down still canals where bright-painted houseboats doze. In the midst of pure pleasure, I'm stabbed with regret. I spent those Oxford years with my head down, studying, scribbling, trying to master an impossible dissertation on Eugene O'Neill, trying to write before I'd lived. I could have owned these fields every morning, gone punting each week, passed that time *al fresco*, in the sun, on the grass. I can no longer remember why I drove myself so hard; there were all these other Oxfords, lost and unrecoverable.

Yet one is retrievable, at least. My return leg leads past Merton College, and suddenly I am ambushed. Every crack in these walls is familiar as ever, and I'm heading once more, as I did for two years, to my weekly tutorial with Nevill Coghill, playwright, Shakespearean, translator of Chaucer, Richard Burton's first drama coach, founder of the Inklings with C.S. Lewis and Dorothy Sayers. Hearing his stage Cockney at our first meeting again: "Naow, Michael me lad, th' first bit o' doin' this job, is to figger aout *'ow* we'll do th' job." Reliving those explorations. Walking beside him, that great gaunt gray wolf's head nearly seven feet in the air, the lurching stride like a wall falling down, big hands in leather driving gauntlets beneath his cardigans and capes and Sherlock Holmes hats as we roamed winter countrysides, lunching with Tolkien (whose trilogy he called "hobbit-forming"), analyzing medieval visions in parish churches' stained glass. How he tucked his handkerchief in his jacket sleeves like a Cavalier courtier, or shyly pushed across the table two heirloom candlesticks as a wedding gift, or encouraged me to audition for his student production of *Doctor Faustus* with Burton and Elizabeth Taylor despite my Philadelphia accent, making me production secretary out of the goodness of his heart instead of yanking me off the boards. Sitting on the lawn of his house in Gloucester, discussing the *Zeitgeist* while salmon leapt the Severn below. His exuberant letter when, after the long voyage home, after law school and our move to Washington, my thesis was finally accepted: "Rejoicings and love to you both, and here is the confidential Examiners' Report. I am not sure this is correct procedure on my part, but I never was good at correctitude. Treat it as confidential!" The string of congratulations marking our later milestones, often scratched in books he'd just published: "For your fine new poem." "In honour and joy over Jeremy!"

I trot into Merton, ablaze with exertion and memory, ignoring the stares of the assistant day porter—a new one—on the gate: some lost American tourist, surely. Staircase I on the back quad remains identical, its view across Dead Man's Walk to the banks of the Cherwell unaltered by a delphinium. I am seized by the conviction that if I go up those stairs, I will find him at work in the long sunny room with its ten thousand books, its red silk wallpaper and Récamier couch. I hear at my shoulder the surprise in his voice when I noted the absence of other graduate papers: "Why, there are no others, of course. You're my last student." He will rise from behind his desk in sections, like a camel, and flash that snaggle-toothed grin and invite me once more to solve problems that are slightly beyond me. "Ah, just the person I was thinking of. I can't get this quite right. . . . Now, tell me: exactly what is it Lear curses during the storm?"

I don't ascend, though. I just halt there, trotting in place. Then I turn back to Wadham, signing the visitors' book on the way out. Nevill H. K. A. Coghill, Merton Professor of Literature Emeritus, died of a stroke nearly 10 years ago. Quickly, I hope; I never knew. I do not want to break the spell.

Thursday, 3:00 p.m. We've finally connected with Bettina and her husband, Gino Segrè, and been punting with them on the River Cherwell through reeds and magpies, and had strawberries with raspberry chaser, dragooning Jeremy for lunch at Wadham in between. ("Wot?" he said, inspecting the buffet, "no salmon?") Bettina was conceived in Munich, born in Binghamton, and raised at Los Alamos when the Bomb was our greatest achievement, daughter of an emigré atomic physicist. A double-diamond skier with philosophy degrees and a health-policy doctorate, she taught survival techniques to the Peace Corps and was deputy health commissioner of the City of Philadelphia five years. Gino, new chair of Penn's physics department, has been at Wadham six months as visiting professor, pursuing theories that may unify the three families of quarks—the Top and the Bottom, the Up and the Down, and (my favorites) the Charmed and the Strange. Born in Italy before Mussolini's Nuremberg laws, he left soon thereafter, then returned to Florence after World War II for an education that led through Har-

WADHAM COLLEGE

Princess Margaret chats with Dietrich von Bothmer (right) and Sir Claus Moser, warden of Wadham (far right).

'Whatever else it leaves you, Oxford's special gift is a sort of magic time in which your senses open, like pores in a sauna.'

vard and M.I.T., but he remains the ultimate Italian—tall, soft-voiced, elegiac, as angular and elegant as a Modigliani. He has never quite got used to the fact that disclosing what he does stops conversation at parties. His sentences are punctuated by little sighs, by the loneliness of existence at that border where matter becomes light and even most physicists do not go.

These people are not sentimental. He became a physicist though his uncle won a Nobel Prize at it. She has fought for women's health programs, health care for the poor, and AIDS education. They wrote last spring that "The Visiting Scholar and the Visiting Professor would be delighted to join the Visiting Thourons for dinner [post-]Princess. Last time we dined at Wadham, we sat with Lady Moser and Sir Claus; do you think you could arrange a [whole] Jewish refugee table?" But though they've already begun packing to return to the States, all they can talk about is the secret civility of this place—its hushed calms at twilight, the covered market and impromptu musicales, how you're seen as peculiar if you *don't* break for tea at four. Oxford time has eaten a hole in the fabric of their advancement. "You know," Gino marvels, "when I went to buy salmon, the counterman said, 'You won't be disappointed, sir.' He was right." Months later, in another country, the physicist remarks, "You won't be disappointed, sir," and we smile at each other, aware of the world behind that joke.

Thursday, 5:30 p.m. Jean and I are late for the first session of the Wadham North America Committee, bursting into a circle of suits and ties like misplaced gondoliers in our boating shorts and striped socks. Previous briefings have laid out the problem. Wadham was always a free-and-easy place with bunches of Aussies and Scots reading Persian or other arcane subjects. But the tutorial system requires a minimum number of students to support each Persian tutor, and without new residence quads, the college can't keep these students or stabilize its growth. Wadham must build or shrink, and build fast, before the endowment's in hand, when every other Oxford college has belatedly discovered fundraising, too. How are the funds to be raised? What should the strategy be? Should it aim for giving first, or to strengthen the sense of a Wadham community first? Annual gifts, or big hits? No, all Americans are not millionaires. No, if British alumni have no tradition of giving, the college must create one. It must make it easy for them to say yes. What are the income patterns? What about the Pakistanis? the Canandians? What do Harvard or Yale do? The Americans jump up and down with ideas, counter-suggestions. The English committee members take notes. "Thank you for this," Sir Claus says at last. He has dark pouches under his eyes from constant interaction since yesterday morning. "We need all the help you can give. . . . There's just time to change for dinner." Jean and I sprint for our room, pull formal clothes over the residue of our punting expedition.

Thursday, 9:00 p.m. The second dinner is looser, released from the restraints of royal protocol, business complete. It certainly starts the right way. An English industrialist who read Chinese here meets Jean at the door, kisses her hand, declares, "Madam, you are simply gorgeous," and sweeps her through the entrance. We find ourselves at High Table with knights and ladies to our right and left, auld acquaintance close by. Wine flows, trivia fly, even the paintings on the walls above—which I used to see as the grim family portraits in *Mourning Becomes Electra*—seem to smile. Until Dietrich von Bothmer rises to deliver the Response to the Toast, begins to describe how, as the last German Rhodes Scholar, he was due here to study classics "because of Bowra, of course," but couldn't get out of Germany because Munich erupted. And paced the streets of Bremen until his boat was allowed to depart, caught at the edge, knowing he would never go back. And after arriving here was ultimately sent on by Bowra to New York, where he began a career that left him director of classical antiquities at the Metropolitan Museum. "And zo," he concludes in tones husky with love and more indecipherable feelings, his spectacles and white hair shining, the sweep of his arm taking in the mahogany panels, the stained glass windows and painted crests, and everything beyond. "Zo, ladies and gentlemen, I give you Wadham—my first free home."

For an instant, the term "ivory tower" acquires its original meaning; the hall fills with a sense of Oxford as fortress and refuge, a candle against the dark, against Levellers and Inquisitors and Roundheads, as well as Nazis and the thousand other troubles that stormed through the past. The rest of the evening is an anti-climax after that.

Friday, 6:00 p.m. We've had our last meal in hall and reached the terminal stage of reunions: dispersal. Like characters at the close of an old Hopalong Cassidy serial, we're bound for different parts, "Till We Meet Again" on zither in the background—Bettina's family to the Lake District, Bill's to Bath and Vienna, Ronnie's to Ireland, ours south to Kent for the weekend, then on. We've shown Jeremy our former flat in the Banbury Road, toured our first married home in a former rural slum near Blenheim Palace, ground through four hours of construction delays on the new ring-road around London. In five days, we've eaten a life's quota of salmon and strawberries, and traveled by every conceivable form of transportation: plane, train, punt, car, river launch, bicycle, taxi, and traffic jam. But not until we're at ease watching sheep graze beneath a sun declining over Hever Castle (where Anne Boleyn was born and the Dissolution may be said to have started) do I realize the distance I've come.

Whatever else it leaves you, Oxford's special gift is a sort of magic time in which your senses open like pores in a sauna, recording a series of small, clear pictures you never knew you snapped. It is a peak of life, no question; but one from which students look backward more clearly than ahead, composed more of early promise than performance, of intellect more than character, of straight lines rather than hard choices or necessary risks.

There are other peaks, and the path was more winding than we thought. Jean and I first came to Oxford as a novice political scientist and an apprentice playwright. Since then, I've left the theater, been a labor lawyer and environmental bureaucrat, dabbled in poetry and journalism, begun a novel set in Russia between 1900 and 1919. She's taught and been a Nader's Raider, run and sold a business, and written several books, including *How to Care for Your Parents* (Storm King/Random House), due out this fall.

Nevill Coghill once wrote of his generation's return to Oxford from the Great War that "we seemed to be experiencing what happened to Odin and his fellow-gods when they returned after their long twilight: finding their golden chessmen where they had left them in the grass, they sat down and continued the game." The pieces are a bit tarnished, the grass more ragged, the rules harsher now. Yet, a return to Oxford still holds the same magic: the game we played there goes on. END