



Fiat Lux!

Down Memory Lane
in California

by Emil Ems

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*UC Berkeley, you welcomed me with warm generosity;
not only when I approached you as a timid youngster, but
even when I dared to come back at an advanced age to
savour the fullness of your splendour. This book is for you!*

Fiat Lux!

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Prologue

THIS BOOK DID not come about through diligent planning. It kind of grew on me. Its origins can be traced to an e-mail from California, received in late 2009. Part of it reads as follows:

“... also will tell you I going to open Studio Apt for rent from April so if you want to rent for two month I am very happy to rent for you. It is furnished and, if you want, tel and internet I will set up for you before you come. Rent is \$1100 per month include water, gas, electric and cleaning after you go home + tel and internet. If you decide rent the apt we have a lot of time. Please let me know I save for you. Take care, Nobuko Fujimoto.”

This needs some explaining. Way back in 1976/77 I spent a year as a visiting graduate student at the University of California in Berkeley (UCB). The stay in Berkeley proved to be the most challenging and exciting experience in my life, remembered fondly ever since. We, that is my former wife Alice and myself, lived on Stuart Street, renting an apartment from a friendly Japanese family, Masami and Nobuko Fujimoto, which leads us back to the e-mail.



Fast forward to Brussels in Summer 2009, during another period of challenge and change. I was busy adapting to my new status as retired person, having just polished off my working life with ten years of interesting and demanding work as principal official in the European Commission. A new career as photographer had to be planned and the move back to Stockholm in Sweden had to be organised.

In the middle of all this, Nobuko contacted me and indicated that she would be visiting Brussels and would I like to meet her and show her the sights? We had exchanged Christmas cards over the years and I knew that she liked travelling, so her message did not come as a complete surprise. I was delighted to see her again and we spent some pleasant days together, sight-

seeing. I learned that Masami, her husband, had died some years before, but that she was still letting studios in the apartment complex they owned. Without thinking deeply about it, I happened to mention during our conversations that it might be interesting to come back to Berkeley and relive my experiences from way back as a student. No more was said about this, so the e-mail above did, in a way, come out of the blue.



I had already moved back to Stockholm when I received it and was busy furnishing my new apartment there. So I hesitated at first; would I really have the time and energy to go back to my former “hunting grounds”? If so, it would have to be for a prolonged period of time, letting me reimmerge into the special culture of Berkeley and savour its atmosphere. But here was an opportunity too good to miss; living space was being offered at reasonable cost. So I decided to take Nobuko up on her offer and to rent the studio for April-May 2010.

Did I have any detailed plan for what to do once arriving in Berkeley? From the outset, my plan was *not to have any plan for activities*. This was against my habit of always planning my vacation trips “to death”, in view of the threat of getting depressed when having nothing to do in a foreign environment. Now I intended to do it differently. I would let events come to me and “roll with the tide”. If nothing else turned up, I could always take pleasant strolls on the beautiful Campus of UCB. After all, I had spent the most dynamic time of my life there when still young and wouldn’t mind reliving the scenery.

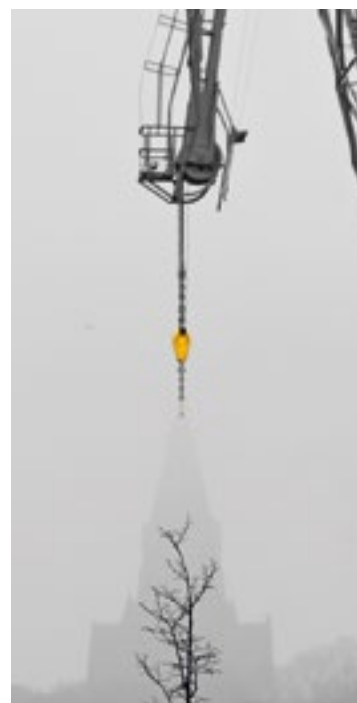
I had taken many pictures on Campus in those days and, maybe, those could be supplemented with new pictures worthy of keeping. Speaking of photographs and other types of travel reports: in the beginning, there existed

only the vague idea of eventually preparing a slide show with photos from my stay in Berkeley. Nothing more elaborate was foreseen. This changed, just two weeks before the trip, when I participated in a workshop for self-publishing authors. The seminar leader, who went by the impressive name of Bismarck, took great care in informing us about the new world of Internet out there, which apparently was rendering it necessary for presumptive authors to build their audience by blogging, facebooking, twittering and generally making their presence known on the net. Although I was not planning any book at that stage, I thought it a good idea to give “networking” a go and the trip at hand seemed to me a suitable way to start – thus the idea of writing a *travelogue* on the Internet was born.¹ It proved to become a major piece of work. I am surprised to see, every time I open the blog’s site, that it consists of as much as *34 chapters* of text and some *400 photographs*.

The travel diaries met with considerable interest and many old friends, as well as new acquaintances from the trip, left engaging and interesting comments on the various blog entries. Upon my return, several of the commentators, mostly among the more mature friends, urged me to go further and to publish the blog as a book. After some trepidation, I decided to take the plunge and the results are before you.

Rereading the travelogue, a year after its gestation and with the insight distance provides, I notice that it contains hidden depths and meanings that I was happily unaware of when working on it during my trip. It starts out as a simple, happy-go-lucky road diary, written by a man eager to explore the delights of travelling in places not experienced since 35 years back. But gradually, a more thoughtful, even sombre timbre permeates text and pictures, and the diary finishes in quite a melancholic mood. Why would this be?

As I can see now, this trip to California represented an important “rite of passage” for me. When I started out, subconsciously, I still looked upon myself as a relatively young man, able to carry out whatever was asked of me and



do what I wanted to do, although some doubts had started to sneak in; after all, I had retired from a long and fulfilling working career and was already a pensioner. But by revisiting places where I had lived my life to the fullest as a youngster, thereby borrowing from old memories and reliving them as renewed experiences, I must have hoped to rejuvenate myself and confirm my view of being a man still going strong, irrespective of his age.

As the weeks of my trip went by, my subconscious must gradually have realized the vanity of these hopes. As a result, I emerged as a mellow, more resigned man – at least as it seems to me – who increasingly realises

and encompasses the implications of getting old and eventually fading away. The trip made this change of attitude agreeable, by demonstrating that mature persons can experience interesting adventures too, and that older age will not prevent me from embarking on new ventures and tasks, even if those will differ from the vigorous endeavours of youth. I hope that the publication before you will bear ample witness to that fact.

I have tried to transfer, as far as possible, the blog’s intrinsic properties to this book. Apart from technical adaptations of pictures and some small editorial changes occasioned by the change in medium, the diaries’ content is essentially preserved. It is my hope that this will bring a quality of immediacy and intimacy to the book that fully conveys the spirit of my 2010 “Voyage down memory lane in California”.

Stockholm, Winter 2011

¹ The result can still be seen at www.emilems.blogspot.com.

15 El Escorial en Alta California



HERE I WAS, standing on a sunny April day alongside what looked like an outsized monastery, reminiscent of the deep middle-ages. But cloister colonnades with stout Romanesque pillars in that age used to circumscribe a cute little green garden with fountains and birds; here they girdled a gigantic outer yard fit for exercising an army and inner greens the size of four football fields. Furthermore, the building material was yellow sandstone, rarely encountered in medieval cloisters, and the decorations incised in that stone looked distinctly Moorish to me.

Suddenly I recalled an old story about the Spanish king who remodelled a monastery on the countryside near Madrid into a Royal residence. Although I have not seen this palace, called El Escorial, it could hardly be more imposing than the edifice I was admiring. If Charles V, the great “Austrian” Emperor, had been aware of this place, he certainly would have preferred it to his final retreat Yuste in Extremadura. He owned half the globe after all, and would have enjoyed this giant quadrant of colonnades, so suited to being carried around in when the gouts attacked him with a vengeance.



An Austrian owning half the globe? Am I prone to funky exaggerations? Well, in the times of Charles V, the feudal system was still firmly in place, allegiance was given to progeniture, and he was a Habsburg on his father’s side and that’s what counts. The fact that he was born in Ghent in Flanders, or that he was King of Spain as well as of Germany, not to speak of being Duke of Burgundy and Archduke of the Austrian domains, combining it all in his title of The Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire (of the German

Nation) does not detract from his Austrian lineage. Furthermore, owning half of the globe, he of course also owned Mexico, which had been conquered under his regime. Thereby he owned the lower and upper Californias as well, in a manner of speech, since his conquistadores already had planted the Spanish flag there a few years after the Mexican Conquista in their vainglorious hunt for gold. So my vision of Charles V nursing his gout on a carrying-chair in a giant monastery in the Bay Area does not seem too far-fetched after all.



Banishing the fantasies of alternative history, I realised that the impressive edifice I was standing beside was the *Main Quad*, the original building of the largest (in area) university campus in America, *Stanford University*. Encompassing fully 3310 hectares of grounds in the flatlands South of San Francisco, the campus lies adjacent to the town of Palo Alto. So huge are the grounds that, on the south-western side, they contain a golf course and a lake and, on the northern side, a park-like forest leading up to the grand entrance. By comparison, the UCB central campus grounds in Berkeley encompass only 90 hectares, below some 2600 hectares of largely impenetrable high grounds on the hills.

Stanford is one of the foremost private universities in America and is considered by some to be the second best research university in the world (with UCB considered the fourth best). This is not the place to tell the full story of Stanford, but nonetheless let me dwell on some interesting peculiarities. The campus site was originally a horse farm owned by the Stanford family, who had come to riches in the turbulent railroad building age, which created (and destroyed) enormous wealth at the turn of a dice. They founded the university in memory of their only child, who had died in his teens, with the motto:

“The Children of America shall be our Children!”

In the university’s first class was *Herbert Hoover*, who even would claim to be the *very* first student at Stanford, by virtue of having been the first person to sleep in the dormitory. He later gave abundantly to the school, funding the Hoover Institute there, which is to this day a major conservative think tank in the US.

Interestingly, at the outset, the US Government was not too keen on letting the fledgling school prosper, even survive. It opened a process against the Stanford estate over an amount of money essentially equal to the funding promise, 15 million dollars. During the litigation period, students and faculty basically starved, surviving on household money provided by the then widowed Jane Stanford. She paid salaries out of her private purse, even pawning her jewellery to keep the university going. These precarious days are long forgotten. The lawsuit was eventually dropped and subsequent diligent management, combined with abundant support from alumni, has brought the endowments up to an impressive 17 billion dollars (in 2008).

The reason for my visit to this temple of grandeur was *Eva Meyerson Millgrom*, a friend of mine, who had invited me over for a campus tour. But we should not forget the role of another friend in this: *Richard Murray* had reminded me of Eva’s presence in the Bay Area and suggested I look her up.



So, on April’s last Thursday, I rose early in the morning for my trip to the peninsula, South of San Francisco. I had decided to make the trip by BART (metro) and Caltrain as a test, for your benefit, of the public transport system

in the Bay Area. BART was a pleasant experience. It is not precisely a metro, since stations are spaced rather far apart; it is more like our local train system in Stockholm (“pendeltåg”). But it runs very smoothly and fast and has a roomy interior



well-gearred to transporting large numbers of travellers. Furthermore – Stockholm take note! – BART is fully air conditioned, making the voyage pleasant also on hot summer days. From Berkeley to the southernmost station on the peninsula, Millbrae, it took about an hour of comfortable travel.

At Millbrae I had to switch to the ordinary train system, Caltrain. Unfortunately, I had not checked connection times, so I had to wait almost 50 minutes for the next train South. When it came, it looked much like the RER trains in Paris, with double-decker wagons and a bit worn. The ride was far from as smooth as with BART. Still, the remaining 30 minutes of the trip passed quickly and there I was at the Palo Alto train station, a cute little well-kept building in a bucolic landscape. All in all, the ride was at least as pleasant as that from Stockholm to, say, Gnesta, combining “tunnelbana” with “pendeltåg”, although a bit more exotic.

I had planned to walk to the campus but the shuttle awaiting me at the station easily dissuaded me. The trip was much longer than I had anticipated, testifying to the compound’s vastness. On the way we passed what looked like a copious forest, before we entered the campus proper on a seemingly endless road. Having some time to spare before meeting Eva, I strolled around the central grounds, which soon led me up to the gigantic complex described above in the introduction. I confess that the Main Quad buildings fascinated me, as

you may have guessed already. The “endless” succession of pillars in the colonnades aroused the photographer in me. You could circumvent the complex in about 30 minutes within these colonnades, being well shaded from the sun and greeted by ever-changing vistas in between the columns.

Eventually I ventured outside the colonnades and the vista depicted in the introduction picture awaited me. Bow after bow of finely chiselled sandstone led the eyes to a high rise in the distance, looking like a church tower, in all this quasi-monastic splendour. I just had to investigate this further. Passing from one courtyard to the next through a large portal, I started to realise that this was a tower standing essentially on its own. So I continued strolling in its general direction.

On the way I passed a pleasant fellow photographer, who told me he was engaged in preparing a video of one of the many conferences being arranged



daily on campus. As always, when meeting colleagues, I queried him about photo opportunities and, in particular, about the nature of the tower. It turned out that this was naught else but Hoover’s ultimate monument to manifest his grandeur.

Whereas the Hoover Institute was funded with Herbert’s own money before he became President, the *Hoover Tower* was funded mainly with other peoples’ money. Collections started under his Presidency and construction was finalized in 1940. You may be surprised to learn that people were willing to support this project, in spite of Hoover’s Presidency being perceived as hapless and unable to prevent the Great Depression. But, when viewing Herbert’s biography, one realises that he was a man of many talents with notable public



achievements. Whilst pondering these issues, I finally arrived underneath the tower placed, as everything else at Stanford, in an aesthetically pleasing surrounding, with a nice fountain splashing its water on a roundabout in front of the edifice.

By now it was time for my appointment with Eva. Her office was located, within the *Stanford Institute for Economic Policy*, in a newly built edifice with the impressive name of “John & Cynthia Fry Gunn Building”. When I approached it, I thought first that I had taken a wrong turn. In front of me was a palace, not unlike the Alhambra in Grenada, with fountains, waterways and all. Only the water in the fountains was missing, to my regret, otherwise the illusion of Alhambra was perfect. Obviously the university takes great care in preserving traditional architectural styles, even when providing new facilities for the good professors.

Dared I enter this monumental palace? Indeed I dared, and was rewarded by a polite welcome in the reception, where a personal guide was put at my disposal to accompany me to Eva’s premises or, rather, to an antechamber since I was a bit early for the appointment. And here we are, looking at





Eva's office, which is as impressive as the building. In my long career at many different institutions I have never possessed such a cosy yet roomy office as hers, with the possible exception of the expanse I once occupied in the Riksbank, where I was Senior Manager for a short while.

Eva is Visiting Professor at Stanford and a highly appreciated Member of the Institute's research and teaching programmes. We had a pleasant chat, updating each other on events and achievements since we last met more than ten years ago. Thereafter Eva kindly guided me through the treasures of Stanford. We revisited the campus centre, but this time I could benefit from the help of a guide who knows where the real marvels are to be found. Whereas I had, earlier, lost myself in the myriad of columns, Eva now led me with firm hand towards the memorial church adorning the Great Quad.

This edifice was Jane Stanford's favourite building project during her time as manager of Stanford University; funds greatly needed to improve academic

standards were sometimes diverted to ensure its financing. Unfortunately, two major earthquakes destroyed a major part of the original church. Still, the renovated building gives a delightful impression of a Byzantine church, being modelled after early Romanesque churches in the region of Venice and Ravenna.

And now comes the zenith of my visit: Eva directed me with determined steps towards a group of statues, located in the Great Quad's inner greens that turned out to be nothing else but Rodin's famous *Citoyens de Calais*! I had not paid any attention to those statues earlier, concentrating on the colonnades, but, true enough, there was a sign that said: "Citizens of Calais by Rodin". How could that be? The group had originally been commissioned by the town of Calais, to be placed on its greens and, as far as I know, still adorns that site.

But I had overlooked the fact that bronze statues such as Rodin's are being cast on the basis of a master model. Thus, several versions in bronze, essentially identical in shape, can be cast from one master. In fact, there exist 14 *Citoyens de Calais* in the world. It is easy to bypass the group, if your main interest lies in photographing colonnades. The Citizens kind of melt into the large green background. Thanks to Eva's guidance, I could now direct my camera also to the more expressive of the Citizens created by Rodin, to pay tribute to this foremost of modern sculptors.

Too soon it was time to say "Goodbye!" to Eva and start my voyage back home. It was with regret that I left the Great Quad, such a treat for a photographer, and I could not resist the temptation to take some last pictures on its outside, facing towards the entrance gate.

Now I had to make a decision: should I trudge on foot all the way back to the railway station, or should



I take the shuttle back? Ever ready to brace adversities, I chose the more burdensome alternative, eager to explore the park-like forest preceding the gate. To give you yet another impression of this campus' enormity, take a look at the outer greens below the Great Quad, facing the "forest" in the distance. From where I was standing, to the entrance gate beyond the trees, it was still a brisk 30 minutes' walk! This was to become a lengthy afternoon hike!

But once past the outer greens, I did not regret the arduous journey. Before my eyes unfolded a charming forest, no doubt replanted on the space of Stanford's ancient farm, with trees glowing in the late afternoon sun. Walking among these trees was like walking in a faerie grove and I sincerely hope that this delightful space will stay unchanged for generations to come. What a fitting place to wave a last "Goodbye!" to Stanford University!





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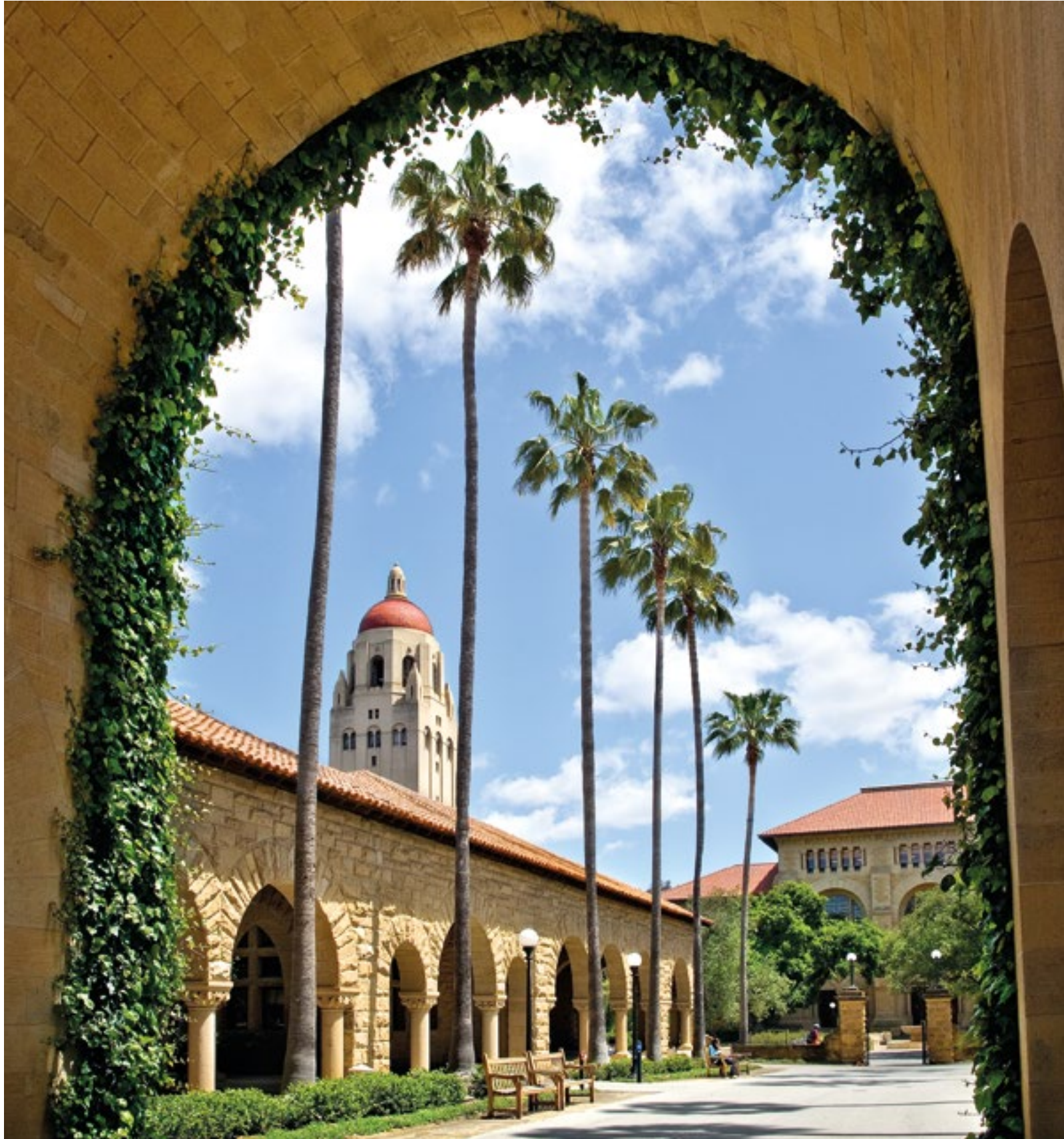


The renovated building gives a delightful impression of a Byzantine church, being modelled after early Romanesque churches in the region of Venice and Ravenna.

Right: I now directed my camera also to the more expressive of the citizens created by Rodin, to pay tribute to this foremost of modern sculptors.







Bow after bow of finely chiselled sandstone led the eyes to a high rise in the distance, looking like a church tower, in all this quasi-monastic splendour.

Right: I finally arrived underneath the Hoover tower that was placed in an aesthetically pleasing surrounding; a nice fountain splashed its water on a roundabout in front of the edifice.





View from the top of Hoover Tower.



I could not resist the temptation to take some last pictures on the Quad's outside, facing towards the entrance gate.



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Epilogue

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THE PICTURE YOU are enjoying here shows *Sophia Church* (Sofia Kyrka), just opposite, and due north of my apartment in Stockholm. As you can see from the church clock, it is precisely midnight. I arrived back home from my Californian voyage, after 12 weeks of travel, on the evening of 22 June, just some twenty minutes before taking this photo. For you dear readers not familiar with Sweden and its peculiarities, you are witnessing the famous white night of the Nordic midsummer.

All was quiet on this blessed occasion. The sun had, of course, already set, but was ambling along, slowly but surely, just a wee bit below the horizon, keeping the northern sky full of light, against which the church tower stood as an enticing silhouette. Suddenly, birds started to twitter, as if being confused between dusk and dawn. And right they were in being confused, since dusk merged with dawn without an intermittent period of dark. Soon the zone of lightness would pass the church, getting more brilliant along its way until, an hour later, the first golden colours of the sun would start breaking through, announcing the newly borne day.

It had been a looong trip and it was good to be back home again. But my joy at looking at the midnight wonders was mixed with sadness. What I had won in regaining the familiarity of my home in Stockholm, I had lost in leaving Berkeley. For the first time in many years, I nurtured a sharp feeling of sorrow and longing, which had appeared already when boarding the plane in San Francisco, but now came to the fore with a vengeance. But should that surprise me? Had I not embarked on my last great adventure that now had come to its end, at long last?

Thinking back to the many weeks spent in California, it slowly started to dawn on me why I had so eagerly engaged in travelling there and staying there for a prolonged period. It was my subconscious that was responsible for that decision – my conscious self having scant to do with it! Way back in the seventies, when I stayed in California as a young man, I was not ready for

all the wonders to behold in that benighted region. Too engaged was I in my daily labours of taking courses, studying books, writing drafts of my thesis, for me to be able to grasp the marvellous experiences that were mine for the asking. Still, my mind must have observed all this at the margin and stored the information as a job undone and to be completed at a later time, if and when circumstances permitted. This is, I realize it now, what made me jump at the opportunity of going back!

But let us not dive too deep into the subconscious! This book has come to an end and it is time to acknowledge it. Let me put the finishing touches by thanking you, dear readers, for your patience and staying power, in following me through the incredible amount of 24 Chapters. A special “Thanks!” is due to Lars Werin, Per Magnus Wijkman and Kari Lantto, my most faithful and elaborate blog commentators, who kept me on my toes during the trip with their manifold ideas and suggestions; to Richard Murray for letting Eva Meyersson Millgrom know about my trip; to Eva, for her cordial welcome, both in the SF Symphony and in Stanford; to Heidi Harman, for gifting me with invaluable advice on getting the travel blog started and going; and, last but not least, to my good friends in Berkeley, Nobuko, Akiko and Edward, for taking me along on numerous excursions. Without you all, I would have tired of documenting the trip already after the first two or three weeks, I am sure.

Now comes the important part: a final tribute has to be paid before you are allowed to close the covers of this book. It is due to the most endearing academic institution known to man. UC Berkeley, you welcomed me with warm generosity; not only once, when I approached you as a timid youngster, but even a second time, when I dared to come back as an old man to savour the fullness of your splendour. This book is for you! Fiat Lux!

Stockholm. Winter 2011

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Photo on page 2: *Graduates at UCB 2010 Commencement Convocation*

A SECOND LOOK AT CALIFORNIA?

Emil Ems is a retired public servant and academic with a long and distinguished career in Swedish, as well as international administration behind him.

He tells a surprising and charming story, seemingly incongruent with the persona of a sober and serene civil servant.

On the surface, this sometimes quirky, but always interesting book looks like a simple travelogue from a trip to California, with amateur photographs added.

But the reader soon realizes that nuggets of knowledge and insight lie hidden under the light-hearted exterior and that the photos are the result of careful and patient preparation, done by a skilful photographer.

We are delighted to learn of hilarious meetings with interesting personalities, from Buddhist street-sweepers to experts developing search engines for IT-programmes.

We see the author exhibiting rare insights in historical facts, ranging from the lineage of German Emperors in Renaissance Europe to the reason why California's countryside is characterized as "the golden hills".



Above all, the book provides a refreshing overview of one of Earth's blessed regions, the Bay Area in California, with the University of California situated right in the middle of it.