

FOR F R E D E R I C K

June 23, 1986

Some day in the future, I thought, you might wonder: How was I when I was a little boy - where did I live - where did I play - who were the people around me - what experiences did I have - what was my relationship with my Mom and my Dad and my Oma?

People remember so little - if anything - about their lives before ~~they~~ their 3rd or 4th birthday and yet, psychologists and educators tell us that those years (before we remember anything) are the most formative years of our lives. I certainly wished I knew about those years of my own life but the earliest memory I have was when I was 3-1/2 years old and fell into a creek that ran right next to the house in which we lived at the German/Polish ~~had~~ border in 1918. It was a frightening experience from which my Mom rescued me.

A Astro
Before my memory fades, I want to tell you about an experience just last week, June 19, 1986. You and I were sitting on the rock wall around the Circle ~~Star~~ Playground in Oakland, next to the Lakeshore Branch Library. After you had kicked a blue ball around the grass for some time you came over to me to rest and have a story read to you. While I was reading Dr. Seuss' ~~XXXX~~ "The Butter Battle Book", a boy came over and started a conversation. He asked me how old you were. I said: "Fred is almost four years old. And how old are you?" He said: "I am 12 years old. I bet Fred doesn't know how much one plus one is." I said: "I am not sure whether Fred knows what 'plus' means. After all, he is not a school boy yet." Then you started to speak: "One plus one is two. One plus two is three. One plus three is four. One plus four is five. One plus five is six. One plus six is seven. One plus seven is eight. One plus eight is nine. One plus nine is ten." I could not believe what I had heard and I asked Fred: "Who was the teacher who taught you that?" Without hesitation and looking me straight into my eyes you said: "Remember, Omi, I am my own teacher." The 12-year old boy said: "He seems to be smart." I said: "Yes, it seems that way."

Several times in the past when you were at my place you had played with different sizes blocks that were coordinated to add up to block size 10 and you had found out that by putting block size 1 and block size 3 together you had the same size as one block size 4. You practiced a lot with these blocks. Was it then that you discovered one plus one is two, etc.? Did I mention the word "plus" when you played this game? I do not recall whether I did or not. Anyway, you understood what was happening and you did not forget it. And yet, who knows whether you did not learn this "game" from some other source. After all, you are not with me every day, just once a week for 5 or 6 hours during the morning and until after lunch.

An exception was the week starting Monday, June 2nd through Friday, June 6th, when your Mom was busy full-time on her job in preparation of a fund-raiser and your Daddy was busy with his prep course for the Bar exam. It was a wonderful week for me because you are a JOY to be with - I love to be in your company!

June 23, 1986

Today, as every day when you are with me and your Daddy picks you up after his bar exam prep course, you expected the same thing to happen: you very much looked forward to your Daddy's coming. But you did not know that today it would be your Mommy who would pick you up. When the door buzzer sounded three times at 1:45 p.m. I told you that this was your Mommy who was about to come up and pick you up. Suddenly your splendid mood that had prevailed all morning turned into fierce rage: you pulled me away from the door trying to prevent me from opening it and when you failed, you screamed: "Don't let her in! I don't want her, I like my Daddy better, don't let her in!" And you grabbed the heaviest toys you could find in a hurry: a hippo, a camel, some blocks, and you threw them at the door. When I finally managed to open the door, there was your Mommy, but you raced past her into the hallway and ran past the elevator and hid in a corner behind it. Fortunately, your Mommy understood what you were thinking and she went back to the stairs and waited there for you. By now your mood had changed and you laughed and ran with joy into your Mommy's arms.

A month ago, May 24, was your ^dDaddy's graduation ceremony ~~XXX~~ with a J.D. degree from Boalt School of Law at the Greek Theater on the UC Berkeley campus. It was a very warm and sunny day and you were sensibly dressed in shorts and a T-shirt while your Daddy had to wear what you called a "professor's gown". While the graduates were sitting in the shade, your Mom and I and you and friend Marilyn were sitting in the sun and tried to amuse you during the (always too) long speeches. You were happy blowing bubbles and managed to amuse a toddler sitting close by. Finally, the ceremony was over and everybody went to the "reception" on the lawn by Boalt Hall where everybody grabbed whatever edible stuff there was on the tables. (Nobody had had lunch) and you were not shy at all and grabbed what you could like everybody else. - The pictures taken by your Mom and Daddy on that day did not turn out well at all: the old Polaroid had had it.

Today you are starting at a new child care center called "PANACAKES", a ~~XXXX~~ place with very high reputation, hard to get into, with a long waiting list. But your Mom, armed with her clout in child care circles, got you in. I understand that the man and the woman who are running it, have backgrounds in art and music and I do hope this will be fun for you since you like music so very much.

Until a few weeks ago you were enrolled at Anna Head II School, a child care center run by the University of California. During the summer last year you were at Girton School, a center also run by UC, tucked away in a cottage under redwood trees on the Berkeley campus. It looked like a ~~really~~ fairy tale place... Before that you were enrolled at the child care center at Golden Gate University in San Francisco, where your Mom was the Director. You started here when you were just a few months old. Your Mommy took you with her in the morning and was able to look after you several times during the day, nurse you there and take you home in the evening. From a very early age you were in the company of other kids of your age and this lack of isolation has made you a very easy-going social^{le} fellow who is neither shy nor haughty.

Sunday, July 13, 1986

Last week on Thursday your Mom brought you over to my apartment around 4:30 PM (after Panacakes) and you immediately looked on the coffee table by the couch whether there were any new books for you. This is always the first thing you do when you come to my place. This time there were no new books but you were not disappointed because you wanted me to read right away a story from "Frederick's Fables", namely the story in which the mice "take off their mask and are what they really are". After that you wanted the story of "the letter tree where letters become words and words become sentences and what they mean is: don't fight!"

You told me that you like it at Panacakes but "I like it better here at your house, Oma, because you never make me take "time out". You know what that is, Oma?" I said: "Please, tell me." You said: "I have to stop doing what I am doing - and then I am sorry. Yes, I am very sorry."

We played with a soft little bounce ball. You hit it hard on the coffee table, then "it kisses the ceiling", it bounces back on the table and sometimes "it ricochets zigzag here and there". Sometimes you let the ball hop on the table several times and we sing a song: "Hop, hop, hp, rider go gallop, over sticks and over stone, now he's here - and now he's gone." Sometimes we sing to the rhythm of the hopping little ball: "Oy, oy, oy, it's good to be a boy... earl, earl, earl, it's good to be a girl..." And sometimes you add of your own: "Can, can, can, it's good to be a man!"

A few weeks ago I asked you whether you still wanted to be a cowboy when you grow up and you said: "Oh no, Omi, I want to be a scientist, a paleontologist!" I could hardly believe my ears that you were able to correctly pronounce such a very difficult word and then I asked you: "What does a paleontologist do?" Without hesitation you said: "They dig up bones and check out footprints."

You like to work with different color papers and cut out "windows" and experiment with the scissors (with protected blades) and come up with shapes of "Oma's lips" or "Oma's nose" and other "memorable" shapes. Naturally, you ask me to get tape and add your new creations to the walls in "Fred's and Oma's Museum", which is my breakfast room now full all over with Fred's paintings and drawings of the past year. You asked me to "get a portfolio to put the old drawings in to make room for new stuff". I did yesterday buy a new portfolio big enough to last for several more years.

After we had dinner (spaghetti, steak-rare, broccoli with lots of butter, raw carrot pieces, a kiwi, and a melon and cookies for dessert plus milk, of course) you rested on the couch for a while and suddenly you announced that you had to go the the bathroom for a "poo". I undid your pants and you rushed unto the toilet seat. You said: "Hold me". I held you a bit. You said: "Don't hold me. I can do it by myself. Oma, it's coming. Don't listen to it. Please, don't listen to it." I said: "OK, I won't listen to it. But it's only natural."

(July 13, 1986 - continued)

You asked: "What does 'natural' mean?" I said: "That's just the way it is: everybody has to push out the poo, little kids, big kids, grownups, all people, all animals, little mice, big lions, everybody, it's just nature's way - it's natural. And that's just the way it sounds, it's nothing bad but I agree with you: it's not exactly music!" You laughed, I laughed. And then your business was finished.

Ten minutes later you had to go again. This time you did not tell me not to listen to it. This time you mumbled to yourself: "It's natural, it's natural, it's natural."

Three weeks ago I was having dinner with a friend at the O'Sumo Restaurant (a Japanese restaurant) on Grand Avenue in Oakland. After dinner, when I put the money on the waiter's tray together with the bill, I remembered what you had done about a year ago in the same restaurant when you watched the waiter give the money to the cashier. You got up from the table, ran to the waiter and asked him: "What did you do with the money?" He did not laugh about your "cute" question but told you very patiently what the money was for and why he gave it to the cashier.

You almost always tell me whether you like the clothes I am wearing or not. You do like pretty, colorful clothes and you have an eye for pretty shoes. Unfortunately, most of my clothes are pretty dull and that's the way you depicted me in your first drawing with brown pencil: Oma with brown pants and brown shoes. I don't have a torso in this picture, just a big face and brown curls for hair.

Almost everytime you are with me in my house you tell me, when I least expect it: "Omi, I love you." You also said this in March this year when you were with me at the Lakeshore Lucky grocery store. "Oh, I love you, too, Frederick", I said. I was just wheeling you through the slot at the cashier's. You were sitting in your stroller sucking your thumb. My heart was still jumping with joy because of your love declaration. You looked dazed and I thought you would be going to sleep any minute. Just then you turned your head around at me and said: "Omi, you are ugly." Matter of fact.

Several months ago, when you were 3-1/2 years old, at a moment when something you did touched my heart very deeply, I said to you: "I love you, Frederick." For a moment you looked at me and then asked: "Does that mean you don't want me to go down the drain?" I was flabbergasted. "Nobody wants you to go down the drain, Frederick, not you-Omi nor anybody else - nobody." You looked at me very seriously and answered: "OK, now make Raggedy Ann and Rabbit talk!" These are two puppets that I gave you when you were still a baby. You still like them and I don't know how often you wanted me to "make them talk."

(July 13, 1986 - continued)

You have had your first four or five swimming lessons at a pool near Oakland High School. Your Mom and Daddy tell me that you love the water, you jump in with joy (your Mom or Dad are catching you there) and you laugh and giggle all the time and are thoroughly enjoying it. I am happy for you that you are learning to swim so early. It will give you a lifetime of fun and healthy exercise. I'll have to come and see you swim pretty soon.

August 27, 1986

On the last three days of July your Daddy took the Bar examination and during that week you got the chicken pox and were pretty uncomfortable. Fortunately, it was a light case and you were telling yourself and those around you all the time: "It's getting better and better." When you were smaller and fell down a lot more often than you do now I often thought that you would cry because it looked like a pretty bad fall, but you just got up and said: "It's nothing" and went on your way. Nobody taught you that "boys don't cry". Sometimes you do cry and it's ok to cry when it really hurts physically or emotionally - but you never wallow in self-pity as some children do.

Your 4th birthday party this year was held on Saturday before your actual birthday because the next day you and your parents took off for a few days of vacation somewhere near Lake Tahoe, a vacation your Daddy especially needed very much after working hard for the last three years and especially the months before the Bar exam. He was really exhausted. Next week he will start a job with a law firm that specializes in copyright law. I took a lot of snapshots at your birthday party at your parents' apartment at #17 at 1143 McKinley Ave. in Oakland. Obi was there and Nate and Annemarie and her little sister Christina and the various Moms and Dads. There was music and singing together and good food. Everybody had a good time. You blew out four little candles and who knows whether you had a secret wish you hoped would come true.

October 27, 1986

Let's go back in time quite a bit: When you were just a few months old and mostly sleeping or drinking I often took you to Dimond Park in Oakland (this was within walking distance from where I lived on Lincoln Blvd.) and it was here that you first were put on a swing. I pushed you ever so gently just a bit so you would get the feel for it and - you smiled, you liked it right away. Naturally, from time to time I pushed you a little harder and your smile got even wider and you let little joy sounds come out of your mouth.

While in Dimond Park, an older woman (like myself) approached us and, as they all did, admired your beautiful looks and the more enthusiastic she got the less I could understand what she was saying although she spoke in a very loud voice. As it turned out, she spoke Russian and since I remembered a few Russian words from my high school days (when I had a girl friend whose parents had fled from Russia at the outbreak of the revolution), she immediately declared me ~~me~~ her friend. I found out that she had been a construction engineer which I found very believable because her voice sounded like the voice of a big, burly construction foreman and - her voice scared you, even though she spoke in a friendly tone. You started to scream whereupon Sarah would let out more screaming words: Why, oh why is he screaming, I haven't done anything to you, be a good baby, don't cry etc.etc. Finally I told Sarah the only thing I hoped she would understand in English: "Shut up!" She did understand. Now she held her hand over her mouth and wailed in a muffled tone: "Oy, oy, oy, hm, hm, hm, oy, oy, oy." Your screaming stopped. Next time we met Sarah in Dimond Park she started to talk again in her loud manner. But then she remembered and kept her hand over her mouth.

Another occasion when I found that you are very sensitive to loud and scary noises was in Children's Fairyland (where I often took you because it was in the park around Lake Merritt and ~~just~~ the entrance was just across the street from where I lived on Park View Terrace). We were sitting side by side on ~~XX~~ a bench while a puppet show just started. The music was very loud and the voice of a "bad" woman had just started to scream: your entire body started to shake with horror. Immediately I took you in my arms, and while leaving I talked very softly to you and gently stroked your head and back. Soon you were smiling again but for quite some time afterwards you did not want to see any puppet show again.

Outside by the entrance/exit of Fairyland are several pretty big rocks that attracted your attention. You took a stick from the ground, hit the rocks and ~~xxxx~~ said to me: "Oma, make rock music!" First I did not understand what you meant because I associated "rock music with rock and roll music" (and probably you did, too) but then you hit the next big rock and demanded in a more urgent voice: "Oma, make rock music!!!" Well - the first thing that came to my mind was the German song "Der Mai ist gekommen..." I sang it and you were satisfied... until the next time.

October 27, 1986

Let me just describe how we spent the time after your Mom brought you to my apartment on Thursday, Oct.23 when you were 4 years plus 2 months minus 1 day:

After your Mom kissed you good-bye, you immediately checked out the books on the coffee table. You wanted to know why there were no new books. I told you that my right foot had hurt since last week and for that reason I did not make an extra trip to the library. You said: "OK" and proceeded to your special little table where I had set up the magnetic word board and put a bunch of magnetic ~~z~~ letters on a tray next to it. You said "I don't feel like making words today but I want to make windows." So you took a capital letter A and put it on the face of the giraffe pictured on the board and looked through the upper part of the A, the window. Then you proceeded to do the same thing with several other letters until you got tired of it which was after a few minutes.

Then you suggested that we play pancakes and sandwiches. This is a game that started spontaneously some time ago. The way this works is like this: there are 3 flattish pillows on the couch in the living room, 2 green ones and a pink one. You stand at one end of the room and I stand at the other end. ~~T~~ you grab one flat "pancake" and throw it to me. I throw it ~~p~~ back and you catch it (most of the time). And so on back and forth. When the "sandwich" game starts, the pink pillow is placed between the two green pillows and thus the "sandwich" is formed. Then the sandwich is thrown like the pancakes, only the sandwich does not stay together. Great fun!

This game calls for a rest period afterwards. So we sat together at the couch and you wanted to "look at the" First Thousand Words in German". You declared that this is your silly time and this meant that every time I pronounced a word in German you would rhyme it with a non-existent silly word. I have no objections to this game because you have learned anyway to correctly pronounce the German Umlaute and also the guttural ch. Sooner or later you will remember the correct words anyway.

Soon you want to draw some pictures. You ask me whether you may take some paper out of my desk. I ask you whether you remember where my paper is. "Yes, I do." You remembered alright. For a while you sat at your little table and drew pictures, ~~for~~ some in black on white, some with several colors. Naturally, I admired your work. I genuinely like it.

You decided that you wanted to build ~~AXXEMOXX~~ a school for Rita and Anita, two small Indian dolls. I watched while you built the school with the different blocks I keep here for you. When the school was finished you decided that it was time for Rita and Anita to take a nap in school and you turned them over into a sleeping position.

October 27, 1986

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Now it was time to play choo-choo train. I helped you and you helped me to put the wooden tracks of the BRIO set together and then you put the train on and started to move them ~~XXXXXXX~~ cars around. Since this absorbed your attention I said: "Please excuse me, I have to wash my hands in the bathroom before I start fixing dinner." When I came back in the living room you said: "Oma, I am so hungry, I want dinner right now! What are you fixing? Is it steak? What else? And what is for dessert?" I said: "Fred, you asked many questions. Let me answer them one at a time. You said that you want dinner right now. I think that you remember that it takes some time to cook dinner. It won't take long because I already have the pots and the pan on the stove and it does not take long to cook the pork chops and it takes just 10 seconds after boiling for the spaghetti to get done. And it takes just 5 minutes for the broccoli to get done in the steamer. What's for desert? You can have yoghurt and cookies." You said: "No steak today? I like pork chops, too but I want steak and pork chops." I said: "Sorry, you cannot have steak and pork chops. Last time I asked you whether you wanted steak again this week or pork chops and you said: pork chops. So this is what you are about to get." "OK, Oma."

Shortly before it was time for you to sit down for dinner, I reminded you to go to the bathroom and you know what to do. And don't forget to wash your hands afterwards. "I don't need to wash my hands." "If you don't wash your hands you won't get dinner. It's as simple as that." Reluctantly you agreed: "OK, Oma, I'll wash my hands."

For more than a year I had not made a tape of a conversation with you, but today I had set my portable tape recorder on the dinner table ready to record. However, you were so hungry and so busy getting the food into your mouth that you did not reply to what I said and asked. You just ate and ate and ate. I turned off the recorder.

December 28, 1986

A few days before Christmas you had another cold and your Mom took you to Dr. Boynton who examined you and found that it was nothing serious. Fortunately, your parents have cold medicine always ready for you and you soon got better. But on Christmas Eve you were so excited during the day that you "threw up all over the place", as your Daddy put it. Your excitement was not about your presents. You never peeked or wanted to know what's in all the bright packages under your pretty Christmas tree; it was just the atmosphere before the holiday that did it to you. While we had a fine pork roast on Christmas Eve at your house, you ate chicken soup with lemon rice - just the right thing for your condition. You got a lot of presents and the ones that were the biggest hit for you were a toy robot that was lit and walked, and SUPERMAN in rubber to bend any way you wanted.

December 28, 1986

Yesterday you spent the afternoon (after your nap) with me at my apartment (at 491 Crescent St. #106) and I read you a story about a bear who has outgrown his baby crib and whose father is making a bigger bunk bed for the little bear. The baby crib is needed for a new baby bear. This is a very opportune story because your father is just in the process of making a bunk bed for you so the crib will be ready for your little brother who is expected to see the light of this world in 3-1/2 months. "He is already my little brother. I can hear his heart beat but he is still inside Mommy."

Another little book with lots of pictures describes 101 ways of what to do with a baby. You looked at this booklet again and again with great interest and a lot of giggles.

You are getting more and more interested in the spelling of words and you are struggling with a very real problem, namely the sound of letters and the name of the letters. Another problem is that in English the vowels do not have a definite sound as in Spanish. There are lots of other problems with the English language but soon you will learn and eventually master it, there is no doubt about it.

You did very good logical thinking when, at yesterday's dinner, you looked thoughtfully at your fork and counted the prongs: "Four.... (click, click, click in your brain)... Fourk ... it makes sense" Rather than correcting you I recommended you on your good thinking. There is another time later when this will be cleared up.

From time to time you are anxious to look at "The First 1000 words in German, a book with lots of funny pictures. Your pronunciation of the Umlaute and the guttural sounds is not yet perfect but you are trying and you seem to get a lot of fun out of it.

I get a great kick out of your new achievement: the ability to mimick me when I say "oh, Frederick" in a mildly reprimanding way when you do something that you ought not to do. So yesterday, when you threw some books on the floor and you knew you were not supposed to do it, you looked at me with a flash of delighted mockery and, before I could say it, you said "Oh, Frederick". I could not help but laugh heartily, and so did you. You picked up the books while repeating "Oh, Frederick, oh, Frederick". Great Fun.

January 15, 1987

Shortly after Christmas, a lady in the apartment house who had never met you before, asked you in the hallway: "Has Santa Claus been good to you?" You hesitated, then - waving your hand - you said: "Well, sort of." The lady said: "What do we have here... a spoiled brat".

I was sure that you were not a spoiled brat, as the lady insinuated because all the weeks before Christmas when packages after packages were piled up under your Christmas tree, you were never interested in them. You never indicated that you would like to know what is in there, you never tried to peek. So, I asked you: "Fred, what did you mean when you told the lady when she asked you whether Santa Claus had been good to you and you answered: 'Sort of?'" This time you did not hesitate: "Santa Claus - I never even got to see him!" So, that's why you were "sort of" disappointed about HIM.

The Santa Claus story is really troubling you because you got mixed messages about it. Your Mom and Dad (and Oma) told you that there really is no Santa Claus, that some men around Christmas time put on a Santa Claus suit - like people put on costumes at Halloween - but then: there are Santas in store windows and Santas walking on the streets, and Santas on TV and everywhere. How can a little kid get a clear picture? What is reality, what is phantasy? It's such a lovely story: this guy coming from the North pole in his sleigh and on and on until he gives gifts to every kid in the whole world... It would be so wonderful - how can it not be true ???

February 2, 1987 (Monday)

Today, on this dark, rainy day, I recall the last weekend when your Mom and Daddy went to _____ in order to celebrate their fifth wedding anniversary (Jan. 29, 1982) and to have (what they never had before) *une petite lune de miel*, just for two days. The weather was marvelous for them and they enjoyed their time together. You were left in the care of friend Marilyn who came over from Palo Alto. She cooked for you, played with you, read to you, bathed you and, while you took a nap, she cleaned the apartment, made "Welcome home" signs and kept you happy. On Sunday, Marilyn and you came over to my apartment and had lunch with me. You certainly liked those small Swedish sandwiches with lots of butter and ham. Pretty soon after lunch you got tired and were ready to take off shoes and socks and wanted to go to sleep on my couch. Marilyn wanted to stay and talk but I urged her to take you home and let you sleep in your bed. She followed my suggestion.

Later in the afternoon your Daddy called me on the phone to let me know that they were back from their trip. I also talked with you and you told me that you are so happy to have your Mom and Dad back with you. I bet.

(I found a note in my appointment book saying that in 1986 I spent 348 hours with you, far less than in previous years.) 10