would like to see a building, say, the Empire State, I would like to see on one side of it a foot-wide strip from top to bottom with the name of every bricklayer, the name of every electrician, with all the names. So when a guy walked by, he could take his son and say, "See, that's me over there on the fifty-fifth floor. I put the steel beam in." Picasso can point to a painting. What can I point to? A writer can point to a book. Everybody should have something to point to.


sometimes, out of pure meanness, when I make something, I put a little dent in it. I like to do something to make it really unique. Hit it with a hammer. I deliberately ---- it up to see if it'll get by, just so I can say I did it. It could be anything. Let me put it this way: I think God invented the dodo bird so when we get up there we could tell Him, "Don't you ever make mistakes?" and He'd say, "Sure, look." (Laughs.) I'd like to make my imprint. My dodo bird. A mistake, mine.


Edward Hoagland: My bifocals are like a horse's halter, binding the lower half of my eyes to the day's work.

dali once took his pet ocelot with him to a New York restaurant and tethered it to a leg of the table while he ordered coffee. A middle-aged lady walked past and looked at the animal in horror. "What's that?" she cried. "It's only a cat," said Dali scathingly. "I've painted it over with an op-art design." The women, embarrassed by her initial reaction, took a closer look and sighed with relief. "I can see now that's what it is," she said. "At first I thought it was a real ocelot."


Roy G. Biv: Red orange yellow green blue indigo violet.

discussion between Haldane and a friend began to take a predictable turn. The friend said with a sigh, "It's no use going on. I know what you will say next, and I know what you will do next." The distinguished scientist promptly sat down on the floor, turned two back somersaults, and returned to his seat. "There," he said with a smile. "That's to prove that you're not always right."

We've always been a musical family. When my grandfather was old, he elapsed into a complete fog. He wouldn't say a sensible word, week in and week out. But his nurse would bring him to the dinner table and he'd sit there and he'd eat. The night boat to Norfolk from Baltimore would come by every night at eight o'clock and it would go "Booooooaaah" as it went by the house. One night, out of this total fog he had been in for months, grandfather stood up, went over to the piano, poked it, and said, "E Flat." Then he sat down and went right back into the fog.

Edward Hoagland: You butter a cat's paw when moving into a new home, so it can find its way back after going exploring the first time.

Recommended: Arthur J. Pulos, The American Design Adventure (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988). 446 pp., hardbound. ISBN 0-262-16106-0. 300 black and white illustrations. Intriguing if hardly amusing, this is the second volume (1940s-1970s) of a history of American industrial design by a past president of the IDSA. Very dry, heady stuff (no jokes, few anecdotes, almost no gossip), but a valuable review of the evolution and elegance of utilitarian objects. We thought the dust jacket (designed by Diane Jaroch) was especially exciting.

Edward Hoagland, "Learning to Eat Soup" in an issue of Antaeus (No 61, Autumn 1988) devoted to Journals, Notebooks and Diaries, p. 228.


A rat in the house might eat the ice cream.
hen she [my mother] told me how she met my father. One summer my mother went to Denver to spend the summer with her sister working in the hospital. My father happened to be stationed at Lowry Air Force Base, and they met through the local rabbi, who was the chaplain for the Jewish soldiers at the base. They had a blind date and that was the beginning of their romance, though the story is that my father was so insensitive to the fact that they were supposed to be the ones having the romance that after the first date with him he called up and wanted her to go on a double date with him—but he wanted my mother to be the date for his friend.


Walter Page: The English have only two vegetables—and two of them are cabbage.

Voltaire: The English have forty-two religions, but only two sauces.

Samuel Butler: A hen is only an egg's way of making another egg.

Clement Freud: If eels looked a little less like eels more people would want to eat them.

Auguste Renoir (when asked how an artist should learn to paint breasts):
First paint apples and peaches in a fruit bowl.

E.B. White (Every Day is Saturday):
We can go to any restaurant and be made uncomfortable by the waiters, as waiters seem to be a breed gifted in making guests ill at ease. They are always older, wearier, and wiser than we are; and they have us at a disadvantage because we are sitting down and they are standing up. We should very much like to discover a restaurant where we would be allowed to stand up to our food, and the waiters be compelled to sit down, so we could lord it over them!


my great-grandfather, Alan Taylor Sherman, came to Washington with the Union Army during the Civil War. He stopped at my great-grandmother’s house to get some water and she was the one who handed him the glass of water. He put this hand over hers as he took the glass of water, and then he got off the horse, and after that, they got married.


dreiser wrote this magnificent novel [Sister Carrie]. It was published in 1900; it was then and still is the best first novel ever written by an American. It’s an amazing work... The book was a magnificent achievement but the publisher, Doubleday, didn’t like it, they were afraid of it. So they buried it. Naturally it did nothing. I would go crazy too in that situation. Dreiser rented a furnished room in Brooklyn. He put a chair in the middle of this room and sat in it. The chair didn’t seem to be in the right position so he turned it a few degrees, and he sat in it again. Still it was not right. He kept turning the chair around and around, trying to align it to what—trying to correct his own relation to the universe? He never could do it, so he kept going around in circles and circles. He did that for quite a while, and ended up in a sanitarium in Westchester, in White Plains.


ne of my ancestors had once driven a carriage for Napoleon... So one day he was strolling there with his walking cane and his Sunday best, and he came upon a skunk. The skunk of course had a nice big stripe up his tail and a great plume and it reminded him of Napoleon whom he had driven in his carriage. And he said, “Well, Napoleon, what are you doing here?” He took his cane and gave the skunk a big smack and of course the skunk retaliated. The old gentleman was completely unaware of it because he had no sense of smell and he returned home but no one would let him in the house. They made him go to the barn where they burned the Sunday clothes which he had brought all the way from Germany.


ne nice thing about the crafts... You work two hours at a time. There’s a ritual to it. It’s break time. Then two more hours and it’s dinner time. All those are very good times. Ten minutes is a pretty short time, but it’s good not to push too hard. All of a sudden it comes up break time, just like a friend knocking at the door that’s unexpected. It’s a time for swapping tales. What you’re really doing is setting the stage for your work.

must have been round the age of five, when I learnt that an old lady living at the back of us was dying. I was very intrigued with this, and spent many hours looking at the house from a back window: I wanted to see the poor old lady ascending into heaven. I did not know if she would be in a perpendicular or horizontal position, what clothes she would be wearing, and particularly, whether she would be able to navigate the railway bridge that stood near the house.


hen I should be reading, I am almost always doing something else. It is a matter of some embarrassment to me that I have never read Joyce and a dozen other writers who have changed the face of literature. But there you are. I picked up *Ulysses* the other evening, when my eye lit on it, and gave it a go. I stayed with it only for about twenty minutes, then was off and away. It takes more than a genius to keep me reading a book.


y grandmother would sometimes choke on her food, and have to go out on the side porch in Shillington, where one or another member of the family would follow and hammer on her back while she clung, gagging, to the porch rail...I also would choke now and then. My album of sore moments includes a memory of crouching above my tray in the Lowell House dining hall at Harvard, miserably retching at something in my throat that would not go up or down, while half-swallowed milk dribbled from my mouth and the other students at the table silently took up their trays and moved away. On the edge of asphyxia, I sympathized with them, and wished that I, too, could shun me.

My earliest memory (I believe I was less than three) is of being in the garden with my brother and our big white dog, Piu. All three of us are rolling in the grass. Next to us on a stool is Mother, talking with a neighbor.


My first memory is of being on a train which derailed in a rainstorm in Nebraska one night when I was two—and of hearing, as we rode in a hay wagon toward the distant weak lights of a little station, that a boy my age had just choked to death from breathing mud. But maybe my first real memory emerged when my father was dying. I was thirty-five and dreamt so incredibly vividly of being dandled and rocked and hugged by him, being only a few months old, giggling helplessly and happily.


Early training is of the utmost importance. The familiar slogan, “Catch them when they’re young,” is applicable to many human practices; it has special significance when applied to art students, religious training, and the taming of wild animals.


Call my mother’s whole family psychic. I don’t know what you’d call them. When they die they leave a message to tell somebody they’re leaving and goodbye. My aunt had this pretty, really pretty glass thing over the table. They were cleaning the dishes, and they heard a crack in the room. They received a telegram the next day saying that an uncle had died.


The governess decided that I had no right to drink water when I came home from school, on the grounds that I was perspiring. I was not allowed to go near the pump any more, nor to enter the kitchen or the dining room until dinner time. I had to stay in my room, which my brother and I shared with the governess. I suffered horribly from thirst. One day, taking advantage of the fact that I was left alone in the room, I began to search. In the closet I stumbled over a bottle labeled “boric acid.” I knew that this solution was used as a disinfectant, but I was too thirsty to care. I drank almost half the bottle. I did not feel sick until later, and then I told my mother what I had done. Lying in bed and pretending to be more ill than I was, I heard, as a consolation, the sharp, bitter dialogue between Mother and the governess.

One of my great culinary moments was being taken as a tot to my black nurse’s house to eat clay. “What this child needs,” she had muttered one day while we were out, “is a bait of clay.” Everybody in South Carolina knew that blacks, for reasons unknown, fancied clay. Not until I came to read Tynanee’s A Study of History years later did I learn that eating clay, or geophagy, is a prehistoric habit (it fills the stomach until you can bring down another aurochs) surviving only in West Africa and South Carolina. I even had the opportunity, when I met Tynanee at a scholarly do, to say that I had been in my day geophagous. He gave me a strange, British look.

The eating took place in a bedroom, for the galvanized bucket of clay was kept under the bed, for the cool. It was blue clay from a creek, the consistency of slightly gritty ice cream. It lay smooth and delicious-looking in its pail. Not until I came to read Toynbee’s I was on my way to the doctor. The taste was wholesome, mineral, and empathic. I have since eaten many things in respectable restaurants with far more trepidation.


French proverb: Spinach is the broom of the stomach.

The following are actual explanations offered by drivers on traffic accident reports, compiled by the National Safety Council:

I was on my way to the doctor with rear end trouble when my universal joint gave way causing me to have an accident.

Coming home, I drove into the wrong house and collided with a tree I don’t have.

The guy was all over the road. I had to swerve a number of times before I hit him.

I had been driving for 40 years when I fell asleep at the wheel and had an accident.