



travel Memorabilia

by Syed Waliullah

"Reminiscences make one feel deliciously aged and sad."
George Bernard Shaw

OUR three and a half years of residence at the Utah State University campus at Logan (Utah) was an exhilarating experience and we still reminisce. No other sojourn or longer foreign travel had left such a lasting impact on our sensibility. Our wish and our urge to go back to this campus grew in intensity with every visit we made singly and severally to the eastern cities of USA. Each time our wish to visit the campus was to be put off for reasons of paucity of fund and or time. The urgency for this visit may best be expressed in the rephrased words of poet Michael Madhusudan Datta.

*"Sigh for (Logan's) Albion's distant shore,
It's valley green, mountain high;
The friends I have in that fair climes;
Yes, Oh I sigh
To recross the vast Atlantic Wave,
For glory or a nameless grave."
(Datta's poem reflects his longing for his dream land, Albion (England), which he was yet to visit.)*

The long awaited visit to my Alma Mater was finally materialized and the days of all waiting and expectancy came to an end with my arrival at the Salt Lake City by Amtrak Rly. Here from the final leg of my journey to Logan, my dream land, commenced by car. My wife could not accompany me in this long train journey for reasons of her health and she had to stay back at Los Angeles.

mi-ra-bile visu(wonderful to behold)
A hundred mile drive to my destination at this wee hour of the morning, over the Rocky Mountains, afforded me an unique and a memorable experience. The description of this experience may be expressed through a quote from Nathaniel Hawthorne: "I have experienced that a landscape and the sky unfold the deepest beauty". This is apposite in terms of describing my own emotive encounter with the mother nature.

In the fading darkness of the cold night of early April the car drove through the rain-soaked mountainous inter-state highway, bisecting the Rockies, brought the three travellers (the other two were my hosts and our family friends Kathy and Glen Jensen) to the descending grade of the road that led to the Cache Valley and further north to the State of Idaho, Yellowstone National Park and other destinations. Darkness seemed to have been reluctantly conceding to the street lights of fast approaching university town of Logan. In no time the car with its intermittently quiet passengers were on the plains of the valley, maintaining a speed of sixty-five miles per hour.

In the wake of dawn the crimson sun was slowly lighting up the eastern sky over the valley and the tranquil snow-capped mountain range. Instead of focusing its beam to the western slope of the eastern mountain facing the valley the eastern slope of the opposite mountain was 'deliberately chosen' to receive the first beam of the rising sun. Thus the western part of the valley on the left of the highway was being imperceptibly uncovered. Here in the earth's craving for the day-light and the sun's own sense of urgency to appease its closest neighbour, the earth, was amply sensed.

At a distance and not very far from the highway I could visualize the Snake river partly cleared off its snow-heaps was rippling away with piles of varied shapes and sizes of snow. Everything, all around our path, appeared to be quiet, peaceful and heavenly. This reminds me of the stanza from William Wordsworth:

*"Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his splendour valley, rock or hills;
Never saw I, never felt, a calm so deep:
The river glideth at his own sweet will;
And all that mighty heart is lying still."*

The Snow: The stream, The Rivulet
At this auspicious moment of the solar system I looked up through the car window to the mountains and my sight was dazzled by a single snowy white sheet that lay on the mountain peaks and depressions in between the peaks. While looking down the valley I caught sight of piles and patches of snow of various sizes and shapes strewn all over the ground as far as I could see. These snow piles seemed to be awaiting the arrival of warmer days to melt them away.

The recycled water flowing from all directions of the surrounding mountains and the valley on their downward journey ran into streams and cascading rivulets before merging into the Snake river and the latter then enters into the Colorado river before getting lost in the great Pacific Ocean hundreds of miles

away. The Snake river is well-known for its deepest gorges and the Colorado river is famous for its largest ones.

A walking tour during the summer through difficult terrain along the narrow river banks and between ridges with miles of woodland is a fascinating one for it is peaceful and serene. However, the river sometimes turns tumultuous when on its steep down grade journey it flows over pebbles, stones and boulders lying all over the shallow part of the river bed. Here the rushing water breaks into spray. This is a particular sight the visitor will not miss, and he is least like to forget.

The Roaming Deer: Through the window pane my wandering eyes caught sight of a wild deer family foraging a couple yards away, a magnificent sight and a rare sight, unimaginable in our over populous country where a foraging wild animal like deer does not have any chance to escape the onslaught of greedy human being, even in their natural habitat in the Sunderbans.

Heavy snowfall on the mountains leaves nothing exposed or accessible to the deer population to forage. Everything goes under tons of snow and ice. Resultantly, the deer population in family groups, move out their mountain habitat and descend on the valley in search of food. They move freely in the open ground, side walks and even they intrude upon the open front yard of private homes. In the later place what they enjoy most is the garden foliage. They are not afraid of anything including the humans. Why should they be when they know through experience that they are not harmed and are left alone. They are protected by law and the law is respected with all seriousness and a violation of this law is a rarity. Violators are punished. Nevertheless, this country has a deer hunting season and this falls in the summer and that again for a few days only under a licensing system. One does not need gun licence but for every hunting season the hunter needs one. The number of deer one could hunt is also fixed. This system allows the United States citizens to enjoy hunting sport, and delicacies of deer meat while keeping the deer population under control under conditions set by federal and local governments. In sum the animal kingdom in the wild forest and the human society in their habitat have established a symbiotic relationship between themselves.

The Glorious Summer: In a month or two the whole valley will be bursting into a verdant world of its own. Staples will be growing in the fields, barren trees; shrubs, bushes, and other foliage will be sprouting new leaves, orchards will be full of succulent fruits, wild flowers on hills and mountain slopes will be seen peeping through the rocks, while cultured flowers will be blooming in gardens in variegated forms and texture. All these will thus be heralding the arrival of the most cherished and hankered after spring to be soon followed by the summer.

During the winter both man and nature take shelter under heavy cover and during the summer they are barely covered. With the arrival of the summer the mountain, its slopes and grounds of the valley shake off the snow that kept them engulfed throughout the winter and most part of the spring. During the winter trees disrobe themselves completely and during the summer they adorn themselves with new and shiny leaves. At the departure of the winter season human being living on the plain disrobes himself from warm and heavy clothing and gets into his light and scanty dress for exposing his God given body in whatever manner and whatever degree and for whatever purpose he chooses.

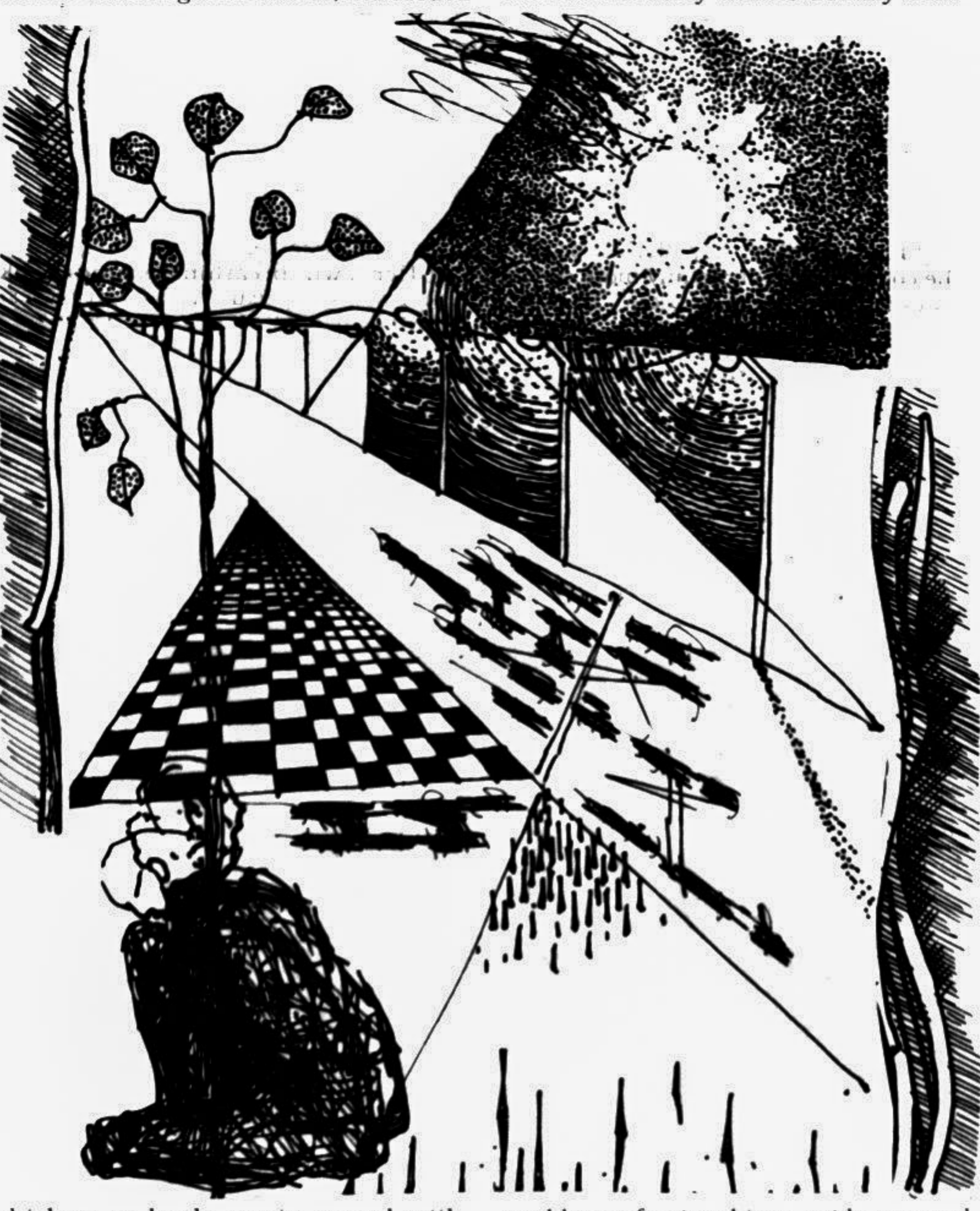
While driving through the highway into the town one could see on both sides miles of open fields dotted with small, medium and large homes and homesteads. The presence of ranches is strongly felt, though not seen from this part of the highway. Stench from ranches was freely flowing in along with the occasional breeze from the north. One cannot escape it now as one could not do so in early seventies.

The very sight and view of the wide open fields, and the glistening rain drops on the thin layer of grass and snow-capped mountains on the horizon instantaneously became integral to my sensibility. The gradual revelation of features and contours of the surrounding hills and mountains with densely wooded slopes and that of the valley itself all together may be compared with the unveiling of a striking beau yaux of a Kashmiri damsel in her natural habitat, the valley of Kashmir.

There seemed to be an element of perfect synchronization between my arrival time in the valley and the onset of dawn with the slow but steady opening of this location of the universe in its variegated state. At this hour everything

in the vicinity was ready to come out of their nightly hibernation. At the appointed hour of the day birds living in freedom and birds living in captivity will be out on the field to forage, front yards of homes will have fluttering clothes on cloth lines, old couples will be seen on their lawn chairs, if not engaged otherwise; children will be found on their bikes or playing in their family front-yard if not old enough to go to the school, working men and women will shortly be on their way to work, student and teachers will be going to their respective institutions, roads will be busy with vehicular traffic, shops, eating places, service stations, banks will be ready to receive their respective clients and customers, workers of the botanical department will be busy in transplanting or tending trees on both sides of campus side walks.

With the arrival of the summer outdoor barbecuing season, one variety of picnic, will commence. May it be private family affair, or it may be with friends, relatives barbecuing will be held on the frontyard, or on the choice mountain spots where necessary facilities are made available by forest department, or one has a choice to go on an hour drive to the Great Bear lake. Community church also arranges one day annual barbecuing festival where church members and their friends are invited. During our days at the university we were invited in one such festival. The food served could be as sumptuous as one would visualize. How one could forget mouth watering beef steaks, barbecued



chicken or lamb roasts served with gravy, along with a scoop of mashed potato, boiled green bean and or peas with a table spoon full of some kind of jam and abundant supply of punch, (usually composed of wine and alcoholic liquor, citrus juice, spice tea and water.) Non alcoholic liquids replaces alcoholic drinks as desired by the guest. Utah being inhabited by Mormons the host do not offer alcoholic drink. Even tea and coffee are forbidden drinks for the Mormons. Mormon religion permits polygamy but not practiced for the federal law prohibits this practice.

Another fabulous summer celebration at the campus is a one-day water melon festivity held at the Quad, the campus ground. At the harvesting time farmers bring in truck loads of freshly harvested luscious water melons for students, teachers and campus employees and their families. Farmer hosts cut these succulent fruits in sizable pieces and hand them over to all stretched hands. Unless one comes too late to the venue there was no chance for one to miss a piece of the melon. One can participate in this melon eating spree and enjoy "all you can eat and at no cost". Although "all you can eat" is seldom practiced.

Here in this very Quad our graduation picnic luncheon was held on Saturday, June 8, 1974 following the Eighty First Annual commencement. Ill luck would have it I could not participate in this great occasion for I had to return home earlier in February to join my service under the government of in-

dependent Bangladesh.

The Destination : The rain that fell on the ground the night before had left the fields completely drenched. The exuding rain soaked field filled my heart with joy and made my soul sublimely happy.

Glen and Kathy drove up to the Salt-Lake City the previous night to bring me back to Logan. Some times we drove under slashing wind with rain and thunderstorm. The car was now cruising at a speed of forty-five miles per hour. Soon it crossed into the town itself. At this early hour of Thursday the seventh of April of the year of 1994 it was no longer the silhouette but the whole valley and its environs including the imposing university tower, the Old Main, on the hill-top to the south-east of the town was a "welcome sign". In my days I had my office on the second floor of the Old Main with a window opening towards the west, and facing the valley. One could get lost in the maze of his thoughts while looking out of this window to the expanse and grandeur of the valley with little or no distraction. Studying, counseling or tutoring students, examining term papers and writing or typing one's own draft PhD dissertation in this room were never boring.

All the way down to this university township my friends were updating me on major changes that took place in and around the campus after I left the campus in early 1974. Theirs was an excellent commentary that is usually deliv-

reached. Without taking any respite after the ordeal of his sleepless night long drive to and from the Salt Lake City, a 200 mile two way trip Glen left for attending to his professorial task at the university shortly after releasing his passengers, Kathy and me, at the door steps of their home. The Jensen's spacious two floor home was cozy having everything a modern household needs but with no trace of showiness. This was to be my abode for three full days to roam and 'romp' for the purpose of refilling my soul with sounds and fragrance of the town and the university; and to see great strides made by the university; the smudge, if any, it has adorned with; and any snippet that I may gather so as to get a feel of a great institution, my Alma Mater.

Later, in the morning Glen returned with his usual mirth, smile and gaiety to drive me up to the campus. In spite of Kathy's urging that I take rest after the arduous rail journey of over thirty hours from Berkeley in California my earlier Alma-Meter, I visited after about thirty-two years. As ill luck would have it I could not revisit Michigan State University, wherein I took courses on rural development. This was the institution with which the founding Director of the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development, Akhter Hamid Khan, established a collaborative relationship for the cause of the academy, popularly known, the BARD.

I went out for I had only two working days to fulfil my long cherished desire. We drove around the campus including the Triads for housing university student family. 36 K was our family abode for over three years. There I lived with wife Suraiya and our young son Rumi. Among additional high rise structures, which were pleasantly coming up in the campus was the huge extension of the library building. I wish I could be there when this extension with its paraphernalia is completed. I would love to spend many more hours, days, weeks, months and even years in this new facility and the neighbouring environment. In this facility I came across a poem by Alfred L Tennyson which I rephrased as follows to suit my emotions around the library.

*"Books in the crowded shelf,
I pluck you out of your nook.
I browse through your pages,
Little words, but if I could understand
All that you are resting in the shelf.
I should know what God and man is."*

At the end of this initial re-orientation of the campus, Glen and I went to meet Professor Jay Schvaneveldt, my PhD committee member and the then Head of the Family Life Education Department, over lunch. While waiting for Prof Jay S in the corridor Glen had introduced me to a few of his colleagues. Interestingly, we all had something to share and that were universal in nature, obviously relating to population, development and the social science, my major area of interest, particularly the issue of social change.

With the arrival of Prof Jay S we all proceeded toward the 'Hub' where a pleasant surprise was awaiting me in the form of an exotic restaurant. Here I found the Hub in its real shape and content and perhaps more. The Hub was a part of the student union. The union building contained the student union office, student daily newspaper office, a book store, a post office, a barber shop, a huge auditorium (a new attraction) and a large lounge for students and teachers with over two dozens of national flags representing countries of currently registered foreign students. These flags of nations added to the pride of respective foreign students as symbols of their self-identity and for that matter the local student community as a whole also enjoyed the same status for they have thus become a part of an international community.

At the huge dining hall savoury food items of different origin, taste, and flavour were laid out at convenient spots. Some of these tables were laid under colourful canopy. The place was pervaded by an appetizing aroma. Food items of different countries were arranged in different locations of the hall providing the environment, the style and character of each of their own. The place appeared to give an exotic aura. Here the customers, comprising of students, faculty and visitors merged into a ruck but without ruckus. People around small dining tables were rapt in their small talks, or serious discourse with little or no sign of boisterousness. Here I found two other smaller eating places to suit the mood and pocket of the diner. I do not remember to have seen any lounging place for teachers. Teachers are always found in their class rooms or in their own offices unless they need to attend a faculty meeting in

a designated room.

After a sumptuous lunch interspersed by an exchange of notes on what had happened to both sides including life and work during the past two decades Jay went back to his office and Glen and I went over to the Old Main. Glen continued to update me on the developments in the campus. I was shocked to learn that the Old Main was damaged by a devastating fire. It was inconceivable for me to comprehend that such a thing could happen to the Old Main where I spent the most part of my three and a half years of student days in Logan. Noticing my shock Glen consoled me with the news that the Old Main was, however, reconstructed, renovated and refurbished internally without affecting the outside of the building. This was amply evident when I entered the building and 'trudged' through the basement, the first and the second floor offices, class rooms and corridors. Incidentally, I failed to locate my office of the past for the whole place was completely renovated. The change was immensely palpable. The massive change in the Old Main after the fire and the concurrent changes that were still taking place in the township reminded me of a quote "...enthusiasm to restore the burnt great cathedral of Notre Dame de Chartre (1194) swept through France." The similarity between the two is so apt. The Old Main from outside gave its quaint appearance but once inside, I was pleasantly surprised by its avenues remodeling, its beautiful settings, refurbishing, acoustics and optimal use of space.

Next I visited the faculty of the Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work Department. There I felt at home in spite of the passage of time, new look and all the new faces of Professors. Coming out of the Old Main, I recognized the Quad, the nerve centre of the campus, and soothing for my raving eyes. Glen reported that the tradition of water melon festivity is still celebrated here at the advent of the summer semester as usual.

The following day Kathy took me around the campus for the second round of orientation. The graveyard, or the cemetery was found to be more populous as far as the stones were concerned and it did not occur to my mind, at the time, that I or any of my near and dear ones will ever enter there.

Kathy left me at the gate of the student union building for me to trudge and muse. While leaving me there she reminded me to call her so that she could be back to pick me up in case I felt 'bore' or 'tired'. In the Union building, the post office and the barber shop were the only ones that appeared to be the same as in the old days. I must confess that I can not claim to have great confidence in my memory of the past, not to speak of the distant past.

I went back to friend, guide and philosopher (he is a worker and a go-getter, than a philosopher) took me to Professor Michael B Toney, the Head of the Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work for a luncheon appointment. Professor Toney took me for lunch and gave me a run down of the ever expanding programmes of his department.

Professor Toney brought me to another restaurant in the campus. This was in another part of the student union building, a new restaurant for me, and it was a traditional set-up and a neat one, seemed to be meant for professors having heavy bill-folds in their pockets, later to be proven that my conjecture was completely unfounded as I saw the place was open for anyone who wanted to eat there expensively. I failed to choose my own food as usual and on my request Professor Toney selected a deliciously hot-sliced, barbecued Salmon to satisfy my ardent palate.

I learnt from Dr Toney all about that happened in the department inclusive of its valuable expansion in terms of facilities and courses with the addition of completely a new generation of faculty, creation of two self-contained research laboratories. The environment thus evolved has attracted many students from home and abroad and many more to come in near future with the proposed Asian studies programme in place. I may note here that during my time I was the only student from Bangladesh. Now there were about two dozens of Bangladeshi students, some with their spouses, in this ever growing campus.

It is my proud privilege to note that the learning process that began at the University of Dhaka, Punjab University, Lahore, then at the U C Berkeley have immensely contributed toward my academic work at the university, in the government and the post retirement professions as well. What I learnt in these citadels of learning reminds me of a quote from a Teheran University