

Nature's Serenity or City's Vibrance?

Both Patty and I grew up in suburbia in the 1950s and 1960s, so it's no wonder that we have chosen throughout our lives to find suburbs to be normal for us. New York City was the exception for us, and we really enjoyed living on the Upper West Side (74th and Columbus) for 7 years and then a decade later to live in Murray Hill (on 31st Street), both in Manhattan. In Lawrence we lived in town, but it's a college town, so has its own makeup. Chicago (suburb) in Morton Grove, DC (suburbs: Rockville for a year then Bethesda for 6 years), then all our 28 years in Sydney (suburbs: Lane Cove, Greenwich and now Chatswood). Even in Nashville, we are in East Nashville which is very much a suburban feeling.

We like the parking and the grass lawn. We like the fenced in yards and the sizes of house. But I imagine that the safety factor is key and the quality of schools also played into our association with our own history in Mission for Patty and Prairie Village for me.

That said, we love nature, enjoying time on bike paths and golf courses, climbing Kilimanjaro in 2012, or beach time in Sydney and other vacation spots (Fiji, Vanuatu, Dominican Republic, North Carolina, and the list never ends...). In 2012, Patty and I climbed Mount Kilimanjaro. It is almost 6,000 meters high, and we started on a very low

level in Arusha, Tanzania, in a rainforest. In fact, it rained the first two days of our climb. So, each evening we hung our wet clothes inside our tent. But by the sixth day, which began for us at midnight under a full moon that October, we were climbing in parkas because it was so cold and the air was so thin. Five and a half days up, one and a half days down, and it was exhilarating. We learned how to say the words "poley poley," the Swahili phrase for "slowly, slowly." We had two guides and 10 other staff serving us: a couple of cooks, and people who carried all the gear that we had to use going up and going down. It was one of the best adventures of our lives. And we landed on a great site at a great time. The end of October was perfect. We learned all this from a man who had written and was updating his book on how to climb Kilimanjaro. He was from Europe and was picked up in our car and taken to the first stop. And then we began to climb the next day. We were definitely led by the Lord, and it was a great time, though exhausting. The pictures do not do it justice. (www.flickr.com/photos/bobmendo/albums/72157631917790679/).



Uhuru Peak, highest point in Africa. Gold!



Glaciers below us. Check out the Flickr page and zoom in to see all the glacier shots. Amazing. Huge!



Momentary pause while climbing. Our guide was very kind.



In the fields around Hancock, NY in spring 1998.



Central Park 1985 summer.



In Arusha at the start of the Kilimanjaro climb

Recollecting My Bravest Experience

Bravery, courage, and resilience are all cousins in this question. And maybe a bit of disregard of potential bad consequences is mixed in. At uni in St. Louis, I joined the student protests in Spring 1970 as a freshman. It was early May, in Ohio, at the uni named Kent State when National Guardsmen shot and killed four protesting students. So when we heard about it on campus at Wash U, it was a bugle cry to us to get out and join them. I had already been active in February that winter helping to burn down the ROTC building. But with the four dead in Ohio, we were mobilized almost immediately again. I did not go to the Air Force building which was then destroyed in the days after Kent State. I joined others in striking on campus and preventing students from entering the halls of learning. Was that bravery or mob mentality? Was that my own conviction or the result of getting high and feigning heroism?

What about Lawrence, Kansas in about 1975? A fellow or two and I walked down to the Bierstube on 14th and Tennessee to witness our faith among the patrons. Fred Stubenrauch was with me. I was sharing the Gospel with a student who was apparently surrendered to the power of beer, and he was getting increasingly hostile. I was not very clued in and I should have walked away or approached another person. But when this man smashed a beer bottle on the bar at which we were standing, making a mess, and making his bottle into a jagged-edged weapon of

sorts, I should definitely have saved my skin and walked away. But I held my ground and told him that he could kill me, but the message of Jesus was still true and would be available long after I was gone. It was a very dramatic moment, and one which played back slowly, almost frame-by-frame for years afterwards in my memory and in the laurels of the Mustard Seed. Was that bravery? Or stupid? Or a bit of both... perhaps all bravery is similar-- consequence be damned!

Other moments I recall today. Helping to rescue a small deer which had gotten caught in the barbed wire on the back nine at Stonecutters Ridge Golf Club in December 2015. The foursome in which I was assigned all went to the screeches of the animal and finally succeeded in releasing the poor captive. It had a mean kick and a traumatised squeal. But we eventually released it. Still, wild animals, especially when snared... usually best to avoid them.



Baby deer caught in barbed wire in Sydney's south one summer day. Our foursome took about 12 minutes and got it freed.