

~ 1989 ~

Part One

The Academy, Music, Progress, Half Dome twice!

[1989 was an eventful year of progress made at the Academy of Art College, more exploring San Francisco, Yosemite, Concerts, The San Francisco Cacophony Society, The Loma Prieta earthquake, a brief romantic outbreak, more socializing, a tough prognosis at the end of the year. I'm splitting the year in two parts: up through August in Part One, with Yosemite taking up most of this.]

I would say '89 was my peak year of art college, considering that I started I sold a large painting through the window display out front of the Academy on Sutter Street, I cranked out some advanced work that spring semester, and felt incorporated into the fine arts building as a diligent regular. A highlight that Spring was sculpture class with Kevin Radley, and painting with Wade Hoefler.

I was working for brother Brian doing more home remodeling on weekends and select weekdays. By summer that was more full time, but I managed several bike rides and hikes in Marin County! (knew I would eventually live in the heart of that charmed region, just happened to be decades later in the next century).

A good **Grateful Dead** concert that February at Kaiser Oakland again. Chinese new year and I got up front, the closest I've seen the GD, and I turned up right beside old Nicollet Island acquaintances Jon and Denise! I remember them at my first show in St Paul 1982. Great to catch up, they regularly travel to Dead concerts. It was fun to experience so close up. Good start to a gung hay fat choy!

Tunage of the time

Other than collecting Grateful Dead shows on tape (an ongoing obsession that hasn't stopped) and various KFOG radio programs like *The Sunday Night Idiot Show* with the wildly enthusiastic DJ personality **M Dung!** [occasionally I revisit on digitized tapes I made then] Only a few albums come to mind early in '89. Brian picked up *The Trinity Sessions* by **Cowboy Junkies** after discovering them on SNL.

Super nice sound I didn't revisit much afterwards. *Oranges and Lemons* by longtime favorites XTC was on frequently at the Academy all that spring semester, so I mostly associate with that first half of the year, even though I picked it up a few times again later. I was somewhat disappointed that Todd Rundgren didn't produce this, always preferring *Skylarking*. Still it brims with bright songs! I regrettably missed chances to meet my studio album heroes XTC, when they had a signing event at Tower Records in North Beach. How did I miss that?! Well I didn't know, I guess so focused on Academy work. Ha, listening to their albums in the painting studio on the community tape player/boombox.

"Quantum Leap"

Speaking of the painting studio, I made good strides advancing quality work. The one I made that teachers called "*a quantum leap*" (Jack Scott said that?) and at one point Larry Robinson marched in, pointing to the painting and says boldly while intensely looking at me "*THAT is the best painting you've ever done.*" then suddenly departs. This was 'Wall At Externesteine', based on a photo of an old worn and scrawled over wall that exists in Germany. I will elaborate on it in a separate essay about the artwork itself. But it affected my output for the rest of a year (for good or ill?). Of significance was my exhibit of that piece with my lauded spine painting, its story already written and posted, linked here for contextual continuity : [https://dean-gustafson.com/artwork-essays/Anthropomorphic%20Landscape%20\[I%20&%20II\]%20.pdf](https://dean-gustafson.com/artwork-essays/Anthropomorphic%20Landscape%20[I%20&%20II]%20.pdf)

Spring semester successful and over, with another annual students exhibition at Somarts, arranged by our fearless director of the fine arts department Ralph Reed. **May 27th** went to the big AIDS benefit concert at Oakland Stadium with sister Joni, and good MCAD friend and Mission flat roommate Jim! A fine big concert headlined by fav locals the Grateful Dead! Good end of spring that Memorial Day weekend. On to working home remodeling with Brian into summertime.

Backcountry: A dharma bum seeking and finding inspiration

I read *The Dharma Bums* by **Jack Kerouac** a few times by then, taking it as inspiration for my Bay Area muse-fueled reading source. The Japhy character representing naturalist poet **Gary Snyder** — those guys were full of mountaineering spirit, Eastern philosophy, and urban Beat culture. Seminal pre-hippy stuff in part. But this is 1989, not 1959, still I was motivated by it enough to give copies away! This and *The Yosemite* by **John Muir** helped boost my enthusiasm for backcountry hiking.

Yosemite phenomena

A highlight of that summer were a couple of magnificent Yosemite trips hiking up **Half Dome** twice! One solo, then later leading a small group of friends. Absolutely fantastic both times!

Solo trek plans

I planned it well, figuring out what qualities I wanted, and what to avoid. I found a decent canvas backpack the previous year, up for grabs on the curbside near one of Brian's remodeling sites in the Orinda hills, it was old military grade and I looked forward to trying it out on a backcountry. Aiming for a satisfactory near-weeklong backcountry trip, I invested in compact energy foods that last. Mixes to add to hot water, some cans of chili, trail mix, power bars to last five days. Mapped out the perfect round trip that started at **Mirror Lake** at the foot of the sheer cliff of Half Dome — the top is the destination! In a few days time.

Summer Solstice Week

Parents drive me there, they were hoping to get a room at the hotel in the valley, where they've enjoyed before. Being June, there were no vacancies. No worries, their good backup plan was lined up for Tahoe! They see me off with backpack loaded, and off I go, into the wilderness on the longest day of the year. The trail

was steeper than expected, but I thrived on the challenge. Physically ready with eager energy pushing me onwards. I made it to **Tenaya Lake** by dusk, with less time than expected to find an unofficial camping spot, the official campsite there was closed for flooding from the lake but I risked it with little daylight left. Exhausted, tent sleeping was good. By morning almost in trouble from the ranger who arrived to check the place, looked at my backcountry permit, but understood my timing and I was on my way.

Day two was more leisurely, making the way slightly south, I enjoyed being out there alone, passing only one small group. And a mosquito infested passage, rare in the mostly arid Sierras, this is not Minnesota! Later I found a used camping spot with a firepit not cleared away. So I used it, and tidied it up in the morning. [regulations requirement to leave no trace] Bear country required a technique of suspending food and anything scented from a tree branch so many feet up and away from the trunk. I did this but turns out a few years later that this doesn't work anymore! I was luckily undisturbed.

Day Three. Up alongside a ridge towards Half Dome, the views are spectacular, seeing that prominence from such oblique angles. Like an out-of-the-body experience! There was snow in large shaded sections, I placed snow in my cap, it was hot out. It would melt down my head, refreshing! I arrived at **Little Yosemite Valley** campground. Good, it has bear boxes, no need to hoist everything up a tree branch. Setup tent in ample time. Not many other campers made it a pleasant stay.

Day Four. To Half Dome! Up up up the zigzagging trail I go, with plenty of time to savor the journey. The smartest part? Leaving the tent and sleeping bag behind at the campground, made for a drastically lighter hike! It is a challenging hike in that heat. I passed very few hikers on the way, and a few teams with donkeys carrying

building supplies for maintaining trails. Most Half Dome hikers were racing up, doing it in a single round trip from the valley. Now I was in excellent physical condition at 25 years old, but I couldn't picture myself enjoying that pace. I really appreciated this trail unhurried.

Heading up, tiring of the taste of iodine pills I had to purify the water, I fill up at the last known spring before emerging above trees and up to a rocky zone of more steepness. Including what I found to be more challenging, hiking up the steps of a shoulder before reaching the dome and what seemed like what should be it. The west view of the dome was fascinating and exotic in perspective, like approaching a temple.

The Cables

Whew! I got over this massive shoulder, finding (as described when doing research on this destination) a pile of leather gloves at the bottom of the metal cables that you need to climb up to get to the top. Some people were going down this who raced up, to turn around after a brief visit on top. Not me, I designed my time to relax into the trek. I waited for them to pass, then with gloves on, climbed up the steep stone incline! It was easier than imagined, with wooden 2 x 4's secured with the protruding cable poles every few yards. Good for resting on, especially when others are returning down, and a few did.

The Top of the World!

Emerging at the top seemed like arriving on the moon! Barren rock, and phenomenal spectacular views! I was a proud achiever — ***I made it!***

There were a few others up there enjoying looking down the sheer face to the valley far below. I did too with trepidation, and that seemed better with others present. I asked them to get a photo of me with my barely used camera. Wow, truly mindblowingly breathtaking!

Another wise choice was to survey the hike and be aware of what I face going down, and if I could possibly go back in the full moonlight that night. Y'see, I timed this perfectly. I decided that I could if I get off the dome when still light out. This luxury afforded more time to soak in the splendor of being there, going down the cables just before sunset. Going down the cables was harder. Freakier because of looking down! But I had to do this in ample time. I made it, gloves are essential or hands would be ripped sore! The second climb down the several steps started to make legs quiver. This was tough. Now with the moonlight and my flashlight, I get back to the tent and sleep satisfied.

Day Five. Leisurely getting up slowly until the heat kicks in made it hard to sleep late. Probably 9am? Wiped out from the big hike, and I still have another night camping backcountry night before meeting Brian and Joni up at **Bridalveil** campgrounds up near **Glacier Point**. Taking time to get going, I soon pass a scene of difficulty, a massive bear was ripping a tent apart like it was taffy! While a guy about my age, also backcountry camping, was yelling and throwing stones at the bear — usually works to ward them off, but not this one. I joined with noisemaking (from safe distance) to hopefully be more successful with more humans present, but that bear just ignored us. There was a cub in the tree near the tent, so I thought uh-oh, don't mess with mama bears! The guy said he was packing up to go, with ramen in the tent briefly, turned around to continue packing, and the bear suddenly appeared! I expressed useless condolences to his tent and ramen. His trip was over. I got on with mine as the bear remained devouring ramen noodle packages.

I have heard that area of Little Yosemite Valley is a hot spot for bear invasions. No big crowds, in the backcountry, and no ranger stationed there. I was simply lucky, it could have been me!

I had a beautiful hike, soaked my aching feet in the ice cold waters pooling above

dramatic **Vernal Falls**. A more populous area for day hikers. Fantastic waterfalls, it was pleasant to spend time stretching out there.

Onwards towards **Illilouette Falls**, and the trail there passed through more marvelous territory — new to me!

The falls from the creek was rushing wildly, I enjoyed the views of the region, I must return sometime on a day hike! (several times years later) I set up tent in an ideal spot not far from the rapids. Heard some whooping nearby down the creek from me. It was other campers, sliding on a slope in the creek. Looking like fun! I settled in by dusk, surprised it was so late. I took my sweet time that day. By now I couldn't wait for civilization to serve up some real food! I conserved just enough for my days allotted. Also wanted some water that tastes like water only, not iodine. A really pleasant evening, appreciating the stars, sounds of water, the scent of the high Sierras, and the satisfied feeling that I did it — I climbed up to the top of Half Dome the smart way — in segments, not a race up and down as most do. and this natural beauty was transforming me for the best.

Day Six, Dipping myself in the ice cold water was an effective if totally shocking way to wake up! I didn't waste time and wrapped up and hiking up to the road, a few miles away. I was impressed by the terrain! Some of the forest up ahead was covered in ashes from a wildfire recently. Passing through it looked like snow! Burnt forest aroma fill my senses. Eventually get to **Mono Meadows**, flooded! Had to carefully walk on branches laid down by others. Foot slipping in at a precarious point, boot drenched, but okay. Only less than a mile to the road. The last few hundred yards are the worst, anticipating arrival. Then I start to hear traffic! Ah, my aching (and drenched) feet are relieved !

I rest in the small parking lot, but not long, I still had to walk a couple miles alongside the road to the Bridalveil campground to meet Brian and Joni, who I expected to be there. Even if they could not secure a campsite the plan was to meet

there. It was still early, I got an early start on this great beautiful morning. It must have been noon when I trawled in, possibly found their note on the bulletin board, found them in perfect timing! Ahhh! Family!

After setting my groaning weight of a backpack that I could not wait to remove, they totally heard my reasoning for a pizza and ale in the valley! So off we go, to civilization, regaling them with my report of an amazing satisfactory trek. Mmm, that pizza never tasted better!

From there we bought provisions for the evening, enjoyed the sights of the Valley. On the drive back enjoyed exploring the bottom of Bridalveil Falls, getting pleasantly soaked by its gushing spray. A great, invigorating time! Back up at the campground before dark, setting up tent, and good camping food — better than my backcountry grub by far.

That night we thoroughly enjoyed a crackling campfire, supplying kindling that incandescenced were big pine cones that Brian was into gathering, enthusiastically! Thanks Bri! We had an excellent time, driving back the following day.

Goals accomplished and satisfaction achieved! I now knew how a Half Dome trek is, and how to do it right! [Returning again a few more times; that summer again was perfect, then '97 and '01 were overcrowded. So '89 was it!]

Insights and reflections

Several. Step after step, stone after stone, view after view... the gains of personal strength to really prove to myself the capabilities, physical and mental, to do this successfully. It takes a lot of drive to get yourself out there. I have a strong love for that national park, with gained extra appreciation for its distinguished features.

Half Dome is so iconic. One of the more memorable sights of the West. **El Capitan** — what a rock! Truly astounding to behold. The **Yosemite falls!** (I wrote about my satori up there in my 1987 essay.) The giant **sequoias!** (more on that soon) **Glacier Point!** The whole place is a majestic natural wonderland. I

experienced such solitude, that I've never experienced in this lengths before. Good brain time, as I've heard said. The dramatic sights, the scents, the journey as the goal and means. I gained chutzpah that week. Planning and successful. It could have gone very wrong if injuries or storms rolling in up on Half Dome. I had perfectly clear weather every day. I was fortunate!

July 12th, Todd Rundgren at the Fillmore

Went with Joni and Brian to the *Nearly Human* show, the second gig of the big tour. This was before I bought the factory cassette release for Brians birthday a few days later. Although the album was out a month previous, I waited until after the concert to get it. I wanted to absorb the new songs live first, as a tradition I had with Todd releases over the years. *Want Of A Nail* was on **KFOG** regularly, so we knew that racehorse of a hit.

We had an excellent spot, at a small table stage left. Up front perfect. I'd heard some newer material live before, and we had been used to Todds one-man multi-instrument performances over the past few years, and absolutely loved this big 14-piece band approach. Especially the three sexier-than-imaginable backup singers! Shandi really caught Brian's eye, and all of us hetero males she seemed to flirt with from the stage! Very appealing. Bri and I would joke, "*who's Todd? This is Shandi's show, right?*"

The performance was hot and abundant, with inflections of r&b/soul/James Brown/Marvin Gaye. A high mark of that summer! I bought the LP a few weeks after getting the tape for Bri. A good one in his van tape deck that year.

August: Planning the group backcountry Yosemite trek

I raved about my extraordinary Half Dome trek to friends .They naturally wanted to experience that too. My old MCAD friend Bob flew out to visit. His first aircraft ride and leaving the Midwest! An impressive jump. So with other good MCAD friend and now San Francisco roommate Jim, we plan a trip up Half Dome that

August, with me as the guide. I knew what was in store, and how to do it right — via a few days of backcountry camping! This plan was to start at the Mono Meadows trailhead (where I ended last time). Brian drove Bob to Berkeley to help him get a backpack, while I was at work. Good ol' Bri — enabling good things!

A shorter trek, four days. Me, Bob, Jim and Dave (a coworker friend of Jims). We set out late, Jim drove. I had a good night time camping plan, knowing it would be difficult to find a campsite in the dark we set out to **Goat's Meadow**. I knew about this spot as a secret backup site from a ranger, when I was with friends who had a 1 year old kid with. [see that and more Yosemite details in my 1987 essay, https://dean-gustafson.com/autobiographical/1987_v2.pdf] That space is just a few hundred yards south of the **Mariposa Grove** entrance/exit. We were in good spirits, I was totally confident about it all. We enjoyed cranking tapes for the drive. Dave had *Love Bomb* by **The Tubes**! [I'm an old Tubes fan, but hadn't heard this **Rundgren** production before] Dave enthusiastically shared the amusing mash-up of *Scenes from a Summer Night*! I had the latest **Todd** 'Nearly Human', and my early **Beatles** rare outtakes cassette that I taped from *KFOG's Sunday Night Idiot Show*, with dj **M Dung**. Instrumental versions of *Help!* and more, gave us good mileage, which kept us awake until finding Goat's Meadow in the dark. Set up tents and crashed.

Rising early, we had to drive to **Yosemite Valley** for our backcountry permit. It all went well, allowing time afterwards to show off the mind blowing dramatic views from **Glacier Point**, and I got in a few good drawings in.* Not far from the trailhead of **Mono Meadows** where we set off with backcountry gear, in decent time to hike down the few miles to **Illilouette Creek**, where I camped just a few weeks previously. I was the driven "scout master" on this excursion, and I think I was possibly too pushy, but moved things along pretty darn well! I wanted to make sure we arrived before dusk, and we did! We had a few wet feet from the still

flooded Mono Meadows, yet drier than in June. Passed through the ashen territory, strong scent of burnt wood. Down down, zigzagging through the forest to the creek. Not gushing anymore, leaving beautifully sculpted pools in stone. With a low enough flow of cold water to soak yourself in, perfectly! After setting up in ideal space above the creek we went to soak in the pools under rising waxing moonlight.

[* one of my best drawings of Half Dome, ended up as a family Christmas card one year. Framed gift for parents.]

The Moonstruck Flats, Tequila crazed dudes!

I didn't know it, but Dave brought a bottle of tequila — something I never touched, since I'm not into hard liquor. The guys were stoked over it! But I was the prudish scoutmaster, complaining "*You don't want to spoil our beautiful trip with booze!*" type of sound advice. However that didn't last long, I was outnumbered and gave in, in this fantastic area with spirited friends. The warmth of the drink pleased the gullet in the cooling yet still warm evening air, alongside the cool waters of Illilouette Creek sitting on the most comfortable organically formed granite boulders. Bob got busy taking night photos, placing lights in strategic places. Our loud little party got louder as the laughter grew. I got in a small pool, it's stone sculpted perfectly smooth by centuries of water gushing, cascading down. I became vividly aware of this phenomenon as I soaked the hot days dust and sweat away.

More hysterical photos Bob took of us continued! (I have them on my Flickr page). We wander away from the creek to dig the moonlight in open spaces. It was spectacular! No artificial lights at all, wide open field of granite sand, with **Mt Starr King** towering overhead in bright moonlight casting a phantomous shadow. We're *loud*, hot-headed tequila buzz fueled, *howling* at the *moon* — it was moon mad lunacy! Running on the flats, laughing hysterically tripping over as feet crumbled

into hollowed cavities, most likely by ants. I was a stark raving nutter! We all were! So much for my sober influence.

We called that open space "the moonstruck flats" even though it has a slope to it. I recall it seemed like a lunar landscape in moonlight, color more stark white than anything. *Magnificent!* Hard to leave, but need sleep for the big hike ahead.

Eventually settling down for the night.

The following early morning I felt better than expected after my very first time drinking tequila. I expected a hangover and late start, but we got up, packed and hiking just fine. The mountains do sober you up well the fresh cool morning air inviting, as tents heat up too much for sleeping in anyway. Having young livers might have helped too! [or not, my 2nd time with tequila in 1990 was my last!]

Onwards to the big **Nevada falls!** And **Little Yosemite Valley**, in time enough to set up and off up to the big rock in the sky!

It was a decent hike to the campsite, not steep, with refreshing dramatic Nevada Falls enjoyed on the way. I was really urgent to get up in good time, at a point Bob complains "*why do you have to be so regimented?*" My answer because we want to time our goal right and not stuck in the dark somewhere prematurely! I guess I could have encouraged relaxation a bit more, but the timing worked beautifully! I knew what to expect as a confident leader.

We set up camp and soon onwards, doing the uphill hike but like I planned, much lighter with small packs felt liberating — no longer weighed down, light as a feather by contrast. Improved the trek especially for poor Dave who had an ill-fitting backpack, giving a nagging pain for his back. I sympathized, but possibly not apparent as the driven leader of this band of dharma bums, focused on moving forward, seeking and finding high natural heights, and finding it!

The Top

We arrived at the top in excellent timing, far enough before sundown to savor the

place for a stretch before descending. Conditions were similar to when I was here last. Probably warmer. Everyone dug this, as expected. A few others were up there, including one guy from Germany who planned to sleep on the top! Hope it doesn't rain. (it didn't)

Looking down off the edge was exciting, and of course marveling at the tremendous view. What followed completely stunned me!

Synchronized alignment

Staying up until sunset was now without question. Perfect conditions and fantastic sundown lighting held sway. As the sun set to the west, it did that illusory effect where it appears to be a golden ball resting atop the distant mountains. Beautiful. Turning to face the opposite direction was the rising moon — appearing to do the *identical* thing, and the same relative size as the sun, only white! I felt completely aligned in a massive cosmic balancing phenomena, exclusively only perfectly visualized from on top of Half Dome for those moments! Looking both ways, this was a new *satori* in Yosemite. This affected my sense of alignment, like an eclipse or sunrise how it would be on the summer solstice from the center of Stonehenge. Whew! We were amazed. This was one night before officially full. The setting was a completely unexpected surprise!

Heading down the decline, moonlit,

The sun sank below the horizon, as the alignment changed and the nearly full moon rose, we had to scurry down the cables in near dusk light. Perfect timing. Refreshed by our shared vision and sense of achievement, I was having one of my very best days of that year. We headed down the long downhill trail with trembling legs of rubbery weakness, yet with charged spirits we had a good loud night hike with illumination provided by moonlight and our flashlights. Made it to our tents and had a good snooze, except there was a brief ruckus heard by other campers warding off a bear.

The last day hiking. Giant Sequoias!

Up early for a long day hiking back up to the car, which always feels longer, anticlimactic. Ah, but followed by another great day, including checking out the giant sequoias of **Mariposa Grove!** With trees so big and ancient, we are so small in time and scale that it staggers to contemplate and behold. We were blown away alright! I'd been there before, but they hadn't. I got a few good sketches in of the 2800 year old Grizzly Giant! I am awestruck by its enormity, with giant trees for its limbs alone! Anyway we had a fully recharged time there, blown away by primordial behemoths, one after another as we explored to the end and back.

Drawing habits

Something Dave said affected me. A prediction that young art students are diligent at sketching for only a few years, then discipline fizzles out as other responsibilities take over and hormones change.

Ha! He didn't know how much more I'd draw in my 30s and 40s, and into my disabled 50s! I was merely starting out in my mid-20s.

Lunar Eclipse Surprise

On the weary drive back, wiped out, after playing my fairly heavy live Roger Waters tape, getting to be dusk as we get to the central valley by dark, Jim tunes into our local San Francisco rock favorite radio station, **KFOG**, announcing the lunar eclipse happening right then. We stop to get out to look, and yep — the moon was dark red-orange! We dig this for awhile, it was a trip with seemingly endless phenomena! I was surprised that I forgot this was going to occur! Getting back on the road, energy lifted, KFOG aptly playing *Bad Moon On The Rise!* Ha! Perfect — we had good laughter over that! What a fantastic week!

End of summer, Grateful Dead at the Greek!

The next day Bob flew back home, buzzing with a fantastic California trip. And

what could be better after returning from the mountains, was the anticipated annual **Grateful Dead** run at the **Greek theater** in Berkeley! Friend of roommate Joe had an extra for the Friday show to trade with my extra for Sundays. So I went with Karlin, on a cool foggy evening. Great to be back! The show was a nice one to return from the mountains to. Set brea, and who do I run into but good Minnesota friend from my Nicollet Island band years and first Dead concerts — Dhaivyd Hilgendorf! He runs through several essential points in my life. It had been a few years, the 1985 May Day parade in Minneapolis, that we last met. A great soul brother, it was excellent to see again! He'd been traveling the coast, just spent awesome times at Big Sur, now up in San Francisco for a day or two and chanced upon a ticket to the show, naturally, he's your quintessential deadhead, who's attended several more than I, across the country. Catching up briefly, he was leaving the next morning. Too bad because he was staying with friends only a few blocks away from my Mission flat. (he later moved to the bay area in '91. We spent quality times throughout the 90s and beyond). As the band launched into *Touch Of Gray* to open set two, we bid farewell as he mentioned how mellow the Dead sound here at home base compared with the east coast and Midwest, and dances off into the fog.

Sunday nights show. 8/19/89

It was a nice weather day, I found a good spot for set one, up on the right side of the stage and just a few heads above the floor, so I had a perfect view of the band. Who was sitting directly behind me was Nicollet Island regular Jon White again! (remember, at a Kaiser Dead concert in February?) Thoroughly enjoyed this entire final Greek show, I didn't know at the time, but the party outgrew the UC Berkeley campus, and unfortunately banned afterwards. It was a great end to that summer. September, and Fall semester began soon. With much more ahead...
On to the eventful Part Two — Autumn 1989. coming soon!

- Dean Gustafson, May 2024