

# INTRODUCTION

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TODAY IS AUGUST 29, 2023. My 78<sup>th</sup> birthday is coming up. I'm in the process of preparing my Last Will and Testament, which tends to focus the mind.

Last week I was rummaging through “Su’s box,” a footlocker-size container into which, for several years now, I have tossed artifacts and mementos from my early life that I imagine may be of interest to the family I’ll inevitably leave behind someday, hopefully not soon. Su’s box is named for my 50-year-old daughter, my only child and mother of my two twenty-something grandchildren.

In the box, I found the weathered diary I kept from September 1968 to March 1969, a formative six-month inflection period of my life. I was 23, the age of my grandson today. As I paged through the diary attempting to decipher my scribbling — composed on bouncing planes in Vietnam and trains in the Philippines, in a hammock strung between coconut palms on a Oaxacan beach, while recuperating from a motorcycle crash in Honduras, and on the lurching deck of a sailboat off the Pacific coast of Panama — I realized I had not read it since I wrote it 55 years ago. As faded memories sprang to life, nostalgia stirred my heart, warmed by self-forgiveness as I became reacquainted with my searching young self.

At my wife’s urging, I decided to transcribe the diary, unedited, revealing the private and, some might say, inappropriately revealing experiences and thoughts that were never intended for others’ eyes. Nevertheless, as mortality looms on life’s uncertain horizon, I’ve chosen to share this young man’s private moments and dirty laundry with whomever may dare to expose themselves to these intimacies. Readers will encounter parts of my life that are heretofore unknown to my family of origin nor even my closest friends today. (My

wife knows everything.) I find this young man's youthful dreams and fears curiously predictive of the path my life has actually taken over the intervening five decades.

I beg your indulgence. Please tolerate, if not embrace, the raw bits spilling from my pen, a pearl-string held together by dashes as my hurried mind skipped from one jot to the next. English majors bent on correctness may impatiently despair. Pity.

Be forewarned: This journal is uncensored, unfiltered through revisionist sensibilities. I recorded thoughts and actions involving sex, drugs, and other matters of dubious propriety. Some readers may indict me for moral if not legal transgressions. Fire away. I was an immature, full-of-myself, 23-year-old kid groping my way into adulthood during a tumultuous period, both personally and in America's evolving culture. Thankfully, I was grounded in a supportive nuclear and extended family, despite having strayed far from the path they had hoped I would follow.

As noted in the timeline of life events below, my father died when I was not yet ten years old. My mother, the embodiment of unconditional maternal love, did not remarry. So, there was no adult male in my home except my four-years-old brother. The insightful reader may discern episodes in my story where a wise man's guiding hand would have been helpful.