



TIME TRAVEL

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When I told my friend, Jeanne that I had gotten a job at Case, she said, “*Zut alors!*” (She lives in Paris.) “The campus must have changed a lot since you went there.” Trying to squeeze twenty-five years into one sentence, I heard myself say, “Yes, the student body is more diverse, and the landscaping is better.”

Since graduating from Case in 1973, I have lived in Cleveland Heights. The campus was like Canada—big and good and right next door, but not uppermost in my thoughts. In 1998, when I started working at Case, the university re-entered my consciousness as a physical place. Walking to work, as I do, intensifies this awareness, and with attachment to place, comes the experience of time travel. Now everything evokes history.

Last spring Carleton Commons was home to a young white-tailed deer, who tapped along the paved walkway during tennis matches and feasted on ornamental trees. Going down the elephant steps in the morning is a pleasure—almost like being weightless—after you hit your stride. Toiling up the steps at the end of the day, while people with full backpacks sprint past me, can be discouraging. So I concentrate on my breathing and on the fragments of conversation that float down to me:

“Her Petri dish is not my responsibility...”

“... You mean—the place you’re from, has like, no direct flights to it?”

“Last semester was way better—we totally improvised.”

“I slept. Yeah.”

Every time I walk past Adelbert Hall, I think of the day it burned in June 1991. It looked like the setting of a gothic romance—a roofless, blackened stone shell. In 2004 I walked into a fully renovated Adelbert to start a job as a writer in University Marketing & Communications. The dark wood paneling and the carved wood of the central staircase were gone, but the interior was lighter, airier—so fundamentally changed, you could say it had a new soul. When Stu Kollar, my editor, loaned me C.H. Cramer’s history of the university, he said, “This book survived the Adelbert fire.” I stuck my nose in it, hoping for a whiff of smoke, but there was none.

The intersection of Euclid and Adelbert, with its two clearly marked crosswalks is much safer than it used to be. This is where

my friend Cheryl Gould saved a woman’s life by pulling her, not one second too soon, from the path of a number six bus. And what a difference Baker Building’s absence makes! The new space clears the view wonderfully and makes it easier to imagine what the corner looked like when Hatch Library stood there.

Conversations overheard on the north side of campus:

“You have to admit the chemistry part isn’t that hard.”...

“Face it—you’ll have to go back and put in all the new numbers manually.”

Case students seem more serious and subdued than we were. We were serious about the war in Viet Nam and race and sex discrimination at home, but we had more leisure. When we weren’t agitating, we did a lot of Frisbee playing, guitar strumming, lawn lolling, and plain air studying. We would have been all over the grassy oval in front of Kelvin Smith Library. Now students assemble there for specific reasons—to promote events, register voters, and recently, to remember September 11. But they don’t stay afterwards to loll. That’s too bad because there’s more green space on campus than in the 1960s. The current site of KSL and Freiburger Field was once a vast parking lot—Siberia in winter, Sahara in summer.

In a way, both dorms I lived in have disappeared. Claud Foster, famously moved down Euclid Avenue in 1968 and inserted sideways next to Thwing, was demolished in 1980. My 20-year-old self floats, dormless, reading William Butler Yeats and James Baldwin two floors above Gene Kangas’s Snow Fence. Taplin House is now used by Cleveland Institute of Art students. During exam week, I played a lot of tennis on courts that have been replaced by basketball courts and by the Silver Spartan diner.

I work—within sight of Taplin—as a writer in Bellflower Hall, a solid burgher’s mansion, built in 1908. My office is on the top floor, where the ballroom used to be, three flights up a graceful, open staircase. Now that I’m here, I don’t want anything to change. ☐

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ILLUSTRATION BY CATHIE BLECK