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Essay Series on Learning the Scholar's Craft: Reflections of Historians and International Relations Scholars

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"Education and the Craft of Being Human"

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You could say I carry a genetic predilection for the living and teaching of international affairs as I am essentially the product of *fin de siècle* globalization. With grandparents and parents who lived the turmoil of war and chaos at the turn of the twentieth century and having seen for myself a world in crisis at the turn of the twenty-first, I am the child of a figurative and literal marriage between a cosmopolitan awareness and an unshakable belief in education. To this day, my foundational drivers remain the twin ideals of that union: progress and service. It took years for my code to manifest, but my family DNA is revealed in an intertwining career that draws inspiration from natural and human diversity and energy from the touchstone of timeless, human connectedness.

In 1909 a stranger arrived in a small village in northern Sweden to offer young men a ticket to America with a job at the other end. My grandfather and his best friend leapt at the chance and left everything behind for a farm in Middle America. The life was harsh, and the lack of exposure to the outside hampered their ability to learn English, but they were accustomed to hard work and spent their indentured servitude dreaming of freedom. To their dismay, when the date finally arrived, the farmer informed them they would have to "work off their keep." The friend ran away, but my grandfather was always a man who believed he was "only as good as his word" and stayed. Unfortunately, the farmer later tried to add his friend's "outstanding keep" to the clock so he too made his escape and headed to Chicago. However, as a single drop in a flood of immigrants, he was regularly greeted with "Swedes need not apply." My grandfather never gained more than a grade-school education and never lost his heavy accent, but he also never doubted his belief that hard work and education were the keys to his dream that his children would have a better life and grow up to serve, and deserve the respect of, their chosen country. Through the teeth of the Depression, he was bent to this vision and was not disappointed as his children became a captain in the Navy during World War Two, a nurse, and a school teacher. My father, his second surviving son, gained a doctorate in Geology from Yale.

On the other side of the world and at the other end of the economic spectrum, my mother's parents met when my grandmother's family traveled from their native Scotland to tour China and had to extend their stay when their young daughter became ill. The local official, a recent American as his parents had emigrated from Yorkshire to the US, had been posted to China as a customs inspector by the British Government. A convalescence romance, they married in Beijing in 1923 and my

mother was born a year later. My grandfather's professional life moved the family from port to port so schooling for my mother and her brother was provided by a governess, a White Russian refugee who inspired my mother's lifetime love of languages and cultures.

Fierce global tides carried both my parents to California where they met and married towards the end of the Second World War. Over the years, they landed in Oklahoma where I was born, the last of seven children. I suppose, like most kids, I assumed that my life was "normal," only to discover that a house with bookcases full to brimming with the maps and the rocks of my father's career as a geologist, and dragon statues posted around the house to guard the portraits of Chinese ancestors my mother's family had collected, was not exactly typical. Given my mother's linguistic pursuits, she collected the dictionaries, syllabaries, and grammars of languages from around the world and, far more interesting to me, beautiful picture books of legends and fairy tales. Always curious and locally rooted, she took me to Native Indian community events and I listened, fascinated, to her and her friend, a native Cherokee speaker, laboriously record verb conjugations and phrases into a reel-to-reel tape machine as they wrote a textbook for a dying language. We did not have a lot of money, but we travelled through the *World Book Encyclopedia*, a constant presence at our dining room table, while the stories of my older siblings sent me in search of my own adventures. At this point, academia was not even on a long list of options for my future, but I was made restless by all I had read and heard and yearned to "bust out" of my "one-horse" home town. So, against the advice of the high school counsellor and probably the better judgement of my parents (though they always encouraged me to follow my heart), I graduated from high school at 16 and effectively followed my grandfather to the bright lights of Chicago to attend Northwestern. A million miles from Oklahoma, I was ironically not far from my grandfather's "new world" roots.

I started college life as a Radio Television and Film major in the School of Speech mainly because it somehow seemed more "respectable" than Theater—though that would have been more in keeping with my high school activities in dance, drama, and the Competitive Speech Team. I quickly fell in love with the place and wanted to stay for the summer. However, to gain parental approval, I had to find a job or something "educational" to occupy my time. Challenge accepted, I got an internship with WBEZ (a local NPR affiliate) on a show called Audio Jam, a weekly, nationally syndicated program that was produced entirely by and for kids, with adult support for content and technical skills. One day I stayed to help with another program and met guests from an organization based in Northern Ireland that brought children from conflict areas of Belfast and Londonderry to Chicago for the summer. This struck me as an opportunity for our "Jam kids" and we set up interviews with these visiting youngsters. My heart was hooked and, believing my mother when she said "the best way to learn how someone lives is to walk in their shoes," I began to plot a journey to Northern Ireland. That specific organization couldn't take me, but they offered to send my letter to local contacts and I buried myself in learning about "The Troubles." By the following summer, the Shankill Road Methodist Church had kindly agreed to host me, asking staff members to put me up in their homes. Thus, I came to serve endless cups of tea and cheap meals at a drop-in center for the unemployed and organize youth activities in a neighborhood with 52% unemployment. This was also my introduction to social deprivation and inter-generational resilience at the personal level.

Going to Northern Ireland was my first time travelling abroad alone and more significantly, my first direct experience of poverty in the inner-city. To say that seeing a long-standing religious/cultural/historical/social justice conflict through the eyes of children was transformational is a profound understatement, but again, my heart called. I concluded that if I was going to make any kind of difference in this world—and to these people—I would have to shift my educational trajectory. On my return, I changed my major to the School of Education and Human Development and Social

Policy. The following year I was the first student ever allowed to do my required “practicum” outside the country in a sort of do-it-yourself study abroad. Given what I know now, I can’t begin to imagine what that process looked like for my advisors, but I can’t believe it would stand a chance today. As it was, it took relentless lobbying to convince both the school and my family that I had to go back. At 18, I was off to Belfast for another six months—this time making sure I went to both the Falls and the Shankill so I could try walking on both sides of the “Peace Wall.”

Service was not the only thing that excited me about the UK as I had met a young Englishman, also volunteering at the drop-in center. We began a long-distance relationship that lasted for the next ten years and provided the catalyst for an adventure in London that would last half my life. But first, I had to complete my degree at Northwestern and then, given the late change in major, my logical default plan was more education. I needed to find out how to make change at a “higher level” than the street and made my way to the realm of policy. With the invincibility of youth, I applied to only two grad schools, New York University and the University of Chicago, reckoning that, if I didn’t get in, I just wouldn’t go. Happily, I got into both and opted for Chicago (shockingly in retrospect) largely on the basis that it would be easier to transport my things across town than to trek cross country.

In more scholarly terms, the two programs appealed because they combined the theoretical with the practical and looked beyond “how it works” to delve more deeply into the communities “where it happens.” I liked the way Chicago’s Social Service Administration program intentionally trained students in policy skills while using a give-back approach to Chicago’s south side. Through that program, I again learned from those I served not only about the realities of poverty, but also about color in America, since it was not religion, but race that more often divided our community. As the director of a neighborhood Student Volunteer Bureau, I also struggled with a university administration that felt that community members should not be “roaming” our campus and often cast a long shadow of privilege and power.

After getting my masters, I had set my sights on a return to the UK, but was shocked to discover that London employers did not greet me with open arms. Both of my universities had instilled a sense of pride (if not arrogance) in my degrees, but a global recession—and a lack of understanding as to how to “pitch” myself in the English context—made it a struggle to find a paying job. Undeterred, I once again wrote letters to people I had never met offering myself as a volunteer to their organizations. Among them were missives to the Labour Party, the Liberals, and the Social Democrats as they then were, though life in Northern Ireland had taught me that the Conservatives under Margaret Thatcher would emphatically *not* be a good fit. As fate would have it, the Liberals were the only party that responded and I arrived in time for the party merger that created the Liberal Democrats. I also found that my experience in Northern Ireland gave me a relatively unusual expertise, landing me a spot as a researcher for the Party Whip and later the Party Leader, Paddy Ashdown.¹ For me, “big idea” policy thinking began to grow real roots in local political action.²

Starting as a volunteer, I slowly expanded my brief to work on other issues and then campaigns, eventually becoming the National Campaign Manager for the 1992 election (when the party was

¹ Alison Holmes, ed., *The Wrong End of the Telescope: Policy in Northern Ireland*, (Dorchester: Liberal Democrat Party Publications. 1989); Holmes, ed., *Europe, Citizenship and Anglo-Irish Relations* (London: European and Irish Affairs Advisory Group. 1991).

² Holmes, “The Idea of “Community” in Progressive Politics,” in *Community Politics Today* (London: Liberal Democrat Publications. Association of Liberal Democrat Councilors, 2006).

literally within the margin of error of not existing!). Later, I was hired to the same role for the 1997 election when the party returned its best result since 1906.³ It was a long decade in British political life, but it was also a privilege to run campaigns for a man the caliber of Ashdown.⁴ Others leaders at the time in London and in Belfast also became my dearest and wisest mentors: John Alderdice, Richard Holme⁵, John Sharkey and William Wallace (who, via a very crooked road, later became my PhD supervisor).

Ten plus years was enough for a young ambitious person looking to make change, and I had been invited by a former colleague to work for the BBC doing essentially the same job i.e. herding cats. I became Deputy Head of Strategic Communications in BBC Corporate Affairs at the dawn of the internet and just as public service broadcasting was charting its course. For three years I worked on convincing the public, the government, and the regulators that the BBC had a crucial role in this brave new world through what was called BBC Digital and its infant platforms, BBC Online and BBC News 24. Little did even those of us on the digital front lines know how technology would soon change every country, every company and every conversation.

Media was exciting, but when I was headhunted to join another former colleague in Public Relations, I opted to go commercial. As the Director for Strategic Communications at Burson-Marsteller I worked for senior business executives on corporate social responsibility and reputation as well as crisis communications and branding. From there it was a relatively short step to BritishAmerican Business Inc (BABI), the largest transatlantic business membership organization, born of a merger between the British-American Chamber of Commerce and the AmCham of London. My position as the Managing Director of the London office started literally the day after 11 September 2001. Designed to work with our NY office and the extensive networks of the two Chambers in Europe and across the US to build the US/UK “special relationship,” our mission and my position were completely recast and refocused in light of that event. Transatlantic relations also became a my regular “beat” when I was asked to take on a role I still hold as the transatlantic columnist for *The American* magazine⁶ and slowly became scholarly interest⁷ that would lead to the next stage.

Throughout my professional journey, I was faithful to the Holmes lodestar of education and completed a Diploma in World Politics at the London School of Economics after the 1997 general election. There I met Michael Banks (my first PhD supervisor), enjoyed the provocative lectures of Fred Halliday, was introduced to critical theory by Mark Hoffman, and intrigued by the inter-war years courtesy of Peter Wilson. I took classes and listened to guest talks from a huge range of

³ Holmes, and Richard Holme. “Sausages or Policemen? The Role of the Liberal Democrats in the 1997 General Election Campaign,” in Ivor Crewe, Brian Gosschalk and John Bartle, eds., *Why Labour Won the General Election of 1997* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000).

⁴ Holmes, ed., “Beyond Citizen’s Britain,” *Paper No. 14*, (London: Centre for Reform. 1999).

⁵ Holmes, ed., *A Liberal Mind in Action: Essays in Honor of Richard Holme*. (Leicester: Troubador Ltd. 2008).

⁶ *The American*. I write a bi-monthly magazine column reaching approximately 100,000 readers per issue.

Archive: <https://www.theamerican.co.uk/pr/TheAmericanOnline-Digital-Editions.php>

⁷ Holmes, “UK-US relations: can subnational diplomacy save the “special relationship”?” in Gaynor Johnson, ed., *Transatlanticism and Transnationalism since the First World War: Anglo-American Diplomacy and Culture* (London: Bloomsbury Press. 2024); Holmes, “Ronald Reagan: Conviction Politics and Transatlantic Relations”, *Transatlantic Studies Association Journal*, Vol. 8 No. 3 (2010): 257-267; Holmes, “Transatlantic Diplomacy and “Global” States” in *Anglo-American Relations: Contemporary Perspectives*, Steve Marsh, Alan Dobson, eds., London: Routledge. 2013. Holmes, (2006) “The Shifting Subtleties of “Special”: Differences in US and UK Approaches to Public Diplomacy that Impact Global Business,” *Journal of Business Strategy*, Summer (2006): 22- 29.

scholars (which of course I took for granted at the time) all while learning that the LSE was the hand that rocked the cradle of the “English School.” This time it was not my heart but my head that was hooked and I enrolled in a PhD program in International Relations with a focus on Conflict Resolution so I could return to my interest in Northern Ireland via Human Needs and systems theory more generally (and a great excuse to write to John Burton⁸, the “father” of Human Needs Theory, and invite myself to Australia where I spent a month doing research and interviewing him for that vital first-hand perspective).

Working as a full-time professional is not a great way to make progress with scholarship, so time marched on and Michael Banks took his well-earned retirement. Ironically, this “returned” me to William Wallace as he had, by then, not only become a peer of the realm but arrived on the LSE faculty. Meanwhile, Thatcher’s government was increasingly unimpressed with “malingering” part-time students and it became clear that I would soon need to deliver a thesis or call it a day. To that end, William gave me two pieces of advice that I still share with students: 1) “ask yourself what you really want to DO with this degree then gear your thesis accordingly without regret or apology”; and, 2) “no matter what you choose, you are going to get sick of it so at least make sure it is something you want to have a good rant about”.

Thus, I returned to politics and policy to examine the Third Way as the product of globalization and an end-of-century stage in a state’s development, from the late 1800s, New Liberals, and thinkers like L.T. Hobhouse⁹, and J.A. Hobson¹⁰, to the end-1900s, New Labour, and globalizers like David Held¹¹ and Anthony Giddens¹², I was deep into the mutual influence of the domestic and the international spheres and the compression of traditional levels of analysis.¹³ Fortunately, I had the foresight to build a “sabbatical” into my joining package at BABi, so when the LSE began to insist I finish, I was able to take the time to pour myself into a thesis that reflected not only my scholarly profile, but my professional experience.¹⁴

With my PhD hot off the presses, I decided if I was ever going to use it, I needed to leave the shelter of the commercial world so I quit my job. This led to an unpaid fellowship at the Rothermere American Institute at Oxford along with a part-time job writing speeches for the US ambassador, Robert Tuttle. The embassy gig started out as a way to pay the bills, but was a truly serendipitous moment as I found diplomacy the natural way to weave together the strands of my career. I was able to bring together politics, strategic communication, international relations, and combine theory and practice in a direct and immediate way. The idea that globalization has changed our sense of space, place, and time, and that diplomats are both the symbolic and literal embodiment of our strange and fleeting ideas of sovereignty, totally captured my imagination. Meanwhile, the people I worked with, dealt with both geo- and practical politics every minute of every day. UK/US

⁸ John Burton, *Systems, States, Diplomacy and Rules* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1968).

⁹ T. L. Hobhouse. *Social Evolution and Political Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1922).

¹⁰ J. A. Hobson, *The Crisis of Liberalism: New Issues of Democracy* (London: P.S. King and Son. 1909).

¹¹ David Held, *Political Theory and the Modern State* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

¹² Anthony Giddens, Anthony. *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press. 1998).

¹³ Holmes, (2007) “100 Years On: Who are the Inheritors of the “New Liberal” Mantle?”, *Political Quarterly*, Special Issue, 78:1 (Winter 2007): 165-174; Holmes, (2007) “Devolution, Coalitions, and the Liberal Democrats: Necessary Evil or Progressive Politics?”, *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 60 No. 4, (October 2007): 527-547.

¹⁴ Holmes, (2005). “The Third Way & New Liberalism: responding to globalisation at the domestic/international frontier”. PhD Thesis. International Relations, London School of Economics, 2005; Holmes, *The Third Way: Globalisation’s Legacy* (Leicester: Troubador Publishing Ltd. 2009).

relations was the bread and butter of my daily life¹⁵ while diplomacy became a new area to explore. Geoffrey Wiseman and Paul Sharp¹⁶ were guiding lights and generously encouraged my direction while Jan Melissen¹⁷ and Ivar Neumann¹⁸ were staking out concepts I wanted to understand.

I was awarded the Pierre Keller Transatlantic Fellowship at Yale and coming to the end of my (unusual) second year there when I took some time to support the Lib Dems through the 2010 election that brought them into a coalition government. After the election, I was invited to return to the UK for a political position, but my heart once again took me several thousand miles in the opposite direction. I had met a British jazz musician living on the coast of California and so I came to Arcata to write and then to teach. For 12 years I ran the International Studies Program at Cal Poly Humboldt, enjoying the amazing privilege of converting life experience into programming for our students. Based on my own professional arc and knowing the transformational value of first-hand experience, the program is rooted in a commitment to study abroad and language. I also helped create a holistic career curriculum and service learning opportunities in the community designed to encourage life-long learning. As living proof of the power of networking, we designed International Education Week with over 40 hours of content to offer students access not only to the international work of scholars on our campus, but to options for work and study in other places.¹⁹ I was determined to connect our students to the world while bringing the global home.

Meanwhile, in my own research, I continued my pursuit of the connections between the local and the global by thinking about the international affairs of California and diplomacy at the subnational level of states, counties, cities and crucially, tribes. The traditional International Relations concept of sovereignty is being challenged every day by those living and working along what I call the vertical axis of diplomacy that puts California in the vanguard of a paradigm shift to a more global view of the world.²⁰

As I am now closer to the end of my career than to the beginning, I recently stepped down as chair and look forward to continuing my policy writing²¹ as well as doing research on diplomacy generally and subnational issues specifically. I also plan to continue serving the local Karuk Tribe's education department, finish my online Graduate Certificate in Native American Studies from Montana State University (I just can't resist more education) and, as inaugural Managing Editor, work to establish a new open sources/free/interactive online journal that will help root the faculty,

¹⁵ Holmes, *Global Diplomacy* (Boulder: Westview Press. 2016). Holmes, and Simon Rofe, eds., *The Embassy in Grosvenor Square: US Ambassadors to the UK, 1938-2008* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 2012).

¹⁶ Geoffrey Wiseman, Geoffrey and Paul Sharp. *The Diplomatic Corps as an Institution of International Society*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 2007).

¹⁷ Rogier van der Pluijm with Jan Melissen, *City Diplomacy: The Expanding Role of Cities in International Politics*, (Clingendael: The Hague Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2007).

¹⁸ Iver Nuemann, *Diplomatic Sites: A Critical Inquiry* (London: C. Hurst & Co. 2013).

¹⁹ Holmes, with students Samuel Lipiec and Ileana Spoelstra (2020) "Stepping From Behind the Redwood Curtain: A Cultural Wealth Model to Support Study Abroad at Humboldt State University", IdeaFest/SOTL (2020); <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/ideafest/vol15/iss1/5/>; Holmes "Pedagogy or Pedagogues in the First-Year Critical Thinking Classroom: Helping Students Connect the Global to the Local by Creating a Sense of Community, Place and Purpose," Cal Poly Humboldt Reports (2019). <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/reports/3/>. Online; Holmes with Loren Collins (2017) "Assessing Career Planning Courses without using testing scores: another neglected issue?", *Career Working Paper Series Online*. (2017); <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/careercurriculumconnections/1/>.

²⁰ Holmes. *Multi-layered Diplomacy in a Global State: The International Relations of California* (London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2020).

²¹ Examples: Pacific Council: Holmes, *New Globalism: An Open Letter to California's New Governor*. January 2019. University of Southern California Center for Public Diplomacy: Holmes, *Which is "Trump": National Interest or Reason of State?* June 2019. Holmes, *Subnational Cooperation and the Environment: The Public Diplomacy of Survival?* October 2018.

staff and students of the California State University system to our 23 communities while connecting us all to the world.²²

In my Capstone class, students read selections from the autobiographies of people I call “pairs of transformational leaders” that cover the same points in their respective lives. We read memoirs of British Prime Minister Clement Attlee and social movement leader Mahatma Gandhi, Mikhail Gorbachev as General Secretary of the Communist Party and political essayist Vaclav Havel, prisoner to President Nelson Mandela and State President F.W. de Klerk. We try to look at them through questions of structure and agency and examine how their actions and interactions—intentionally and unintentionally—combined at a moment in time to create profound change. We talk about culture as it relates to leadership styles, the bias of the autobiography, and history as judge. We talk about our desire to “make a difference” and whether that is the same as “leaving a legacy.” We talk about human helplessness in the face of immense power and the immense power of the human spirit. But what we really talk about is the fact that, once you have reached out and touched the world, there is no going back to what you were. We are changed by the world and we change the world as we move through it. The best we can hope for is to face that reality with intention and with care.

Stepping back, it becomes possible to look over the course of what has really been multiple careers and begin to identify the themes that stand out as well as the patterns that emerge. We may be only dimly aware of these threads as we feverishly spin them forward, but in truth these are the weft and warp of our lives. They connect us to our past, hold us fast in the turbulent present, and offer a path to follow that will keep us true to our potential. Our diversity is amazing and our commonality constant.

In 1909 a young man left his village in Sweden bound for America...in 1921 a Scottish woman became ill in China...in 1981 a teenager from Oklahoma wondered the “why” of Northern Ireland. These are the ripples of people’s lives that repeat millions upon billions of times to create the multiple layers of our world. “Learning the scholar’s craft” at its most basic level has been, for me, my own small journey towards understanding others by walking in their shoes, even if briefly, while trying to always be conscious that our collective future is altered by that exchange. A favorite quotation is Paddy Ashdown’s “third law”. Calling it a “law” was pure political rhetoric, but it’s no less true for that: “in the modern age, where everything is connected to everything, the most important thing about what you can do, is what you can do with others...we are now locked together...we share a destiny with each other...It used to be that if my country was more powerful than their country, I was safe...the advent of interconnectedness ...means that...I share a destiny with my enemy.”²³ At its best, I see the scholar’s craft as an echoing call and response through time from one scholar and generation to the next, all learning from each other as we gather knowledge and build towards a better future. For me, what has been even more important, is the give and take of sharing that knowledge through education as I believe that is where we find hope of learning the craft of being human.

²² **csuglobal**. A free access interdisciplinary academic journal of the California State University (CSU). <http://calstate.edu/csuglobal>.

²³ Ashdown, Paddy (2011) “The Global Power Shift”. TEDxBrussels. http://ted.com/talks/paddy_ashdown_the_global_power_shift

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