

Academic and Family Travels, 1977-2006

From Chicago and then from Maine I began to travel outside the US for research or for speaking. Professional travel was mostly to conferences but also included architectural tourism and research for my writing on architecture and urbanism. Memorable philosophy conferences found me in Trieste, Sydney, Perugia, Oxford, Copenhagen, Lund, Leicester, Toronto, and Montreal, not to mention the standard circuit of New York, Chicago, Boston, DC, San Francisco, and many universities. It was at Bates that I began regularly visiting Japan.

Flying from Portland or Boston or Manchester NH meant extra driving and more connections. Fortunately, many of my professional meetings were held on the East Coast. Flying to Europe was easier from Boston and the two of us made many trips, and I made solo trips for professional purposes. Our trips were mostly to England, Italy, or Scandinavia, but we also visited Scotland and Poland. Architectural research led me to Scandinavia and to Florida for Disney and Seaside, to LA and SF, and all over Italy. Hypertext research brought me to conferences in the UK and Denmark as well as around the US.

One of the bad features of professional life in those years was that the major philosophical convention where hiring interviews were done was held a few days after Christmas. This meant traveling to another city in unpleasant weather, leaving family and friends at the holidays, and locking it yourself up in a hotel suite where you would interview eight or 10 people a day. Around you the conference was in full swing with talks and book sessions and book displays, and you could get out for occasional talks or meals with friends. The hotel was haunted by people looking for jobs, with long faces and worried frowns. Some were interviewed in a large room with a table for each college, putting unspeakable pressure on the job candidates. There was also the infamous philosophy “smoker,” a reception in the evening where you sat around at tables by college and sipped your drink while friends from other colleges came by to hawk their wares. Or you would be courting among the tables yourself recommending graduate students. One memorable occasion we were interviewing in a small hotel room in a New York hotel. The room’s window faced the Empire State building. Over the course of the long days you could watch the slow progression of the sun and cloud shadows on the building. I felt like I was in Andy Warhol’s 24 hour movie of that building.

After a conference in DC or New York it felt good to return to Maine where the cities were not too large and there was nearby nature. The entire population of Maine was smaller than the city of Chicago. You often ran into people you knew at the Portland airport. It was not hard to get to know state representatives, even the governor. (When we moved to Oregon we were again in a place with nearby nature and a relatively small population compared to its larger neighbors, but it was three times bigger than Maine.)

One of my books resulted in my being invited to Sweden and Denmark for lectures and academic events over a period of years. We also visited Finland on our own, and in 1999 I spent three months at Lund University in Sweden where the architecture school brought mind- expanding experiences and new friends, as well as a trip with a group of students to Berlin, my first visit to

that city, where I admired the new architecture and visited Hegel's grave and the street where he had lived.

On a trip to southern Sweden for academic purposes a few years before my stay at Lund our host sailed us across a bay to visit a huge driftwood sculpture on the shore of a nature preserve. There were controversies between the artist and the local government since nothing should be built in the natural area. The ensuing court battles led the artist in 1996 to declare the area around the sculpture an independent nation, The Royal Republic of Ladonia. Controversy continued while the nation publicized by the artist gathered citizens, set up a government and a newspaper (<https://www.ladonia.org/>). The recent death of the artist is allowing the controversy to be settled and the sculpture, now a tourist attraction, will remain (<https://ladoniaherald.com/2021/the-u-turn-of-the-community-wants-to-keep-the-artwork-by-lars-vilks/>). Since I had visited and been impressed, early in the process of nation building I applied for citizenship and by paying a small fee was granted a patent of nobility as Viscount David Kolb. When we moved to Eugene I announced the opening of a consulate in Oregon, and a recent reorganization of the foreign ministry granted me the rank of ambassador. The position has few obligations and no remuneration.

Micronations like Ladonia have a point in today's world. There are dozens of micronations about, some formed as protests, some vanity projects, some trying to assert principles (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_micronations). Some micronations are territorial, such as Christiania in Copenhagen or the Republic of Užupis in Vilnius, Lithuania. Others like Ladonia have a footprint on the earth but a non-geographical citizenry. There are now some 27,000 registered citizens of Ladonia and a functioning government with a queen and many ministries. You might object that this is at best shared performance art, akin to devotees of Jane Austen or Star Wars in cosplay. It is at least that, but it also serves to forecast a world where people's allegiances will not be nailed down to geographic nation states. What will the world mean to us when such non-geographic associations become even more prevalent? We need to learn how to create loyalty and community without geographic borders. More importantly we need to learn what it means to have multiple citizenships and identities that overlap without one being hierarchically dominant.

We visited Poland, Hungary, but not further east until after I retired, when we were able to travel in Turkey, live a few weeks in Istanbul, and tour the Baltic nations.

It was Japan that became our most frequent destination for travel from Maine. Anne had lived and worked in Kyoto for two years in the late 60s and we both spent 1983-4 in Nagoya while I was on a Fulbright grant teaching at two Japanese universities. In the late 80s and early 90s I led one group of Bates students to tour Japan during the spring short term and three groups to study in Tokyo for full semesters. We also made several official trips representing Bates College and the state of Maine, as well as trips to see friends and explore further. We visited most of the country except Hokkaido and Okinawa. Anne has a great affinity for Japanese culture and has studied ikebana flower arranging intensely while there and then by correspondence with her teacher over many years. Shortly before we left Maine her teacher and several students came to visit us, staying at our pond house and enjoying the Maine coast. I was increasingly interested in Buddhism and while in Nagoya studied aikido. We both learned how to travel around and became semi-proficient with the language.

Family travels and Farewells

During the time we were living in Maine we made a variety of trips with my family. These were in addition to the fairly standard Christmas visits when my parents would come to Massachusetts to see my sister and her children and then come up to Maine to visit us. We would all get together on Christmas day down in Boston.

We traveled extensively in New England with my parents, exploring local scenes. This got more difficult as the years went on and tourism increased so that it became difficult to find places to stay on the spur of the moment. Nonetheless we had many happy travels looking at waterfalls and mountains, wildlife and leaves, ocean and islands. I remember in particular one trip to Grand Manan Island where our terrible accommodations and bad weather made us leave early and travel into Canada.

We made two trips to Mexico with my parents; one early on down to Monterey by car and another later to the colonial cities of Guanajuato and San Miguel. These adventuresome tequila fueled trips made us appreciate that central Mexican area which we later visited several more times.

My parents invited us on an anniversary cruise to the southern Caribbean which would culminate in the stop in Caracas commemorating the family visit there in 1956. The cruise was a general success, but that because of problems with mudslides the ship did not stop in Venezuela. But we visited a sequence of Caribbean islands and got a taste for Caribbean cruise life. It was enjoyable but not something we chose to repeat. The pervasive feeling of being an intruder on someone else's land constantly asked to give money wore us down. As tourists were helping support the islands and degrading them at the same time. My best moment was encountering a sea turtle while snorkeling.

On the last trip we took with both parents we visited New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island: ferry boat rides, walking on beaches, interesting towns, the strange scenery of Prince Edward Island. I remember especially standing with my father on beaches looking out of the sea. Within a year he was bedridden and declining. We didn't know that this would be the last trip.

Looking back I'm aware of what good travel companions my parents were, patient, flexible and always ready to explore something different or provide a bottle of scotch.

My father died in 2004. Increasing heart problems made it difficult for my mother to live alone. It was not feasible for her to stay in their lovely house in Lakeway. We all decided that she would move near Boston with my sister. In Boston Mom lived first with my sister and then in a nearby assisted living. Anne and I suspect that it might have been less lonely for her to have stayed in Texas, in assisted living near her wide circle of friends, and been visited by us frequently.

When we moved to Oregon on 2006, my mother was sad that we were leaving new England, and she never visited us in our new home. To deal with the distance I phoned her every day and traveled to Boston five or six trips a year to visit. They were always fun trips although toward the

end as her health declined they had a more urgent tone. Transcontinental flying was not as painful as it has become with sardine packed airlines.

My sister joined me to accompany my mother on two trips, one to visit her sister Alice in Florida, and one to her sister Margaret's funeral in Pittsburgh. At that family reunion my mother discovered her 1938 wedding dress, which had been handed down to a series of cousins for their marriage ceremonies; she proudly demonstrated that it still fit her. That was the last of our family's wonderful family reunions at Margaret's large old house.

We visited with Anne's Milwaukee family less frequently from Oregon than we had from Maine, but we saw them most times we were in the Chicago area on business and flew in deliberately for summer visits or family reunions or an occasional holiday. Several of Anne's siblings had houses that could handle their large family reunions.

My father's cancer of the gallbladder developed suddenly, first diagnosed as jaundice and gallstones and then as a tumor with about a year to live. Things went well but in the last six months he became wheelchair and then bedridden and spent a lot of time staring into space or staring at newspapers without changing the page. We never knew exactly what was going through his mind. He never talked about dying. It was strange because he did all the things that were necessary to prepare for his death: he initiated my sister and me into the details of his finances with with pride in the fortune he had accumulated; he made arrangements so there would be no trouble after his death; he made phone calls to Anne and others to say goodbye, without ever saying that was what he was doing. He asked me to take pictures a day or two before he died. Everything was carefully thought out and planned but he wouldn't talk about it. Even to my mother, which I found strange. It was an act of control, I suppose, and also trying to not burden us, but it had the opposite effect.

A week or two before my father died I was at a conference on hypertext apps University of Santa Cruz in California getting daily bulletins about my father's situation. As it turned out the paper which I had written for that conference \$1000 prize is the best research paper; I had a printed plaque to bring with me to show my father as he lay on his deathbed. He studied it for a long time and looked at me and said you must be very proud that I was and I felt assured that he too felt proud of me and that is efforts which had been involved in trying to get me not to go into the Jesuits by suggesting alternative path would now give them a feeling that the path I had chosen had led to the same goal he had hoped for though with some detours it took longer than perhaps he expected. It was a moment of pride in sharing.

My mother's death was very different; she discussed the matter. We faced a medical issue when she fell and broke her hip. Should she have the hip replaced? We were assured by the doctors that if we didn't she would become immobile and, given the problems she was already having with breathing and swallowing, she would probably be dead in three months. So we went ahead with the operation, which was successful, followed by physical therapy, which was also going well. But her problems with swallowing had gotten so acute and the ghastly diet in the nursing home

where she was recovering brought her decide it wasn't worth going on. She assured herself by consulting a doctor and a priest that what she was doing was courageous and good; she took things into her own hands in the firm but pleasant way. Without consulting me or my sister she signed herself into hospice and stopped eating and drinking. She died within two weeks. Towards the end she asked me "I told God I'm ready to go, why won't he take me?" She was weak but quite coherent until about a day before she died when she. When my father died my mother and I were at his side; my mother died with my sister and I am one of her daughters there with her. These were my first encounters with death in person. peaceful, reassuring, and frightening.

Moving Along

Around the year 2000 I began to think about retiring. Anne and I spent time over the next few years traveling to various locations that we thought might be interesting. We both felt that we wanted a change from Maine, much as we loved the state, and thought the challenge of a new environment would be an invigorating experience, as indeed it proved to be. We decided upon Eugene, Oregon, as a new home and we moved in 2006, selling our house near the College but keeping for a time our pond house in Maine.