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Sailing into the Wind

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At the beginning of my career, I had strong ideas about what I wanted to do and research, none of which outlived the realities I met. Unexpected adventures, enormous opportunities, huge historical shifts, and serendipitous encounters helped me 'learn the scholar's craft.' The drive of my own intellect may have been the least important factor. So I adapted. I have a willful temperament, and that was difficult, but luck and key mentors helped. Along the way I have never been bored.

I became an academic by default. I am the only daughter in a family of sons, all three of whom went into the U.S. Navy, the family vocation. My parents instilled public service in us from birth—my father's favorite saying was "make a contribution." He was a career naval officer, USNA '54, who also earned a Ph.D. at Harvard. We moved more than a dozen times before I graduated from high school—which also happened to be the first year women were admitted to the Naval Academy. It was obvious to me that this should be my path.

"You'll never go to sea, you'll never fly, you'll never be in combat, and your career will be capped before you even begin." My father, who was the U.S. naval attaché in Moscow at the time, strongly objected. So I gave it up.

Not sure what to do now, I spent a year after high school living in Moscow, working at the U.S. Commercial Office, a joint venture between the U.S. Departments of Commerce and State. It was my first lucky opportunity. There was a spy scandal, where the U.S. and USSR ejected dozens of each other's embassy personnel. As I could live with my family on a dependent's visa, I found a wonderful job (they were desperate), helping to liaise between American businessmen and Soviet ministries. Mostly I was an 18-year-old secretary; but as one of the embassy's skeleton staff I met high-profile visitors, supported key contracts (Caterpillar tractors, baby food factories, etc.), advanced my Russian skills, and reset my ambitions.

I ended up at Princeton University, where I studied public and international affairs as an undergrad in what was then called the Woodrow Wilson School. F. Scott Fitzgerald eating clubs were not my world. I was a scholarship student, scraping by and holding extra jobs. Princeton offered rich intellectual challenges, and I also made lifelong friends. I focused on Russia and China under mentors Lynn White, Gilbert Rozman, Robert Gilpin and especially Richard Ullman, ultimately earning the undergraduate thesis prize for a comparative study of Soviet and Chinese internal migration policies. When I won a Marshall Scholarship to Oxford University, Richard Ullman (who had been a Rhodes Scholar) sent me to his old college, St. Antony's, to do a D.Phil.

By this point my ambition was to be a Foreign Service Officer like those I had worked with in Moscow. It seemed a noble enterprise, trying to save the world from nuclear apocalypse. I had also taken the Foreign Service exam, passed the various parts, and been placed on a list to join a class. My instructions were to wait to be contacted, so I went off to Oxford.

Oxford taught me to think independently, work across disciplinary boundaries, and take responsibility for my intellectual progress. I loved it there, not least because it was the first time I did not have to worry about money. I could stop dividing my time between studies and work, which was enormously freeing and boosted my confidence.

My introduction to Oxford was rocky. The Marshall Scholars arrived before most other Oxford students did, so I set about trying to find a research supervisor in Russian and Chinese studies. I went from one don's office to another, striking out. "I have too many students." "I'm not interested in your area." "Anything post-1949 on China is mere journalism." Etc. Finally, I ended up with Professor Harold Shukman, a highly regarded Russia expert who (it turned out) was also Richard Ullman's close friend during his Oxford days.

"You have been going from office to office alienating everyone in Oxford," Shukman told me. He explained there were three strikes against me: I was a woman, an American, and had come from an Ivy League school ("whom we hate, as they are too rich and keep siphoning off our best faculty"). He advised me to give up and start over. I was never sure what he meant by that. All of my energies went toward thanking him and departing his company without crying. I never asked.

In retrospect, Professor Shukman did me a favor by explaining the reality I faced. After blubbering in my room for a day or two, I decided not to go home. I would never have another opportunity to get a graduate degree. Besides, now I had something to prove.

So I tacked--sought a different path forward--and soon had two more pieces of enormous luck. First, I met Patrick Cronin, a grad student living in the room above mine. He was studying for an M.Phil. in International Relations and showed me the course materials. I realized it was a great program with top faculty. Second, I met Adam Roberts, Reader in International Relations at St. Antony's--lately from the London School of Economics (LSE) now on the Oxford faculty—who drew me under his care and became my supervisor.

From there things went smoothly. I remember my first tutorial with Peter Pulzer, the renowned historian at Christ Church, who handed me a syllabus with north of 1,000 books. Asked where to start, he dismissed me with, "Read around! Read around!" The teaching was outstanding. Hedley Bull covered international relations theory, Michael Howard military history and theory, and Adam Roberts strategic studies. I studied terrorism, narrowly missed being a victim of an IRA bombing of Harrods, and experienced a middle-of-the-night bomb threat and evacuation. After two years of intensive study, our small M.Phil. class of about a dozen sat for two days of examinations. Fortunately, I did well. No one ever again inquired why I was there.

At this point, Adam Roberts offered me the opportunity to stay on to do a D.Phil., and the Marshall Scholars' commission approved the expense. I wrote my dissertation on the four-power negotiations over Austria following the Second World War, analyzing from an IR perspective why occupied Austria had emerged unified and neutral in contrast to Germany. A raft of documents had just been released (this was 1984), so I spent extensive time in historical archives, then did interviews in Vienna, and developed a theory about resolving conflicts through negotiated neutrality. I defended the dissertation at Christ Church College, Oxford, then won a postdoctoral fellowship to Harvard University under Robert Art, Samuel Huntington, and Stanley Hoffmann.

I was still unsure what to do in my career. I had not heard back from the Foreign Service and assumed I had not placed high on the list. I had spent several summers working in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, writing what was then called the Defense Guidance, as well as in the Office of the Secretary of the Navy, writing speeches for Secretary of the Navy John Lehman. Then as now, I love to write, though Pentagon work had its downsides. For example, one of my Navy bosses regularly critiqued my anatomy (chest, waist, tush) and even observed it was a good thing I wasn't very pretty because "maybe people will take your brains seriously." That sort of thing I kept to myself, for fear others would decide I did not belong there at all. I wondered whether my prospects might be better in academe.

My postdoctoral fellowship was at Harvard's Center for International Affairs (now the Weatherhead Center), whose director was Huntington. I'd been active in his seminar and decided to ask him for advice. Huntington had been my father's dissertation advisor and he knew both the Department of Defense and academe. During the meeting, I keenly remember how nervous he was—possibly because he thought I wanted a letter of recommendation (I did not). He advised me to become an academic, so I applied for a raft of academic jobs. By this point, I was engaged to the wonderful Patrick Cronin, whom I married at the end of that postdoc year.

My first academic job was in the Government and Foreign Affairs Department at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, VA. Under the kind guidance of Robert Art, my first book had been accepted into the Cornell University Press series edited by Art and Robert Jervis, and it was published during my first teaching year.¹ It was well-reviewed. I produced a few related articles² and started on a second book about neutralization as a tool for resolving other conflicts between the US and the Soviet Union.

Yet, this proved to be a discouraging time. Upon my hiring, the UVA Academic Dean explained that the standard for tenure was two books and a dozen peer-reviewed articles. At the same time, the teaching load for junior faculty was 3/2, with very large classes and a heavy advising load. Tenured faculty had 2/2 loads, taught smaller classes, and had fewer advisees. TAs and RAs were distributed according to seniority. It was a fairly large department (maybe 40 people), of whom three were women and one African American. The other junior woman (who had become my closest friend) was let go at her three-year review. Meanwhile, Patrick lived in Washington, D.C., and we were commuting. Never having taught before, I struggled to prepare five large classes and could not find time to write. It was a grueling life.

After two exhausting years, I found a fellowship in D.C. where I could work on the second book. I completed case studies on Laos, Korea, and was working on Afghanistan when the Soviet Union dissolved. My hefty book manuscript became irrelevant, although I continued to follow Afghanistan through the 1990s. That is how my focus shifted from great-power politics to the Mujahideen, the rise of Al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, and global terrorism. Patrick and I also finally spent time together, and a happy result was my pregnancy at the end of the fellowship year.

During this period (I do not remember the year), I received a letter from the State Department saying that I was a member of a class action suit decided in my favor. Women had been skipped over on the Foreign Service intake list in favor of men. So that's what had happened! I could join the next class, it continued, with preferential choice for my first assignment. But by then it was too late.

Returning to the academic market, I found an excellent tenure-track job at the University of Maryland's School of Public Affairs (now School of Public Policy). I enjoyed my time there, with great colleagues and a reasonable teaching load. But I also bore two children in rapid succession, and there was no maternity leave. I took a year's leave of absence without pay, but there was no pause option for my tenure clock. With two new babies, my writing pace was glacial. The Dean wanted the tenure line, and I was forced to give it up. I returned some eighteen months later on a non-tenure track basis, with the Dean promising I could re compete for a tenure line after I published my next book.

On Valentine's day 1996, during the Spring semester, my five-year-old daughter was diagnosed with leukemia. Overnight I lost my job. I spent the next three years mainly at Georgetown hospital, trying to help keep her alive. This was not a time to write international security articles—though I did write a book about the experience (that I will likely never publish). She

¹ Audrey Kurth Cronin, *Great Power Politics and the Struggle over Austria, 1945-1955*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs Series, Cornell University Press, 1986).

² Cronin, "East-West Negotiations over Austria in 1949: Turning Point in the Cold War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 24 (January 1989): 125-144.

had many complications but survived, and our marriage and family of four stayed intact, indeed grew stronger. No other time in my life has required the clarity, sense of purpose, and sheer drive to make it through.

Meanwhile, my friend Michael Brown (a fellow Harvard postdoc) took over the Security Studies (SSP) program at Georgetown and persuaded me to help him transform it from a night program into a well-respected academic program. It would be a path to rebuilding my academic career, he argued. When our daughter entered remission, I shifted to teaching, writing, and institution-building at Georgetown. Frankly, it was a lot of fun.

In 2003, the university decided to transition my term position to a tenure track position, so I applied for it. I had been teaching Georgetown's terrorism courses since 1998, had produced a successful edited volume,³ and had just published my first article in *International Security*.⁴ During the attacks of September 11th, 2001, I had been live on National Public Radio's *Morning Edition* and was reasonably well known in the field. I thought I had a decent shot at recapturing a tenurable status at Georgetown.

I did not get the job. I had never counted on it—indeed had already lined up another great option—but the *reason* I did not get it bothered me. When I asked him for advice, the search committee chairman told me I had never been a serious candidate because I was too old and had made unprofessional decisions when my daughter got sick. That was hard to hear. Looking back on it, that setback was another gift: I went to Capitol Hill as the Specialist in Terrorism with the Congressional Research Service (CRS), working with Members of Congress in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks.

CRS was a fabulous and enriching experience. I learned more about how to do serious research there than in a decade of academic study. The resources at the Library of Congress were matchless. And I worked directly with Members of Congress and their staffs and supported the 9/11 Commission. I understood how the legislative branch worked, especially what kinds of legal and policy questions are crucial in counterterrorism. I also churned out public reports that garnered attention and yielded invitations from universities throughout the country and abroad.⁵

Writing and publishing kept me viable as a scholar. With young children and a full time “day job,” this meant working before the children were up or after they went to bed. More critically, Patrick and I were always mutually supportive: we read each other's drafts, took pleasure in each other's accomplishments, teased and pushed each other. Indeed, we still do. Humor is our glue, self-pity not an option.

When I was invited to return to Oxford to be Academic Director of the Changing Character of War program in 2005, I jumped at it. Adam Roberts knew I had encountered setbacks in my academic career, and his support was again critical. Our children were doing well now, and Patrick had been offered a great position as Director of Studies at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in London. I also had a strong idea for my next single-authored book, *How Terrorism Ends*, which had arisen from a conversation with a senior Senator. In Oxford, I found the time, resources, and intellectual

³ Cronin and Jim Ludes, *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy*, (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2004; numerous printings since).

⁴ Cronin, “Behind the Curve: Globalization and International Terrorism,” *International Security* 27:3 (Winter 2002/2003): 30-58.

⁵ For example, Cronin, *Terrorist Motivations for Chemical and Biological Weapons Use: Placing the Threat in Context*, CRS Report for Congress, RL31831, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, March 2003; *Terrorists and Suicide Attacks*, CRS Report for Congress, RL32058, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, August 2003; *The 'FTO' List and Congress: Sanctioning Designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations*, CRS Report for Congress, RL32120, Congressional Research Service, October 2003; *The 'FTO' List and Congress: Sanctioning Designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations*, CRS Report for Congress, RL32120, Congressional Research Service, October 2003.

space to write that up, along with more articles on terrorism, insurgency, and war.⁶ I also worked for Director Professor Hew Strachan, a brilliant historian, energetic role model, and outstanding boss.

After several years, I returned to the National War College, where I became Director of the War and Statecraft core course. This meant teaching senior military officers, state department Foreign Service Officers (FSOs), agency personnel, and others returning from hazardous tours or combat. Against strong opposition, I introduced the teaching of Thucydides (all of it). Most important, *How Terrorism Ends* came out and did well in both academic and policy circles.

Participating in high-level policy reviews, I also witnessed how glib suggestions and unrealistic theories can get people killed. I led or co-led field studies trips to many places including India, Pakistan, Algeria, Tunisia, Colombia, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, deepening my regional expertise. I also built deep bonds with my faculty deputies, travel buddies, and colleagues, some of whom remain as close as brothers.

In 2011, George Mason University hired me as a tenured full professor. There I began another book about technology and nonstate actors, especially their implications for the future of conflict. This project knit together my deep interest in the changing character of war with a strong belief that we are misjudging the role of accessible digital technology in political violence, especially its use by proxy armies, militias, terrorist groups and individuals. By now multitudes of scholars were studying narrow topics in terrorism, insurgencies, and civil wars. I thought the crosscutting role of technology was falling between the disciplinary and methodological cracks.

When American University offered me another full professorship at the School of International Service, I joined them in 2016. My latest book, *Power to the People: How Open Technological Innovation is Arming Tomorrow's Terrorists*, was published last year. It just won the Airey Neave prize for "the most significant, original, relevant, and practically valuable contribution to the understanding of terrorism."⁷ The mobilization of the 6 January Capitol insurrection mob bears out the theory in that book, as does the widespread use of facial recognition technology, popular experimentation with synthetic biology, and the explosion of 3-D printed "ghost guns." I am still writing and developing projects related to this work.

As is obvious, I have not had a typical academic career, gradually learning the scholars craft by calmly refining my ideas in a predictable trajectory. Still, I love being an academic, am grateful to my family, friends, and mentors, and have enjoyed almost all of the twists and turns along the way. To my surprise, I didn't have to join the Navy to see the world.

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⁶ Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns* (Princeton University Press, 2009). Other publications from then include "How al-Qaeda Ends," *International Security* 31:1 (Summer 2006): 7-48; and "Cybermobilization: The New *Levee en Masse*," *Parameters* 36:2 (Summer 2006): 77-87.

⁷ *Power to the People: How Open Technological Innovation is Arming Tomorrow's Terrorists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

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