

A Life Through Responses to the Class Birthday Cards

Terry O'Keefe

Introduction

Terry passed away February 5, 2020. [His memorial page on the class website](#) contains photos, biographical information, and tributes from classmates.

After receiving the class birthday card in November, 2017, Terry responded at length to Jon Holman's request for photos and more information. The photos are on the memorial page.

The story ends with Terry's memories of recent Princeton events and hopes to be at the 55th reunion.

Part I

Dear Jon,

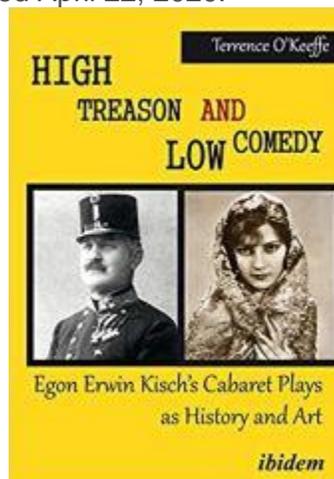
Your birthday greeting arrived yesterday, for which I thank you, and I'm giving a brief reply here, to be followed later by some of the information (and photos) you asked for. I don't think we knew each other at Princeton during 1962-66. I have no photos of my roommates and me together, but I have some related to track at Princeton, and, of course, many from over the years between the 1960s and the present. I'm attaching three of the latter here and will get around to sending you some others later. (For the older black and white photos I think I can photocopy a few and convert them into pdf documents, if that's an acceptable approach – I'll use the local Staples facilities to do this.)

The reason there is no 1966 photo is that I dropped out of school in March of 1966 (don't ask me why – it was the 60s, an explanation in itself). After some odd jobs and three years in the army, including one in Vietnam, I was readmitted and graduated in 1971 with a *summa cum laude* degree in Art History (a reversal of results from the first time around, when I had been the worst student in the architecture program, run by their serene eminences, Michael Graves and Peter Eisenmann). I'll fill in the details of the next 50 years as we go along. Suffice it to say that almost forty of these years these were filled up by my job – I was a research scientist who specialized in long-term psychopharmacological and electrophysiological studies of social groups of monkeys and apes.

At present, upon the request of an editor who has taken an interest in a book of mine, I am revising the manuscript to conform to his requests for deletions, re-arrangements of material, and other editorial changes. The title of the book is *The Posthumous Lives of Colonel Redl – Egon Erwin Kisch and the Redl Espionage Case in Life and Art*. Whew! For your information, the Redl case was a major scandal in May-June 1913, and Kisch was the reporter who broke the case in a Prague newspaper, *Bohemia*, thereby undermining a false ‘cover-story’ put forth by the General Staff of the Austro-Hungarian army. He came back to it in the 1920s, writing a definitive version of the affair published as a small book in 1924, and also a cabaret play about it (*Die Hetzjagd* = The Pursuit). I translated the play for my own use, and will try to get the translation published elsewhere, along with my translation of another cabaret play by Kisch, *Die Himmelfahrt der Tonka Šibenice* (The Ascension to Heaven of Toni Gallows), a very entertaining piece of business – Toni is a prostitute who talks her way into heaven, which, for her, proves to be a replica of one her favorite dives in Prague.

In the book under editing I’m writing about the historical aspects of the matter and also its "transformation into art". There were five “Redl films” made between 1925 and 1985, a successful play about the case by a leading English playwright (John Osborne’s 1965 play, *A Patriot for Me*), and, my favorite, a surrealistic-farcical 1990s treatment of the whole thing written by a talented Slovakian novelist, Pavel Vilikovský (he’s our age). So that preoccupies me just now, and I have several other writing projects in play, hoping that I’ll live long enough to see at least some of them in print.

Editorial Update: the first in-depth treatment in English of [E. E. Kisch](#)’s work as a playwright, [High Treason and Low Comedy: Egon Erwin Kisch’s Cabaret Plays as History and Art](#), to be published April 22, 2020.



Attached are three photos I like – two were taken in Vilnius, Lithuania in the summer of 2012, when my wife, Joanne, and I traveled through Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. She’s drinking the local (unpasteurized) beer, and I’m sitting next to the dummy set out in front of an Argentine (!) restaurant along one of the main drags. I was trying to fool the local kids. The third is a picture of us taken by a kind stranger – we were pausing on our walk around Lake Bled, a nice resort town in the Slovenian Alps, in 2011, and in the background you can see an island with a church where those with money and energy get married – you need energy because the tradition calls for the groom to carry the bride up the 100 steps from the boat landing to the church. I’ve written several travel-essays about trips to Central Europe, including the one to Slovenia, but they haven’t found any publishers so far.

Part III

.... Track memories already included on the [memorial page on the class website](#).

My roommates for the sophomore and junior years were Hugh (Chip) Sweeny (from Scotch Plains, a long-distance runner who kept it up until about age 69 or 70), Rick Siller (Union, NJ), Andy Greene (from one of the NJ Oranges, I forget which), and Randy Wiest (Cleveland, OH). Our other roommate, Don Hubbard (from Rumson, NJ), died in a car crash during our first week of school in the sophomore year. As seniors we all went in for solo housing, assuming this might make us more productive and less distracted when working our obligatory senior theses. In my case it made no difference, because I dropped out in March.

On the other point you raised, no, I’m not a polymath (that’s far beyond my reach). The jump from art history to anthropology in 1971 came about almost by chance. Although I had a decent shot at getting into any of several good art-history graduate school programs, I looked around at the collection of grad-students I’d been taking courses with and thought, “Do I want to hang out with these guys and gals for the three or four years?” And the answer was no, just a sort of gut-reaction. As a veteran on the GI bill I made friends with three or four other guys who were in the same situation – during late winter one of them, Dean Kedenburg, asked me what I was going to do after graduation (in '71). Both of us had two more years of GI-funding coming our way, and he convinced me make a very late application to the Rutgers anthropology program. We took the GREs at the last possible moment and arranged for interviews – as Dean said, “Hey, two Ivy-leaguers from Princeton, no way we can’t get into Big State – think of the

alternative, going out and looking for a job.” Being in agreement about the undesirability of that last item, I went along with his suggestion.

The Rutgers program itself was big on the putative relations between non-human primate and human evolution, and it was run by two guys who were making their reputations as researchers and popularizers of the basic ideas of what came to be called ‘sociobiology’ – their names were Lionel Tiger and Robin Fox, pretty serendipitous for folks interested in animal behavior. My winding up in their hands was not the decision path followed by a polymath, rather that of a chancer. Having been commended to a weird project (“Remote Control of Behavior through Telemetric Means”), I wound up working on an island in Bermuda (in Harrington Sound) that had a small population of (imported) gibbon apes, some of whom had deep brain implants designed to be activated by radio signals, which in turn would elicit (or inhibit) specific behavioral patterns – the man with the grant money was a colorful soul from Spain via Yale, Dr. Jose Maria Rodriguez y Delgado, and his main interest was in ‘controlling’ and ‘modulating’ aggression and sexual behavior. I was collecting and analyzing behavioral data and doing the physical side of the job as well (cutting trails with a machete, building capture compounds, maintaining all the equipment, handling animals when blood samples had to be taken or equipment had to be temporarily placed on them, etc.). The project manager had to return to the US on short notice, and they gave me the job of running the show, which in another year brought me back to work at a place called Rockland Research Institute (in Rockland County, NY – a stone’s throw from the city on the other side of the Hudson; at present it’s the [Nathan Kline Institute for Psychiatric Research](#)). This turned into a life-long job and I eventually set up big social colonies of monkeys so that we could have a decent sample-size, including a large ‘control’ population, for testing the long-term behavioral and electrophysiological effects of various psychoactive drugs that were in use or being proposed for use. We usually did this in co-ordination with human studies of the same drugs. The lab’s chief was a psychiatrist (Ken Lifshitz) interested in the biological underpinnings of mental illness, and I was his ‘monkey man’ who ran the parallel animal studies. That all came to an end when I retired in 2009, moving on to the next thing, which proved to be traveling throughout Central and Eastern Europe and writing about its history and culture, which I’m still doing at present, as well as dealing with the normal madness of family life (a daughter and two sons, none of them youngsters any more) and the nasty encroachments of old age. During all those years of doing other things I read great amounts of history - it was my ‘avocation’ - and now it’s coming in handy as I write about the CE region and writers from the area.

Part III

Once again, thanks for your kind words. I expect to be at the 55th and look forward to meeting you, but one never knows when the final gong is going to ring. I often make it to the last day of the “off-year” reunions because it’s only 70 miles from my home in Pearl River to Princeton. I don’t bother with a hotel but limit beer or whiskey consumption to one or two, so that I can make the drive home unhampered by having had too much fun. And last year my wife and I made it, for the first time, to Staś Maliszewski’s big “day at the steeplechase races” on the outskirts of Baltimore (my own home town, and my wife's as well). Give me a link to the website you are amending and adding to, when you can.