

Sat., July 15: Foggy Feelings to the Fog of War

Fog seemed appropriate, given my mixed feelings on leaving the hotel bound for Columbia, Missouri. The sinking feeling I'd gotten when pondering a night there returned as I pulled into town.

The reasons are complex. A career-guidance book had confirmed my suspicion at 24 that I wanted to make a living as a writer. I also like researching, and didn't want to be a starving artist, which narrowed the genre down to journalism. My grades at N.C. School of the Arts did not get me into my top three schools, so I accepted a place at my safety school, the aforementioned UNC-Chapel Hill. After a year it became clear the second would not fulfill my needs, and I moved west to hang out with my best friend, where I was able to start my writing career. After four years, I was ready for a new chapter, and drove to visit my sister's family in Rochester, N.Y., from Washington State by a slight detour... through the American Southwest. I call it the "Loop Trip," 5,200 miles in three weeks of June 1989.

Already I was thinking about another journalism-school try. My first choice the first time was the first (still operating) J-school, at the University of Missouri at Columbia. On the Loop Trip, I stopped by and had a chat with the grad school advisor. Buoyed by better grades at UNC, I got in and a year later returned here to get my master's degree. I finished classes in 2003, and came back two years later to successfully defend my thesis.

As I expected after 28 years, the part of town between the interstate and downtown was unrecognizable. Heading toward my old apartment, a triplex in a falling-down house in a student ghetto, I was met by a canyon of new-to-me dorms for Stephens College. This is the women's college whose campus I usually cut through walking to Mizzou—only because it was the most direct route, you understand. The extra dose of co-eds had nothing to do with it.

Finally I had to give in and consult an online map to find the address, but was confronted once there by a not-new house that looked nothing like my old one. The address was on the front, so my best guess, after driving the block three times to see if I had it wrong, is they tore down my place as soon as I left and this was the replacement, now going on 30.

I headed downtown and looked for a parking deck so the car would be out of the sun. I couldn't spot one immediately, and the mostly empty on-street parking required an app. I refuse to download a privacy sucking app in order to pay someone to park, especially on an empty street on an August Saturday in a college town. After driving the few blocks to

campus and back, I finally found a deck, and then happened into the new-to-me City Hall to pee. As I left, a city council meeting was starting, which I found unusual on a Saturday. I went by my primary destination to confirm that I had an hour to kill before it was open, noticing three coeds across the street trying to raise money for something related to health care. The time of day and lack of foot traffic did not seem promising, but the short-shorts would help with half the population.¹

I walked through the arch I almost always took between Neff Hall, where the journalism school was based, and the building housing the Journalism Library. I stopped to say hi to two old friends visible in the photo, circa-1400 lions given to the J-School by the per-Communist Chinese government back in the 1930s. That's around the time the school awarded the world's first doctorate in journalism. It was founded in 1908, granting the world's first undergrad journalism degree a year later. Walter Williams, the publisher of the local newspaper, the *Columbia Herald*, was a university trustee and had pushed for the school. (A fun irony there: Nationally famous publisher Joseph Pulitzer, for whom the top awards in journalism are named, had offered money to Columbia University in New York City to found a J-school and was turned down.) Neff dates to 1919.



In July 2023 the entrances were blocked off for construction. Supposedly. I think it was because I'd come back to visit for the first time since 1995. The Universe likes to screw with me.

I wandered down the grassy, open Quad surrounded by Victorian brick buildings and touched the Columns, the last remains of Mizzou's original 1843 building that burned down 50 years later. It is a tradition today for freshmen to run through the Columns for luck on their first day of classes. Thomas Jefferson's original headstone is on the Quad, though the separate inscription is now in the nearby administration building, Jesse Hall. Of course, that was locked. I had wanted to see it again, because I'd finally visited its replacement on Jefferson's grave in Virginia after moving back to N.C. When visitors kept taking chips of the first one, his descendants replaced it, and donated the original to

¹ I'm not being gender binary. I figure when you add up all straight males, lesbians, and pansexuals, minus asexuals, the percentage that would be attracted to young women in short-shorts is still roughly half.

Northwest Passage

Mizzou, the first college in the Louisiana Purchase. I guess the souveniring continued here, because Plexiglas now protects the headstone. People are selfish assholes.



The Columns and Jesse Hall (on left)

Rounding Jesse, I was reminded of my former close friend Carrie Kallenbach. We'd met at J-School; I was intrigued romantically, but she had a boyfriend and was an undergrad besides. We once had a long conversation in the shade of Jesse after a chance meeting. Some friendships you need to drop; others are ripped from you. Losing hers because I had fallen in love with her, just a couple years after the Washington State friend died, were two hits from which I will never fully recover.

Across the street is Traditions Plaza, built after I was last there, but in memory nonetheless because of events that made the national news after George Floyd was murdered by police in Minneapolis. (Too be clear, I oppose all killings of anyone by anyone, but I've long had issues with that fraction of cops who are little different from the criminals they are supposed to be protecting us from—and the politicians who protect those cops.) That and too many similar murders folded into a reckoning at Mizzou over its treatment of people of color. This led to the football team refusing to practice until certain practices on campus changed. They and other activists began gathering at the Plaza.

Though fully supportive of the team, I was far less so of a few people in the crowd who threatened journalists—at the world’s oldest journalism school—and an idiot communications professor who supported those threats. The whole thing ended with the athletics director and the president of the college resigning. I stood on the small semi-circular platform and pondered.

Walking south, I looked at and thus was greeted by a woman taking a break on a bench from walking two German Shepherds. I volunteered that I was an alumna just back to see campus. She said it was a beautiful one, which led to us sharing that we both liked to visit campuses. While I think Mizzou is near the top of those I’ve seen, I had to tell her I still thought Chapel Hill’s tops it.

I went toward the old Hearnes Arena where I’d watched many basketball games (shamefully, only the men’s games) and from which I now see women’s games on TV. Getting there proved more difficult than I remembered. A cancer center now blocked the path I used to take, its rear entrance requiring a badge. I decided I would just have to drive it, and circled back, passing folks who appeared to be athletes returned to campus early for training. I headed for the Bookstore, only to find it, too, was closed, until noon. “Well, I guess I’ll be buying my gear from Tiger Spirit,” the downtown store of all things Mizzou that I had somehow known would be the source for my new bling, the destination mentioned across the street from the donation seekers.

A problem increasing in criticality was the need to pee. At this point in my life cycle, I probably average an hour between outings if I’m drinking water at my normal rate. But the cycle shows bizarre variability. I’m capable of going 90–120 minutes, and in extreme cases as much as three hours. At the other end of the continuum, I guess the bladder doesn’t empty fully, especially after one of those longer stints or when I take a crap, and in 10-20 minutes I need a supplementary round. More to the point, every once in a while I have to go several times in rapid succession, followed finally by a longer-than-normal gap. These limitations will lead to several adventures on this trip.

In this instance, I had been counting on the Bookie. Fortunately, nearby Ellis Library was my next stop, where I spent many, many happy hours researching, and still one of my favorite libraries. I saw a young woman hurrying in, assumed she was late for a meeting, and was gratified to open the front door shortly after her. But the interior door was not so forgiving, and she told me from her position inside that it would not admit me for another 15 minutes, at 10 o’clock.

“Better to keep moving,” my bladder told me. So I wandered to some shade, scrolled the phone, went back to the Quad to sit-and-squirm, and managed not to look as panicked as I felt when at 10:03 I was the second visitor in the door.



Soon relieved, literally, I wandered a bit. Where I used to peruse computers dedicated to listing studies is an “information commons,” whatever that is, named for the James B. Nutter Family—the name behind the Kansas City company with whom I refinanced my first home. A pass through the reading room, with its rows of tables under lamps below a high ceiling, was like returning home. Far less so was a room with

an impressive collection of reproduction Classical statues, the originals of some which I had seen in Greece. Lacoön, one of my Top Ten favs worldwide, definitely loses his power in plaster. A sign on the wall confirmed the room came after my time.

I headed back toward the lions. Being a persistent devil, as the J-School encouraged, I decided to try a door leading to the updated Journalism Library on the off chance that it... was open! I suspect it wasn’t supposed to be—nobody was around, and no interior doors gave way—but I stalked the old halls anyway, prepared to be visited by campus police at any time and consciously looking innocuous for any unseen cameras. I was disappointed not to get a look at the new library, even though I knew from checking online a few years back that the copy of my thesis I paid for is buried in storage somewhere, requiring a special request to see.

Neff Hall is mostly completely redone inside. My memory had somewhat failed me about one unchanged area, the main stairway. It had the “Journalist’s Creed,” written by founder Williams, on a bronze plaque. Memory had it painted in larger letters on the wall. I stood on the steps and read the whole thing; though a bit dated, I think it holds up as a reminder of what *genuine* journalists still try to do²:

I believe in the profession of journalism.

2 <https://journalism.missouri.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/journalists-creed-download.pdf>

Northwest Passage

I believe that the public journal is a public trust; that all connected with it are, to the full measure of their responsibility, trustees for the public; that acceptance of a lesser service than the public service is betrayal of this trust.

I believe that clear thinking and clear statement, accuracy and fairness are fundamental to good journalism.

I believe that a journalist should write only what he holds in his heart to be true.

I believe that suppression of the news, for any consideration other than the welfare of society, is indefensible.

I believe that no one should write as a journalist what he would not say as a gentleman; that bribery by one's own pocketbook is as much to be avoided as bribery by the pocketbook of another; that individual responsibility may not be escaped by pleading another's instructions or another's dividends.

I believe that advertising, news and editorial columns should alike serve the best interests of readers; that a single standard of helpful truth and cleanness should prevail for all; that the supreme test of good journalism is the measure of its public service.

I believe that the journalism which succeeds best—and best deserves success—fears God and honors Man; is stoutly independent, unmoved by pride of opinion or greed of power, constructive, tolerant but never careless, self-controlled, patient, always respectful of its readers but always unafraid, is quickly indignant at injustice; is unswayed by the appeal of privilege or the clamor of the mob; seeks to give every man a chance and, as far as law and honest wage and recognition of human brotherhood can make it so, an equal chance; is profoundly patriotic while sincerely promoting international good will and cementing world-comradeship; is a journalism of humanity, of and for today's world.

What sets Mizzou apart from every other J-School is the running of actual commercial news outlets. Students deliver the news on the local NBC affiliate and NPR station. The school runs a commercial daily newspaper, the *Columbia Missourian*, competitor to the founder's paper, which remains in business. That's why Mizzou was my top choice. I did two stints on the *Missourian*, a fantastic experience. My newsroom is now a parking lot. However one old bathroom that was open looked much like it had, probably as it has since the 1910s. I took what I call a "prophylactic pee," where I go more because a bathroom is available than because I need to. In this case it was a nostalgic pee as well.



The Leadership Center that had turned me down for the Ph.D is in the new newspaper building diagonally across the street, which had just opened when I was last here. I wanted to get a look, but it was locked up. What I cannot fathom is why the *Missourian* appeared to be closed on a late Saturday morning. There weren't even any cars in the lot. The paper operates year-round. Please don't tell me the students work entirely remotely now. What you learn, the story ideas that get hatched, when you are sitting in a newsroom overhearing phone conversations and the police scanner and editor discussions, are invaluable to the craft.

Back I walked to the Tiger Spirit store, fully intending to cross the street and donate to the Children's Center that the co-eds were collecting for. But they gave up just before I got to the street and quickly hopped in a car, either having finished their stint and eager to split, or sensing my evil aura. So I turned right and right into the store, where I was ignored by the two college-age workers talking to each other. From the broad selection of caps I selected a black one with the school's tiger logo. The mug offerings were less



expansive, such that I was starting to despair until I realized one I feared was more expensive because it was in a box was not. It was black-and-white instead of the black-and-gold or opposite I'd hoped for, but I liked the combo of the tiger floating atop the Mizzou "M."

The car took me to see Hearnest, Mizzou Stadium, and above that, the new Mizzou Arena where the men now play, and I felt done. Really, really done. The turn-down from the

Ph.D. program, surely due to my age, crushed me. Now that I have my bling, I feel no need to ever go back.

Belatedly, I thought to pull over and text Beth Plonk, mentioned in the intro, for her old address here. By unbelievable coincidence, my cousin Bill Plonk, Jr., had gotten a residency out of medical school in Virginia at the same college I showed up at a year later from New York in the middle of Missouri. Beth, his girlfriend, a nurse, came with him. We enjoyed an 18-month overlap in Columbia. At nearly the last moment before I hit the interstate west, I heard back from her, and backtracked slightly to find their single-story, two-bedroom brick rental house and send a pic. “Has not changed much except for taking down Bills fence,” she texted, referring to the fence he put up despite a decided lack of being “handy,” as he put it, so their dog Garbo could roam the back yard.

This was the house of family lore. When Bill and Beth went East to get married, I dog-sat Garbo because I could afford neither the trip nor a wedding gift. One afternoon I came in to find the floors of the main bedroom, living room, hall, bathroom, and part of a second bedroom covered in goose feathers. Garbo, bored, had ripped apart their king-size comforter. As I love to say, when telling the tale with exaggerated umbrage, this is how I learned one of those things that should be obvious yet is not until you try it: You cannot sweep up feathers. I spent two hours picking them up almost one by one, filling several garbage bags.

Still ahead of itinerary, I indulged a curiosity about a pair of dots on the atlas, Boone’s Lick and Arrow Rock state historic sites. They are close to each other, yet not, on opposite sides of the Missouri River with the closest bridge 10 miles away. As Boone’s Lick is named for Daniel’s sons, not him, and Arrow Rock is a Lewis & Clark site, I decided to go for the second. A winding and climbing two-lane road brought me to the Arrow Rock VC about 15 minutes off the interstate.

The exhibits informed me that the whole bluff is the arrow “rock.” The name refers to the flint in the bluff used for arrowheads and tools by Native Americans for centuries. The interpreter at the desk explained that it had the name before William Clark noted passing it in his journal. He pointed out this was a good site for a town. Twenty-five years later, it became one. Many towns in the region were built on land bought by speculators, each advertised as an Eden. None really took. The early version of Arrow Rock washed away into the river, so they built this one atop the bluff. As a river crossing for the

pioneer³ trails and a river port, this one came closest to thriving, growing enough to briefly rival St. Louis and Kansas City.

One of those trails was the Santa Fe Trail, which first began just downstream as a trading route. Santa Fe, the capital of the Spanish territory of New Mexico, was 2,000 miles from Mexico City, but “only” 800 from here. William Becknell led a trade group there in 1821 to great success, later making as many as six trips in a year. For a time the trail started here, before shifting west to Independence near Kansas City.

The interpreter pointed out the river had shifted course, such that it was no longer close to the bluff. I asked about the exact crossing point of the trail, and she said it wasn't known. The river has many shallows here, she said, which she had not realized until the staff was taken out on it in kayaks. There were probably multiple routes, she said.

The exhibits also told of the Boone's Licks area. Boone's sons were not the primary settlers, but the name gave it marketing cachet. They and others established semi-successful salt works, an axle from which was on display.

On leaving I realized what I thought was a continuation of the entry road into the three-street-by-eight town with 50 permanent residents was actually a walking path. It turns out the entire town of Arrow Rock is a national historic site and inside the state version. But I made a decision I now regret, to get only a drive-by view. The reason was my desire to get through my next stop in Kansas City without having to pay the hotel bill for a night in the big city. But it might have been worth it to fully explore Arrow Rock and the Boone's Lick site.



Arrow Rock, 2013 (Missouri Historian, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons)

³ I use the term “pioneer” advisedly throughout this book. Everywhere the pioneers went had been thoroughly explored by Native Americans, and in many cases by French or Spanish or Russians before them. They were pioneers only in the sense of leading American expansion.

I drove down Main Street past the two-story, brick, 1834 J. Huston Tavern, which hosted, fed, and entertained pioneers and Santa Fe Trail merchants. Shops invited me from behind a boardwalk across the street, but I closed my ears to them. I continued instead to a tiny parking loop at the edge of the bluff, where there were markers adding nothing I'd hadn't already learned, by a picnic shelter with a couple of questionable characters I kept my eye on. The trees below were pretty but blocked a view of the former riverbed. Had I stayed longer, I could have hiked to a view of the bluff and the former river landing, then had lunch back at the tavern, the oldest continuously operating restaurant in Missouri. But I didn't.

The decision to leave brought my next problem to the fore, being the lack of gas in the Sage and of gas stations in Arrow Rock. There being no direct route to the interstate without a backtrack, I headed west-northwest up MO 41 toward Marshall. After gassing up there, I had a need for speed, so I headed directly south to pick up I-64 again instead staying on the back roads I prefer. My goal was another off-itinerary stop. I had known, but forgotten, that Kansas City is for some reason the home of a major World War I monument, from 1926. In checking this day's drive the night before, I found out there is much more to it. The founding citizen's group began collecting artifacts, and when the monument was restored in the early Aughts, they and the city decided to create a museum underneath. Now also the national WWI museum, it houses the world's largest collection of artifacts from that terrible conflict.

World War I (1914–1918) fascinates me, the most massive waste of lives and money in the history of the planet, the “War to End All Wars” that didn't. In fact, the death of 16.5 million people⁴ over six years had no lasting impact on world geopolitics, and contributed to the need for a Second World War to sort everything out. The war flamed up from a minor incident, the assassination of one country's leader, into a couple dozen countries at war around the globe through a series of treaty obligations not offering enough flexibility. Along with smaller nations on both sides, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey were defeated by England, France, Japan, Italy, and later, the U.S. Russia started out on the English/French side, but a Russian Revolution erupted that basically pulled them out as Communists took over. I've read a massive book on the war twice.⁵ Hence my sense of urgency in getting through the whole museum—which proved a challenge.

⁴ <https://www.history.com/news/how-many-people-died-in-world-war-i>

⁵ Gilbert, Martin, *First World War* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994). Admittedly, the second read came when libraries were closed due to the covid lockdowns. But I had retained it in hopes of taking it with me to tour the battlefields someday.

The first challenge was finding it as, yet again, highway signage was lacking. The route from the highway crawls through a long retail area before finally opening onto the hill topped by the solid Art Deco column of the monument, below which I found the glass entrance to the museum. Having asked for my zip code, as happens at most museums these days so they can analyze where



their visitors come from, the middle-aged woman cashier said she didn't recognize mine. After I told her the location, she said she didn't get many North Carolinians, which I can understand given its location and the general lack of awareness of this period of history.

Further inside, a volunteer noted there was only an hour-and-a-half left. When I asked what he recommended, he said it depended on what I wanted to see. "I know about the war," I said. "I just want to see the artifacts." He directed me to the door on the right, from which sweeps a semicircle of what feels like miles of exhibit cases either curving along the central wall or radiating outwards, in addition to large standalone items. I thought I'd seen a lot of WWI items at the army museum in Paris, but I had no idea.

One does not have to be a war buff to find items of interest here, as you'll see. For those who are, highlights included:

- The classic Prussian (German)⁶ pointy headed helmet
- A six-ton, five-inch-diameter field gun, which fired 60-pound shells more than two miles
- A uniform worn by Paul von Hindenburg, the Prussian Army chief of staff
- Map cases, including one with a 2-D map in one half and 3-D version on the right



⁶ Legally, the largest government that fought the allies was Prussia. Because it encompassed much of the area traditionally known as Germany and led the German states, the terms are used somewhat interchangeably.

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- The last personal letter from the U.S. commander, General John J. Pershing, to the Allied commander, Field Marshal Ferdinand Foch of France



That almost complete French tank looks quite impenetrable until you walk around behind the wall, look through the square window, and see the hole put in it by a German 77 mm cannon, one of which sits nearby. I thought of the terror of the men inside while looking at a splinter mask, a metal mask with medieval-looking chain mail hanging over the lower part of the face to protect against bullets and shell fragments coming through the view slit in the tank. Past the tank was a reconstruction of a trench. Much of the war involved the two sides shooting at each other or gassing each other from within miles of deep trenches engineered like linear cities, with none of the comforts of urban life. The model added to the sense of awe I feel for the men who spent months in these spaces, sometimes sinking knee deep in bloody, rat-infested mud, the typical alternative being crawling over the top to run across a field decorated with craters and barbed wire toward machine guns and infantry fully protected by their own filthy trenches while under artillery fire. That space was the original “no man’s land.”



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Connected carts (a caisson and caisson limber) used to pull a cannon and its supplies were attached to fake horses to give the feel of being on the battlefield with them. I appreciated the detail on a note clarifying the team had a rider on the lead horse, not someone sitting on the limber holding reins.



For those not interested in strictly military items, options included:

- Actual tin soldiers with tiny cannons
- Christ figures and architectural elements blown up when a church in Ypres, Belgium, was struck by German artillery
- A dog collar used by German canines to deliver messages, with a metal cylinder on one side for the message and a bell on the other.
- A German board game in which players tried to shoot down Allied planes or airships (huge helium balloons driven by propellers and used for reconnaissance and bombing)
- Fabric from the airplane of Lt. Quentin Roosevelt, youngest son of Pres. Theodore Roosevelt, who was



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shot down a month after joining his squadron. A few days later a German airplane dropped a note to Allied lines confirming his death, stating the Germans had buried him. His grave was found later after Americans captured that area

- “Traffic Regulations” listing a speed limit for trucks of “12 miles per hour,” and declaring, “Only drivers (are) allowed to ride on a loaded animal-drawn vehicle.” One note was a good reminder of the importance of everyone in any sized organization: “Good truck driving is as important as carrying a rifle, because it supplies the man on the firing line”
- A Harley Davidson motorcycle from 1917, the first year olive drab paint was applied to bikes



I inherited from my grandfather Martin Boyer a stereoscope from the late 1800s. Combined with a special camera that took two pictures of a scene from slightly different angles, these give a 3-D effect when viewed through their lenses. Along with the many picture cards I inherited, for a while I collected more, including a scene of the principal negotiators of the war-ending treaty leaving the Palace of Versailles in France after the signing. Pres. Woodrow Wilson is among them. A copy of the same card is in the museum! Here's mine, now a little over a hundred years old:



A couple of factoids were surprising to me despite all my reading. The Allied flying ace with the most downed enemy aircraft to his name was a British pilot I don't recall hearing about, Capt. Renee Fonck, with an astonishing 75 kills. That's only five short of the number for the infamous Red Baron⁷, Germany's top pilot.

The other surprise was that despite all the guns, the U.S. army still taught fencing. A fencing outfit is displayed, with mask, padded jersey, and wooden sword.

My favorite find in the whole museum, however, was the outfit, helmet, and headset of Col. Grace D. Banker. By happenstance I had in the past year read a book about the "Hello Girls," French-speaking American telephone operators who were recruited to run the military phone network for U.S. forces in Europe. They worked close enough to the front lines that some came under fire. U.S. commander Pershing credited them as crucial to the Allied victory. Banker created the force from the start, and was its commander. Though they were under military control, the government refused to recognize them as veterans and give them equal benefits, which wasn't corrected by Congress until 1977. Seeing items from this wronged and wrongly little-known heroine was thrilling.



⁷ In the Halloween children's classic TV special, "It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown," Snoopy imagines himself dog-fighting the Red Baron.

I exited with just enough time for a pee before a cleaner entered to do her thing. Up top I was surprised to learn from the inscription at the base of the memorial that Pershing and Foch were present when the memorial was dedicated. It was cool to think I might be standing in their footsteps, another developing theme of the trip.

Back in the Sage I decided I was good for a run to the location of the next site on the itinerary, Topeka, Kansas, an hour west. I could have just followed the somewhat funky directions I'd written to see that site, because MapQuest took me there and a couple miles beyond to this night's home. MQ's cheapest well-rated hotel turned out to be attached to the town's convention and events center, its "hallways" balconies around an atrium. The lobby at its base housed a sadly quiet bar and what I guess is a breakfast-only restaurant, given it was not open at dinnertime, which I found suspicious. Perhaps it only operates evenings when events draw in more customers.

Online I found a couple possibilities for vegetarian food on the main head, and headed north. First I had to make a critical stop, because the pad I'd been taking notes on in my binder was down to one page. I pulled into a Walgreen's with several sketchy patrons, one clutching a malt liquor can as his sole purchase, and found an 80-sheet tape-bound composition book of the type I'd used on prior journeys. I am glad I remembered to select the wide-ruled variety, easier to read when transcribing the contents.

One of the food options turned out to be a loud beer bar, not conducive for taking notes on the day's travels, as I generally did at dinner each night on the trip. I landed at The Weather Room. After waiting a bit, the host finally appeared from the other side, asked what I needed as if that weren't clear, and then asked me to wait while he got a large party waiting on the other side seated. Yes, I am purposely overusing the word *waiting* to make a point. I guess I came in the wrong door, but even on leaving I saw nothing to suggest that were true.

Asked if I wanted to sit at the bar, I stated I needed to do some writing and would like something quieter. He nicely took me into a side room with no other patrons, and even pulled a curtain to give me too much privacy—if something went down in the main area, I wanted to be able to see and react. When the server came, I told her it was okay to leave it open, hoping she would take that to be me making things easier on her. I knew it was going to be a good time when she introduced herself as Melissa, the most significant female name of my life.⁸ I ordered a Harvest Ravioli, packed with squash and bits of mixed veggies, and a first for me, a watermelon mojito. Both were tasty, the latter an alcoholic version of the Simply Watermelon juice I often buy for the house. I couldn't

⁸ A niece, a lifelong friend, my best swim student at the New York Health & Racquet Club...

resist a crème brulee for dessert, finishing off my first fancy meal of the trip, which only came to \$36.

I stretched my legs a bit when done. Topeka has the statues of famous folks from town scattered along the sidewalk, including one man whose story I'd forgotten. Charles Curtis was vice president of the United States under Pres. Herbert Hoover from 1929–33, the start of the Great Depression. Thus history books claim he was the first (and only to date) Native American V.P., making him also the first person of color in the role.

That statement points out the complete absurdity of racial identification in America. Curtis was all of one-eighth Kaw.⁹

9 <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/who-was-charles-curtis-first-non-white-vice-president-180976742/>