

## Epilogue. Intersecting Endings and Beginnings

This historian's life with literacy and continuing education go on, without formal institutional classrooms, gradebook, faculty meetings, peer or student reviews, or monthly salary. As Chapter One explains, the intersections of the personal, the political, the academic, and place continue to entangle in productive and satisfying ways. It is a story of actions, reactions, activism, and reform intermixing with transitory goals, successes, failures, and limits.

There are many lessons, for active careers and for retirement. I hope that this book makes them clear. In one of many possible summations, I have lived a full, successful, and impactful life in academia and found a life beyond it by developing ways to build upon those foundations and their many lessons. In other words, there are new beginnings in the endings.

For me, it is a lifelong—and continuing—expedition of self- and other learning, helping, supporting, connecting, correcting, and interrelating. These activities are not unique to a life involved with universities but have a vital role and responsibility within them—both with and without institutional cooperation.

And for me, the journeys—plural—intertwine with the intellectual, especially the new histories; literacy; education; children, youth, and families; cities; and the striving to work *interdisciplinarily*. It led from a mix of progressive and traditional curricula and instruction in grade and high schools to the electives I selected at Northwestern, great good fortune and innovative knowledge and tutelage at Toronto, and opportunities inseparable from obstacles at public universities in two states and three cities. It spanned older and new campuses. These contradictions are central and inescapable. They cannot be ignored or wished away.

As I have tried to make clear in this book, these experiences are inseparable from the complicated, often contradictory currents of the 1950s and 1960s, the rest of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Without a road map or plan, they took me from Pittsburgh to Evanston-Chicago, Toronto, Dallas, San Antonio, and Columbus.

The values of my family created a life committed to equality at all levels, especially for racial, gender, and minority rights and equity. That intersected at all points with the personal, the political, the academic, and place, as it should.

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This past year underscores how clearly my circles repeatedly complete. My close friends and family tease me about now operating “Harvey U”: no tuition or debt for “students”; very small classes of all ages; every participant both teaches and learns from the others, including the “old prof”; all topics have historical foundations (for more on “Harvey U,” see Graff, 2022a). One continuing “class” consists

of six to eight college seniors across disciplines at several universities. My connections with each of them, often accidental or indirect, allow me to continue as a professor without walls, grading, or Rate My Professors. I have almost but not quite learned what technical systems engineering is.

I have brought the Ohio State section together in my dining room sometimes for takeout meals and potluck dinners. The interactions are enormously satisfying to all.

One member is now in law school; another is taking a gap year and filing applications. A third is beginning an entry level job in publishing and serving as an intern in a student mental health nonprofit. High school participants are beginning college.

The two newest undergraduate members meet with us over takeout from Winston's Coffee and Waffles and discuss Marx, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, classic and contemporary fiction, and current cultural politics. The 2023–2024 and continuing OSU group comprises six students—first-year students, juniors, and seniors.

A second “class” was the Columbus Reform group that met regularly in my living room. My local essays lead progressive residents to contact me. This results in acquaintances and often friendships across ages, occupations, backgrounds, and opinions. I connect the participants in this growing group with each other. We began to develop collective efforts directed at educating Columbus' publics, supporting city charter reform, and advocating for affordable housing. Multiple-year efforts to cooperate with both the City of Columbus and Ohio State off-campus representatives showed promise but then stopped. On the one hand, neither has interest in genuine collaboration or in changing tried but failing ways. On the other hand, serving neighbors and taxpaying residents works against both Columbus' and OSU's profit motives. (See my relevant essays, listed in the Appendix.)



*Figure Epilogue.1. The Seniors at “Harvey U”: Matthew Snyder, Justin Kim, Vicki, Harvey with Trossie, Tara Johnson, and Jeanelle Wu, October 2022.*

As they did during my active professorial years, my writings continue to make an impact and my concepts join popular vocabulary: from “the literacy myth” to “conflicting paths,” “the Dallas myth,” “undisciplining knowledge,” the “Second Big Lie,” “white fright and flight,” “the New Illiterates,” “Moms *Against* Liberty,” and “The Columbus Way.” I hear my recent concept—describing current book banning as “the new illiteracy” (Pérez & Graff, 2022)—on CNN, NPR, and MSNBC. It also appears in print, along with the critical race theory “nondebate” (Graff, 2022d).

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Finally, Vicki and I completed a 50-year-old “circle” by visiting Toronto, our home from 1970 to 1975, in September 2022 and Chicago-Evanston a year later. Although I had returned several times over the half century since we moved to Dallas, time commitments for lectures, seminars, and conferences prevented my walking the city streets and personally observing changes.

When our former professor in the early 1970s and friend since then, 94-year-old Natalie Zemon Davis, told me in August 2022 that she was experiencing health problems, we decided to make another journey to Toronto. It was fulfilling and in many ways life-confirming and life-completing. We spent entire days pounding the pavement, discovering that most of the older city we loved remained amid the new towers of 40 to 60 stories. Despite enormous growth in all dimensions, Toronto remains a welcoming, truly diverse, public-oriented, world city.

With friends from graduate school, we celebrated the city past and present by seeing it; sharing in its historical, visual, and culinary highlights; and engaging in impromptu conversations with strangers, especially with young people in the university area. We had a wonderful catch-up conversation with Natalie, who passed away a year later. Returning to Columbus, we stopped for a few days in Detroit to see my brother Gary—still a hardworking, quite successful rock music journalist—and meet his partner, Stacey.

One year later, we completed another Midwestern driving trip: to Cincinnati to see a former graduate student who is now a professor there, a cousin, and the city; Indianapolis, especially for the best-in-world Children’s Museum of Indianapolis; Goshen, Indiana, to see former next-door neighbors in a progressive Mennonite retirement community; Notre Dame, Indiana, to see long-time literacy studies colleague and friend John Duffy and his wife; and especially Chicago and Evanston.

Staying in the Lincoln Park neighborhood of Chicago, where we will relocate in fall 2024, we had a lovely meal with another former graduate student and her family. She is a historian of early printed food recipes. After more walking, wonderful eating, and seeing other sites, we returned to Northwestern University. The university archivist Kevin Leonard conducted an oral history interview with me about student activism and student life at the university in the late 1960s when I was an undergraduate activist. We walked the campus, remembering the old and taking stock of the new. It was a “trip” in more than one sense.

We dined with old friends, starting with former UT-Dallas faculty colleague Marvin Cohen and wife Janey. He left academia after his UTD introduction for a successful career in social philanthropy in Chicago.

The next evening, we had a gourmet vegetarian dinner with Harriet Lightman, a close friend from the Newberry in 1979–1981. She recently ended her career as associate director of Northwestern University Library after beginning as a doctoral graduate in early modern French history. We had a fine breakfast with the new vice president of research and education of the Newberry Library, our old stomping grounds. This trip ended with a voyage on the high-speed ferry across Lake Michigan to visit my brother in Detroit and our friend, retired historian Mary Cayton in nearby Canton.

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May 17–19, 2024, represents another point of culmination and celebration, the Expanding Literacy Studies/HJG Reunion. Approximately 40 former graduate students from three universities along with a handful of former undergraduates, close friends, and colleagues met at Ohio State for a reunion and celebration of at least four anniversaries. Conversations with former doctoral students—all currently teaching—Kelly Bradbury, Shawn Casey, Michael Harker, Nora McCook, Caitlin Ryan, and Julia Voss early in 2023 led to the mutual discovery that the upcoming year marked the following:

- 15 years since the landmark 2009 Expanding Literacy Studies International Interdisciplinary Conference for Graduate Students
- 20 years since the 2004 founding of LiteracyStudies@OSU
- 45th anniversary of *The Literacy Myth* (1979c, with its revised reissue 1991/2023b)
- 75th birthday celebration of HJG, Juneteenth 2024

And here I pause the paths of my 75 years, with time to get resoled and resoled. I hope that they provide at least a set of signposts for others.