

Archibald "A Personal History of Memory,"  
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There was unanimous recognition that the realities of working-class life in Tullylish were experienced differently and unequally. While men were expected to work hard and be the principal wage earner, their work was over at the end of the day. In contrast, the labor intensive nature of domestic work and the high standards of cleanliness resulted in long hours of hard work for married women and their daughters, whether they worked outside the home or not. This gender inequality was voiced in the following way: "Men didn't give women a very good deal in those days. The women got it very hard. It wasn't a woman's world."

Nevertheless, attempts by women to preserve respectability, defined in mid-Victorian gendered terms, were at the heart of working-class agency and subjectivity and provided deep satisfaction for many. Because working-class women led lives of purpose and dignity readily acknowledged in the community, perceptions of hard toil and oppression were often tempered by memories of good times and close social ties, creating an ambiguous subjectivity among many of the women interviewed. Neighborliness and interdependence—despite their links to poverty and gender inequality—were missed, considerably more so than the local linen industry, which has ceased to dominate the region.

## Notes

1. For a more detailed examination of women linen industry workers in the parish of Tullylish, see Marilyn Cohen (1997).
2. Studies of British working-class women include Black (1983); Lewis (1984); McDougall (1977); Meacham (1977); Oren (1973); Reeves (1979); Rice (1981); Roberts (1977); Rose (1992); Ross (1982:576; 1983; 1993); Stearns (1972).
3. Historical examinations of women homeworkers include Miriam Cohen (1977); Franzoi (1984); Lewis (1984:55–62); Neill (1994); Roberts (1977:310).
4. Anthropologists who have analyzed Irish shopkeepers and their relationships with customers include Arensberg (1959); Arensberg and Kimball (1968); Silverman and Gulliver (1995).

## A Personal History of Memory

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ROBERT R. ARCHIBALD



**T**HINK FOR SIXTY SECONDS without using words. It is not possible.

My earliest memory is of the middle bedroom in my family's home in Ishpening, a gritty iron-mining town on Michigan's Upper Peninsula. I know this is my earliest memory because I had developed words with which to encode and save the experience, "sensory experience tagged with language," as Paul Ableman (1999:106) describes it. The bedroom had two windows overlooking the pine trees on the west side of the house. It had three paneled doors: one through a closet to an adjoining bedroom, another to a different closet, and the third to the second-floor hallway. In one early morning's shadowy light, I stood and peered out from my crib toward a table set against the north wall. I was terrified, for there on the table top was the dark decomposing corpse of a dead bird. The more I stared, the more distraught I became. I cried and screamed with terror. This was a nightmare that did not easily succumb to reality in the light of day. My father came from my parents' bedroom. He picked up the gruesome corpse and brought it to the crib where I finally could see that my fears were unfounded. That the corpse was a crumpled multicolored handkerchief. I think I was about two years old.

But the handkerchief story is more than my first memory; it is the point in time over fifty years ago where "the story of me" begins, where I can first apply the pronouns *I* and *me*. It is the beginning of my self-consciousness, and, when I look back, it becomes the vanishing point of my identity. Every person has a beginning point, a place where the story starts; and the story always starts when we have the words. Words are not merely a means of expression; words are the raw material of thought, of self-consciousness, and of story. Without words there are no memories, and without memories there are no "stories of me" for anyone.

Thus, words are not incidental to memory or to narrative. And narratives are how we construct ourselves and how we order the world around us.

For each of us, the story begins with that first memory, the opening scene of a lifelong narrative that concludes only with death. The idea that stories have beginnings, middles, and ends derives from personal narrative and those stark signposts of beginning and end: birth and death. A story without a beginning and without an end is not a story. Yet no scientific evidence has been found for a narrative that explains the universe. If from our perspective the universe is infinite, there cannot be an explanatory narrative because narrative requires a beginning and an end. While we know that cause-and-effect does exist in the universe, there is no evidence for sequential time, that is, time as we understand and use the concept. In the absence of sequential time, and in an infinite universe, narration is not possible. Memory and story are characteristics of our brains, not attributes of the universe that enfolds us. So we are left with the conclusion that my memory of the handkerchief and the story thus begun are proof of how my mind works, not proof that the universe can be explained by a story. Thus we do not gaze outside of ourselves to discover preexisting stories; instead, we construct the stories around the sensory impressions we receive. As I make my way through my life and the world, I make narratives as my only way of making sense of it all.

I am conscious of how little I remember about my childhood or youth or even details from last week, but memory is not a rote recording of the entire past of any of us. My mind sorts between the pieces that it will add to my story and those that it will discard. But my story also changes daily, and those pieces that I can recall take on new meanings as I rethink the experience of my life and even my own identity. We unceasingly reinvent ourselves, and we modify the story of ourselves to maintain consistency. In some instances, the distinctions between what I really remember and what I was told are blurred. I do not know for certain now whether some memories are remembered experience or remembered conversation. There are other instances where I discover inaccuracies in my memory. My memory can be undermined by tests of objective fact, but objectivity and fact are not what my memory and story are about. In one sense, my memory and my story of myself are myths that will not stand the test of objectivity and accuracy when tested against recorded facts. Yet, verifiable or not, they are the sources of my consciousness and my identity, the stuff of me. If I could alter memory, remake the myth, I would not be me. I would become a different person.

Years ago, an older friend told me about an experience with his elderly mother. His parents were of the doughty World War I generation of eastern Montana homesteaders who settled on hardscrabble land near Roundup. While his mother remembered well and eloquently and told him stories of the homestead beyond the time limits of his own memory, he wanted to know more. So on a spring week-

end, he drove his mother from Billings on the Yellowstone River, northeast to the dry land his family had simultaneously embraced and battled. Once out of the car and on the very ground that had once been home, his mother was transported back in time, traversing the now barren land and describing the place in present tense as it had been years before. With a torrent of reminiscences precipitated by the outlines of what was once her house, chicken coop, and even the undulating landscape so intimately a part of her just a half century earlier, she could reveal that life to her son. My friend was overwhelmed by the mnemonic power of this place. His mother's ability to recall fact and feeling was intensified, magnified, focused by standing on the ground that was the crucible of her memory and the story of herself. She stood upon the memory place of her young womanhood, her childbearing, her marriage, and widowhood—but now from the perspective of her old age and impending death.

My own grandmother was a denizen of graveyards, especially the one that held what remained of her own family, where each individual was commemorated with a gray granite marker near a matching obelisk deeply engraved with family names. Sunday at her house in Negaunee, Michigan, invariably included good food, a relaxed discipline, and a drive down the old highway to the cemetery. Her mood did not become somber there. She yanked weeds from the ground, complained about the dry brown grass, planted a few flowers, and incessantly talked about the people who were buried there with spaces left for those still living. She did not need my cousins and me as an audience, but I do think that we were the stimulus for making her remembrances audible rather than remaining silent meanderings. The cemetery was her mnemonic device. I think that she drew comfort from the weekly summertime excursions. I believe that in those granite marked graves, she found confirmation of her own memories and of her very own story of herself. Although even then I treasured time spent with my grandmother, I do now wish I had listened more intently to her cemetery stories. I go to the cemetery alone now and try to recall what she said about uncles, aunts, greats of all generations, and especially the personal stories about my own great- and great-great-grandparents. When Grandmother died in 1966, a part of me was lost; although now when I go to her grave in the exact spot where she told me it would be, I have my own cascade of memories of her and of our cemetery visits too.

A few years ago I went to the place of my birth, childhood, and young adulthood to write a book finally titled *A Place to Remember*. I had not returned to this natal place in nearly thirty years. I knew that in this place, memory would come. I used the landscape and the people as stimuli in a risky experiment with my own story of myself, my memory, and my identity. It was the most exhilarating yet excruciating experience of my life, and it still reverberates in my present. I did not escape unscathed, and I will not repeat the experiment. Memory is too powerful.

Almost twenty-five years ago, Saul Friedländer wrote a wrenching book entitled *When Memory Comes* (1979:102). One passage especially strikes me.

It took me a long, long time to find the way back to my own past. I could not banish the memory of events themselves, but if I tried to speak of them or pick up a pen to describe them, I immediately found myself in the grip of a strange paralysis. When I finished my military service, since I could not forget the facts, I made up my mind to view everything with indifference; every sort of resonance within me was stifled.

Place is the crucible of memory. As Friedländer discovered and then recorded in his book, you can “view everything with indifference” and stifle every sort of resonance—until you go back to where it happened. Then the most carefully erected barriers crash. The places where things happened are stimuli to memory, and there in those places, memories will pour out with irresistible force. An individual will feel this sometimes overwhelming power in a place, and so will a family, even a community or a nation.

Remembering is not completely rational and objective. I am sure that it has to do with how our brains are structured, but memories have an emotional component; that is, we do not just remember facts, but we reexperience emotions associated with past events. The power of remembering rests not just in recall of specific events of one's life. So at the cemetery I remember what it felt like to be with my grandmother. I have a visual image of her, how her hair was arranged, the printed dresses and sturdy shoes she wore. Her voice quietly echoes, and I can even smell the fragrance of her again. So remembering is also memory of smell, color, sound, touch, temperature, all of those sensory components of experience. And every time I remember Grandmother, I see her from a different perspective. I remember her differently, and she assumes different meanings for me. I am now nearing the age that Grandmother was when I first remember her. She seems different to me now because I now can know her for the first time as someone my own age. As a child I would have said, “My grandmother is an old woman.” Now I think of her as nearly a contemporary. The facts of her life have not changed, but I have. There is a principle of historical relativity here. My meaning of the past constantly changes because the past is always moving through time in relation to me. My life doesn't feel like it projects into the future anymore, perhaps because more than half of it is past, not future. Thus I think that the line is headed in the other direction. My children follow behind me, just as I trail after my grandmother and grandfather and my great-grandfather into the past. Sometimes, I think that we have time and history backwards.

So Grandmother's graveyard stories were not just auditory; they were visual, multisensory stories. And her stories were never neutral, never objective.

They reeked of regrets, love, sorrows, joys. In them she recounted the lives and imposed judgments upon the people under our feet. Her inflections varied as she stopped, stooped, smiled, or grimaced. Grandmother was not recounting the past; she was reliving it and passing it to me. She was telling me who my people were, how Quinns and Archibalds behaved and what they believed, how they had struggled, how they defined successes and failures. She was telling me about buried tragedy, suffering, pleasure, fear, pain, and about faith. And she was relating to me who I was, subconsciously telling me how to find my bearings and which way to head. She was cautioning me but also encouraging me to follow these people, our ancestors, learning from their experiences and valuing the good things they exemplified.

Grandmother's stories were always stories with a point; remembrance was instructive and engaging. I rest on the green bench in my garden in St. Louis. The pungent, fuzzy green tomato plants are chest high now with nectarine-sized fruit in this early June morning. Colors of splashy reds, browns, golds, pinks, yellows, purples, whites, and subdued greens tumble around and over the patio. Grandmother and I did not spend all our time in graveyards. Often I trailed her around her backyard garden in Negaunee. She planted more vegetables than I do now, but like me she also grew flowers everywhere. I know now that I grow these things because she did and because my father, her son, did. I know that her father, my great-grandfather, did, too—I vaguely remember his garden. So the story of her values, her aesthetics, her hobbies are repeated in mine. Such stories, such patterns, endure through generations with palpable consequences—garden smells and colors. Generations of gorgeous roses and fine tomatoes, tended in gardens where her descendants live, are proof.

## Memory and History

Pierre Nora (1989:9) argues in his essay “Between Memory and History” that the true intent of history is to destroy memory. “At the heart of history,” he writes, “is a critical discourse that is antithetical to spontaneous memory. History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it.” While his view may be overstated, it does describe a real dichotomy. History, relying upon evidentiary rules, is factually more correct and thus more “true,” while memory is suspect because it fails the test of evidence and accuracy and hence can be dismissed as unreliable. In a scientific age, anything that flunks the test is discarded. And memory often fails the test imposed by the mountains of historical evidence compiled and sorted in archives and libraries, stored on museum shelves, and interpreted by scholars concerned with the pursuit of a perfectly accurate memory: history. So individual and shared memory cave into history because they

must. But memories and the traditions, habits, and values they communicate are within the sacred and thus have authority. As many people now observe, our challenge is to define new relationships between memory and history.

David Thelen's essay "Memory" (2001) is a fine summary of disparate approaches to the distinctions between memory and history and their reconciliation. Can we find a balance between emotional value-bearing memory and the white lab coats of history? Can we agree that facts matter as crucial reference points, but that memory, with its evocation of emotion and empathy, is the only sure path to the past? Can we stop demanding that memory be a surrogate for truth and acknowledge it as a faculty for defining meaning? Can we admit that despite memory's historical fallibility, it nevertheless is an important determinant of the course of human events?

My interest in history has always had more to do with a fascination with history's evocative power, rather than the rigid rules that require an objective examination of the causes of the Civil War or the results of the Civil Rights movement or an analysis of Jacksonian Democracy. Those things are undeniably important, but they seem so remote, so past, so impersonal to me. However, all of us have looked at artifacts or visited historic sites that evoke an emotional and visceral response. Tears well up uncontrollably, goose bumps tingle, and a lump rises in the throat. My body reacts in this way when, for instance, I visit Ellis Island. I knew the history of the place long before my first visit ten years ago. But traditional history belies the impact of the place. It is not the museum part of Ellis Island with its abundant artifacts and documents that makes the most vivid impression. It is the place itself. Just the view from Ellis Island toward Manhattan is overwhelming. I can imagine thousands of people on crowded immigrant ships looking at the New York shore after a long voyage in miserable quarters below deck. That view must have been a symbolic concoction of fear, hope, homesickness, longing, and anticipation.

Many Americans trace their roots to this place or places like it. Ellis Island makes this central part of the American experience vibrantly clear to me. This process of becoming American was so unlike becoming anything else. Imagine: walk through the Ellis Island portal successfully, board a ferry for New Jersey or New York, and instantly become an American in the making. Standing in the Great Hall, I get a palpable sense of the emotions exuded by the masses of people from every part of the earth who passed through this place. It is as if the people moved on but left behind as a residue everything that happened here and the range of emotions they felt. I can sense it; my own emotions resonate with it. Here I can stand in the spaces where they stood and imagine what they felt. And I shiver at the symphony of feelings that surrounds me imbedded in this place by those who passed through here long ago. The resonance between me and those long-gone immigrants

is like the sympathetic vibrations between stringed instruments when tones produced by one are precisely echoed in muted tones by the others. It reminds me of listening to music from an orchestra in another room.

Of course, my experience at Ellis Island, repeated with the same intensity on several subsequent visits, is distinct from my memory of cemetery visits with my grandmother. Those experiences happened to me, whereas I have no personal experience of arriving at Ellis Island as an immigrant. My own experience is vicarious, but it does draw on the recorded experiences of others. I have read diaries and official reports and even talked with a few individuals who are connected to Ellis Island through personal experience. But my Ellis Island experience rests on the same symbolic mnemonic referent, Ellis Island itself, upon which first-hand memories of actual immigrants rely. I can stand in the same place, with much of its ethos intact, and I can repopulate the place, imagine the smells and the murmuring voices. I can dress the immigrants in the clothing from photographs I have seen. I can recollect the motions, even the emotions, of real immigrants who once passed through this place. I can conceive Ellis Island not as it is but as it was by drawing on what I have seen and read about the experience. I can recreate the sensory experience and the emotions of those humans long gone from the place because I am exactly like them in my own humanity. Thus, I have incorporated the real experiences into my own memory.

Traditional history makes little room for such experiences since they are subjective rather than objective, stimulated by emotion and not evidence, with conclusions not verifiable according to the rules of the trade. But several historians, notably R. G. Collingwood and Wilhelm Dilthey, have considered them. Collingwood, whose writings were published mostly posthumously from his drafts and lectures of the 1930s, notes that in attempting to make sense of the past we are never eyewitnesses of what we desire to know. So what is it that we must do in order to know the past? "My historical review of the idea of history," Collingwood (1994:282) concludes, "has resulted in an answer to this question: namely, that the historian must re-enact the past in his own mind." Dilthey, born in the Rhineland in 1833, lived and thought about history in the nineteenth-century ferment of philosophy and history. Dilthey (see Rickman 1961:39–40) argues for historical "understanding," which may be more easily understood in English as "historical imagination." He insists that since we are all human, we all have a view of what it is to be human from the inside out. We know what it is to be angry, happy, disconsolate, fearful, joyful, to crave intimacy, fulfillment, and meaning in our lives. We all know about motivation and struggle, success and failure. In other words, we know what it is to be human. Further, we also know about the function of memory because we all have and use memory. We can understand that memory binds us to people and places and that remembrance can induce comfort, grief,

desire, confirmation, and the impulse for action in the present or the future. Thus, other humans, dead or alive, are not inscrutable. In fact, they are knowable precisely because they, just like us, possess human faculties. It is possible to see the world from another's vantage point and to see it with some precision. We do develop empathy for others, not just with those whom we know well, but with others we know only indirectly, even some who died before we were born.

Just because we are human, we can think our way inside humans who lived in the past, just as we can have empathy for those we know personally and intimately because we coexist in the same time. But thinking our way into the past is not simply a pattern for knowing the past; it is also how we confirm our own understanding of ourselves. My recollection of my experiences as a toddler or of time spent with my grandmother is a means of confirming my own identity and of distinguishing myself from others. It is an expression of consciousness of self. In discussing what we remember with others, we further establish our own self-consciousness and individuality. History then is a means of self-confirmation through connecting oneself to a particular past.

A friend regularly gives me postcards depicting my hometown of forty, fifty, or more years ago. Most recently she gave me one entitled "Ishpeming, Mich. Lake Angeline Basin." My childhood home was within, literally, a stone's throw of Lake Angeline. The lake I remember was rimmed with the ruins of iron-mining operations that had ceased years earlier. The postcard perplexed me; there is no lake in sight. Instead it is an industrial scene with mine shafts, stockpiles of iron ore, trams, railroads, smoke, and a deep pit in the foreground. Despite the fact the postcard title implies that this picture is of some place that I should know well, it is an unfamiliar scene. But as I study the image, looking for any familiarity, I recognize the outlines of the background bluffs, and they match exactly my indelible mental image of where I played as a boy. I can see the road that I know well, winding sideways up the hill where I walked in the spring picking dogtooth violets and jack-in-the-pulpits. I begin to sense that there is something intimately familiar about the scene. I look intently. There, on the edge of this desolate picture of a mining and smelting operation, is a house. Its cream color jumps out against the green trees. It is my house. I remember the profile, and then I remember my older brothers brushing barn red paint over the cream color when I was about ten years old. The arrangement of the chimneys confirms my recognition. But in this image, the house is not perched near the blue water of Lake Angeline but instead near a deep mine pit. And yet it fits. My father told me that at one time the lake was drained so that the iron ore underneath it could be mined. He cautioned me about huge drop-offs hidden by the water. In this picture, I could see that the water that I knew had disappeared.

The presence of the bluffs and of the house confirm my memory of my childhood home. Yet this image is not just a memory confirmation; it also reinforces

the history of the place as my father described it and in doing so extends my knowledge of my own place backward in time, to years long before I was born. The postcard supports my own memory, but only because it contains enough familiar elements to confirm that it is my home place. The rest of the scene is disjointed, alien, but I am able to connect the dots and restructure the place through time. Thus, I can understand how radically my place changed, and I now have a story that begins in one place before my time and continues into the present. The Lake Angeline postcard serves to extend memory into a past before my birth, but I can connect the scene to a place and events within my own memory. At the same time, the postcard image changes forever the way I think of the place, and hence my memories of it. For example, the ruins that I knew around the edges of the lake as a boy and that I imagined to be antiquarian and even antediluvian relics of all kinds of fanciful edifices, are now forever associated with the mundane mining and smelting facilities they once supported.

Ellis Island is an analogous place for me. Although I had no personal bond to Ellis Island as an immigration portal like the one I have with Lake Angeline, I did have connections through immigrant diaries and other historical recountings, and I did know people whose first footsteps on American soil were taken in this place. So this island, this tangible link to bygone events and experiences, becomes for me and for millions of others a memory place, verifying and confirming what we have gleaned in other places. The diaries, official records, and histories of Ellis Island, like the picture postcard of my home, extend my memory into a past I never knew.

I was a carriage driver on Mackinac Island one summer between college years. It was a marvelous summer, enchanting really. The place is beautiful, and most of those who worked there were college students too, given to long work days and long dreamy nights, enjoying freedom from the pressure of studies and exams. I recall standing on a high bluff overlooking this juncture of Great Lakes and suddenly understanding why this small island was of such value to native people, and then to French, English, and Americans. From the island you can see the lower Great Lakes and the narrow passage up to Lake Superior. It is a strategic point.

I gave tours of the island seven days a week from my perch on the carriage driver's seat, repeating day after day to tourist after tourist what I now know to be a partly apocryphal history of the island. The place itself, in general not part of the guide's patter, was the most important clue to its historical meaning. But the built environment, including the fort and other historic structures that I rattled on about, meant less, and it was hard to discern what was real and what was not. It was clear that much of what visitors see is reconstructed, that is, it was not authentic, and some of it was even fictional. The fictionalized parts of it made me suspicious of the whole thing. The literature about this island connected a visitor to the place but not to the reconstructed remains of human activity. So Mackinac

Island never became an extension of memory for me, not in the sense that Ellis Island, where I never stayed or worked, has become. Mackinac lacked the authenticity of my memories of Grandmother, the reality of Ellis Island's ghostly halls, and the credibility of the Ishpeming postcard. People value artifacts because of perceived authenticity. Once the assumption of authenticity is undermined, the aura of suspicion settles in, and the credibility of the artifact or—as in my experience with Mackinac Island—of an entire historic site is destroyed.

Memories and history always have referents, especially the places where the remembered or recounted events occurred. The place may be altered beyond recognition or otherwise unidentifiable. In those instances, the memory or history lacks crucial confirmation, but indirect confirmation may compensate. For example, a memory may retain validity because others confirm it, or the memory may be so vivid that it remains unquestioned, or the history may be substantiated by multiple sources. But when the referent is lost, despite whatever kind of corroboration we can find, an important emotional element of the past is dissipated, and the process of imagining the past is crippled. In addition to actual disappearance, many referents are mangled; places, objects, images, and other potential mnemonics that purport to be representations of the past are in fact reconstructions, manipulated images, reproductions, and interpretations. They are profoundly mediated and lose any legitimate claim to an authenticity based on integrity. Such places may even possess integrity of a scholarly variety, that is, they are based on the best research possible, and yet they still fall far short of my family cemetery plot or Ellis Island.

Places of memory possess authenticity and integrity. Perhaps this is what accounts for my own disdain for our ubiquitous homogenized suburbs and my unabashed proclivity for life in an older city neighborhood. Living in places that are authenticated by memory, places that have a history, induces and embellishes the feeling of connection to the past, and I like the notion of adding my own memories to a place that already embodies so many. I do not disdain newness, but I do not care to live in places that do not encompass sufficient memory to give me a sense of connectedness and of expansion beyond now. We all need memory places. In the absence of them, we are cursed by a sense of confinement, an isolation in the present.

It is difficult to describe the effect of the remembered past upon emotions. Perhaps Dilthey's concept of historical imagination is close, but it does not adequately describe the intense stream of emotions evoked by memory and its places. In a recent interview with a friend, a Comanche woman, we discussed the importance of certain objects and locales, now and in the past, for her people and thus explored an alternative way of envisioning the past. Certain principles guide my friend Evelyne and her people in talking about the past. First, those who are dead

are never referred to by name. Second, they are called as a token of profound respect "old ones." Third, the chronology of events is not of particular import. Fourth, the past is in the present; the old ones can be called upon for advice or strength at any time. Fifth, the past is not a place of death; it is real and very much alive. Evelyne refers to the old ones as having gone on ahead. They are not in the past but rather in the future towards which the living are headed. Finally, for Evelyne, remembrance is sacred and spiritual because the process of remembering calls the living past into the living present. Evelyne's understanding of the past is subjective, personal, emotional, intimately linked to her people; and yet this perspective exudes integrity in the sense that it substantiates and validates an entire culture and world view. Most importantly, it explains existence in meaningful ways. And so Evelyne's memory is precisely what Nora has in mind when he claims that history and memory are in fundamental opposition and that history seeks to annihilate memory. Evelyne's remembrances and the rituals that sustain them are immediately destroyed by historical inquiry, proved to be either inaccurate or unverifiable. The fundamental truths that these rituals convey are undermined by historical methodology, and hence they are heaped into the intellectual sophisticates' trash bin as vestiges of a primitive age. Yet they continue to sustain the Comanche people as they have for countless generations.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., is not a historic site as usually defined, but it is surely a memory place. A display at the Smithsonian Institution shows mementos and notes left at the memorial in what is likely the most powerful exhibition I have ever visited. Tokens of love, friendship, longing, and regret—notes written as if to the living—have made this wall, encapsulating memory, a place for communicating with those who are gone from the earth. Here, memories conjoin those who are commemorated on the wall and all those relatives and friends and comrades for whom the wall is a place for remembrance. There is a sense of closeness to both the living and the dead as memories come in torrents and the past becomes contemporary, so much so that the dead are addressed as the living. It is as if this place, sanctified by the memories of all who visit, is somehow a nexus between the living and dead. Evelyne would understand this. Yet a historian could only evaluate the wall as a symbol, describe how the wall was built, count the hordes of visitors, and speculate about the power of the place. The metaphysical qualities of the place, which are really the source of its power, are not the topics of history and in fact are antithetical to the whole notion of history as a rational inquiry subject to specialized rules of evidence. History can describe what happens here but cannot travel inside of it. So, the experiences of visitors at the Vietnam memorial become social phenomena to be described, analyzed, and interpreted by historians and other experts, rather than acknowledged as a profound emotional outpouring that transforms the place into sacred ground.

just as sacred as the battlefield at Gettysburg, the Great Hall at Ellis Island, or the cemetery where Grandmother brought me so often and where the bones of my ancestors molder. None of these is at all sacred when viewed from the outside. However, viewed from the inside, the way Abraham Lincoln looked at the battlefield at Gettysburg, as ground hallowed through events of a time before us, we can feel the "mystic chords of memory" that bind us to the past (Kammen 1991).

Although the Vietnam Veterans Memorial now has its own peculiar history as a monument, it is not a place that had any particular association with the Vietnam War nor with the veterans it memorializes. It is not the site of a battlefield, nor is it a cemetery. It is disembodied from the events of the war in Vietnam. Yet, it has become the preeminent memory place for those who seek to understand the war and remember those who were lost. While the shape and design of the memorial may cause the deepest emotions surrounding the war and its dead to surface, the place is hallowed not by the physicality but by the tears shed, the mementos left, the emotions experienced, the words exchanged.

Objects, letters, and photographs left at the memorial wall by friends, lovers, comrades, and even strangers provoke deep poignancy in all of us, often prompting tears of empathy, even now so long after the war. I am especially struck by those objects that are intimate and even erotic, left, I suppose, by wives, husbands, and lovers because such things recall life's passions in this place that memorializes the dead whose passions are so long gone. But then this is not just a place for remembering the dead. It is also a place to recall passion, love, intimacy, lost lovers, and to remember in the most elemental and most powerful way possible—emotionally. Our emotions remember in ways that our intellects never will.

The Vietnam memorial wall achieves its power through the names, both in the enormous totality of that list and the poignant personal individuality enshrined there. Although not the stuff of history, names are among our most intimate possessions. They make people real. They are the *I* of all memories, the beginning of self, the central character in all of the stories of our lives. The mystical power of a name standing for the totality of an individual human is manifested in the naming rituals of all cultures. Instinctively we know this when we approach the wall. Just as baptism and formal naming gives each individual a specific identity and a separate existence, the wall calls all those lost warriors into the presence of those who stand before it. Because their names are present, we must acknowledge each as an individual with an existence, an identity, and a reality that transcends death. The wall is hallowed by the conjunction of the names of the dead and the memories of the living.

Explanations of what happens at the wall or Ellis Island or my family cemetery, or through the picture postcard of my home, or at any memory place, fall short of what really happens inside of us when we have such experiences. But I

think that it is all right that explanations fall short. We do not need explanations because we all have had the same experiences. We share a common humanity. We know what it is to be human. We all understand that nostalgia is a profound longing to go home, an attempt to recover the past and our lost selves. We also know that except insofar as we can use our memories and imaginations to visit the past, to visit ourselves as we used to be, and to once again see others who are gone ahead of us, it is a forlorn hope. Remembering can be a source of comfort and confirmation, but it can also be a reinjuring. We all mourn time passages. We are mortal. No more explanation is needed.

There are multiple ways to activate the past in our minds. All rely to greater or lesser extent on what Dilthey described as historical imagination. We all possess personal memories that manipulate the past into a sense of self in the present. We incorporate into these personal memories the memories of others, like my grandmother's, whose stories of the past linked my own memories to people and places before I was born. Artifacts, such as the postcard of my home before I was born, extend my memory of my own place to a time before I was there. The picture postcard has added credibility to my memory because enough of what I can see in it was still there when I knew the place. Like my grandmother's life, the postcard overlaps with my memory. Such intersections and linkages give added integrity to knowledge about the past. But linkages can also be synthetically created. Thus, Ellis Island has profound meaning for me because through historical inquiry I can link it to knowledge acquired through diaries, historical descriptions, photographs, official records, and oral history. With this context, I am able to imagine and feel the immigrant experience at the site. But at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial my reimagining of the pathos of the Vietnam War is much more immediate, activated by the provocative and evocative symbolism of the place, by examining the gifts and letters left at the wall, and by feeling the poignancy of the memories stimulated by the place and the names that reflect the individual identities of the dead.

### Collective Memory

Thus far I have discussed memory as a personal and individual experience. Memory is also collective or even communal, often referred to by scholars and others too as an entity distinct from the memories of individuals. Of course there is no such thing as collective or communal memory distinct from personal memory because only individuals have memories. When I returned home to the Upper Peninsula (UP) of Michigan to write about my own memories, I preferred to revisit my own places of memory with my sister Anne or my cousin Rhena or with old friends. Now, as I reflect on our excursions, I know that I needed the companionship because it was an



this place. The bifurcated memory of Miles Davis is symptomatic of St. Louis's burden of an unshared past and of parallel histories that confirm and contribute to the region's racist reputation and divided history.

Recently the Missouri Historical Society in St. Louis organized a stunning exhibition examining the legacy of Miles Davis and facilitated the development of a year-long regional festival celebrating the life and music of Miles Davis. The exhibition, entitled *Miles: A Miles Davis Retrospective*, was the product of a collaboration among museum and jazz professionals as well as family, friends, and associates of Miles. Nearly thirty collaborating groups sponsored scores of events highlighting St. Louis blues and jazz, poetry, art, and African American culture on both sides of the Mississippi River. The opening of the exhibition at the Missouri Historical Society embodied my aspirations for the project. Hundreds of St. Louisans gathered to celebrate: African American leaders from both sides of the river, heads of major corporations, family and friends of Miles Davis, musicians, jazz and blues fans, members of the society, interested citizens. They were not discussing diversity, nor were they focused on racism, nor were they huddled in corners segregated by race, as so often happens, especially in St. Louis. Instead everybody was focused on a grand celebration of the life of this creative genius with deep St. Louis roots.

I saw and heard many things that evening. I saw representatives of our community celebrating the genius of a man that they had never celebrated before and learning to appreciate their place in a new way. I heard St. Louisans, particularly St. Louisans who were not African American, expanding their story of St. Louis to encompass Miles Davis, and I heard black St. Louisans surprised that Miles Davis was celebrated in a major cultural institution. I saw personal memories of those who loved or knew Miles converge and contribute to a newly shared memory of St. Louis as Miles Davis's place. I witnessed reunions of family, musicians, and others who once were friends. I saw people confront the ambiguities of Miles Davis's life and accept them as evidence of the common humanity that we all share. I detected a new intersection in our previously parallel histories, a new chapter of a new narrative that acknowledges the contributions of all the people who made this place. I felt another powerful confirmation of my conviction that how we remember the past matters now and has profound future consequences. I sensed a growing acknowledgment that if Miles's haunting, soulful music came from this place, then there is something marvelous and beautiful about this place, something worth celebrating indeed. I know that because of our efforts, in some small but important way, St. Louis will never be quite the same again.

I never knew Miles except through his music. Because of my role in the development of the exhibit, I now know his family, some of his musician friends, his biographer, and others who knew him well. In the exhibit gallery, I stand—as many others have—in front of the trumpet that Miles played to record his

opportunity to confirm or question my own memories of the place. In this effort to confirm my own memories with other people's, we mutually defined and reaffirmed some shared memories and implicitly questioned others. Everyone experiences this process of coremembering. Definition and creation of shared memory is how we develop and sustain relationships with other people and also how we define ourselves as distinct from others. In this instance in the UP, I found an affirmation of family ties and long-standing friendships.

But experiences at places like Ellis Island or the Vietnam Veterans Memorial are different from remembrance with family and friends. While we all have our own thoughts about such places and differing points of connection with them, they do provoke similar feelings in all of us. Thus, I talk with others who visit such places and discover that we have constructed similar narratives around them. So, while collective memory is a chimera, we do create shared memory to establish our self-identity in juxtaposition to the identities of others, but shared memory also creates family ties and friendships. The sharing of memory brings about not only self-knowledge but also mutual understanding and trust between people. Memories are the cords that bind individuals together as neighbors, communities, and even larger groups. Conversely, mutually exclusive or conflicting memories can create mistrust and divisions between people. It is this principle that informs my own professional work in a public history organization.

The year 2001 was the 75th anniversary of the birth of Miles Davis. I no longer remember when I acquired my first Miles recording, but it was sometime after I came to St. Louis in 1988. That is when I began to learn about St. Louis and about Miles. The place and the person are intrinsically associated in my mind. A St. Louis native, born and raised in Illinois on the east side of the Mississippi, he played his first professional music on the west bank of the river in St. Louis. When I think of St. Louis, I hear Miles, and when I hear Miles, I think of St. Louis. For me, those cool, haunting trumpet tones are the melodic intonations of the soul of the place. Before he died in 1991, Miles Davis was acknowledged in his own country and abroad as a giant musical genius of the twentieth century. But Miles has been regrettably ignored in his hometown. In 1991, the local St. Louis newspaper ran a small obituary on an inside page while one of our nation's largest dailies prominently covered his death and the world mourned his passing.

Miles was black. Miles was brash and proud. Miles was from East St. Louis on the "other" side of the river, and Miles did not cater to white folk. Miles was scarcely remembered by white people, other than jazz aficionados, in his hometown. Yet in East St. Louis, which is predominantly African American, people did remember him and named a school for him. Among African Americans in the St. Louis region, there is a high level of awareness that Miles Davis came from this place. And Miles Davis himself acknowledged his personal and musical roots in

groundbreaking album "Kind of Blue." I imagine his fingers and lips on the instrument, and I can hear the clarion burst of "So What." I can almost see the breath blasting through the horn in staccato bursts. I remember Miles's words: "In music, I have such feeling for different phrases, and when I'm really enjoying something it's like I'm one with it. The phrase is me. . . . I see colors and things when I'm playing" (Davis 1989:399). I move on to the picture of Miles in Copenhagen. It is one of the few images I have seen in which he is obviously pleased. He has finished playing. He looks over his left shoulder. Sweat pours down his face. He cradles his trumpet in his arms. His usual haunted look is overshadowed with satisfaction. He is happy. I am sure, and I want to adopt that expression for this place of St. Louis. His music builds bridges between us and lightens the burdens that encumber us. His music is a shared space, and so is my place.

My memories are dead-bird handkerchief memories and home place memories, Ellis Island memories, Gettysburg memories, Evelyn's Comanche memories, Vietnam memories, and Miles Davis memories. Every memory has a referent, a place or a person that is at once a crucible and a confirmation. Some are remembered referents like the bedroom of my childhood. Others are artifacts like the Negaunee cemetery or Miles Davis's trumpet or the Vietnam memorial wall or Ellis Island. Out of all of this, I have dreamed myself, shaped my identity, established my values, and marked out my place in the world. Many of my memories are shared. Those of us who have visited Ellis Island, Gettysburg, or the Vietnam Veterans Memorial do not have identical memories of such places and the people and events associated with them, but rather we have memory outlines in common. Those memories do not just define a *me*, they also define an *us*.

When the past is not shared, when it lacks people or accessible places that confirm it, the past is less meaningful. If the past is entirely mediated by professionals and cannot be personally confirmed, it loses credibility. My experience in thirty years of work on behalf of the public's history convinces me that the history that matters to people is the past that they remember and have validated through emotional experience. A shared experience with the past, such as in the Miles Davis exhibition, has meaning because the visitor confronts objects that affirm that Miles did live and did play. The interplay with the object is emotional because it is a tangible link to Miles, just as the Negaunee Cemetery links me to Grandmother and others gone before. My reaction to Miles's red trumpet now in our exhibition case is to think something like: "Miles touched that very horn—that's where that beautiful music came from as he held that trumpet to his lips and pushed his streams of air through its convolutions." The past is knowable but not through words on printed pages so much as through emotional resonance, stimulated by places and objects of memory and the stories our whole community tells.

## 4 Remembering the Past, Re-Membering the Present Elder's Constructions of Place and Self in a Philadelphia Neighborhood

MARIA G. CATTPELL



**T**HIS IS A STORY ABOUT THE WAY THINGS WERE in the year 1990 in a place called Olney. The story weaves together Olney's present of 1990 with its past, twining current happenings, history, and memory into stories about an anthropologist (me), the community of Olney, and some older white ethnics who were longtime residents of this section, or neighborhood, in the northeast quadrant of Philadelphia. I was carrying out an anthropological community study in Olney. But the story is not so much about me as about the community and, first and foremost, the older people who were the focus of the research. Many of them undoubtedly live now only in memory, in the memory of their friends and families, and in my accounts of them in conference presentations (e.g., Cattell 1992a, 1994, 1996, 1997a, 1997b), an unpublished research report (Cattell 1991a), and several other publications (Cattell 1991b, 1991c, 1992b, 1999).

Of course, the story continued after the research was completed. I learned that some of the participants in the research died or moved away from Olney, in spite of their determination to finish their days in their own homes. But I have not followed up on them in any systematic way, and so the story concerns a moment in time, the year 1990. It is a story of the past.

### The Research Project: Aging-in-Place

Much gerontological research has focused on specialized and age-segregated communities such as nursing homes and retirement communities, marginal settings such as single-room occupancy (SRO) hotels, and the migration of elders, especially to the Sunbelt. The Olney research project complemented this kind of research by looking at the aging-in-place of community-dwellers, persons who continue to live in the same community in which they have lived for many

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