Always a Little Further

Four Lives of a Luckie Felowe
A Memoir
Morris Martin

Forward:

The engaging odyssey of a young Oxford scholar who set out to make a difference in the world

When Morris Martin gave up a promising academic career to "work for a better world," eyebrows were raised, dons were dubious, and tradition was abruptly overthrown. The adventure took the author, "armed with my Ph.D. and a naïve understanding of a world going through the Depression" from the halls of Oxford to Hitler's Germany, from Capetown to Calcutta, and more than once around the globe. The tale is enlivened by his association with newsmakers of the day, including Moral Re-Armament founder Frank Buchman, with whom he worked closely for twenty years. We learn behind-the-scene stories of historic events, including details of Martin's personal involvement in the post-World War II reconciliation of France and Germany. "In my nineties," says the author from his home in Tucson, Arizona, "I am proud of two happy marriages, of becoming an American citizen with an English accent, and of having had four different lives, each of which has taken me 'a little further.''

Snapshots:

"At the border crossing into the Third Reich I tried to hide the copies of *Rising Tide* under the bulky cast on my leg. Those 2050 copies were the only ones to get in to the country before the propaganda ministry banned the publication as decadent democratic propaganda."

"Joan Crawford was lying languidly on a settee when I heard her give the line. It was now or never. I walked out in front of the cameras, raised my hand and said, "Stop!" Panic broke out all over the set. George Cukor rose from his director's chair and said, 'Who the hell do you think you are?'"

"It was quite dark, not a light showed in the village as we approached Robert Schuman's home. We tugged at the ancient bell-pull and knocked. Nothing. We knocked and pulled again. When we were finally about to give up, the shutters above us opened and Monsieur le Président, in his pajamas and wearing a nightcap, peered down on us.

Excerpt:

XVIII
Back to School

One day in Rome in November 1964 I received a letter from Peter Howard. After regretting that the fine MRA buildings on Mackinac Island stood empty for about eight months of the year, he went on:

Would it be a good idea to start a college in Caux and Mackinac? Run them together as a school for modern languages, international relationships, theater, T.V., Radio, journalism, Art? It could be the education of the 21st century. The aim would be to train youth to take on the key places in nations…to get the right young men instead of the wrong ones into places of influence in public affairs…It would be easy, I think, to get money for education…it crossed my mind whether a man like yourself would be able to be President of such an undertaking.

To this last question I replied after brief deliberation, "No way!" I was British, knew little about American education, and if one of the duties of a president was to raise money, I was neither inclined nor competent to handle the job. I was also not quite as sure as I had once been who were the "right young men." That, I thought, disposed of that.

But with Peter Howard's death some three months later the college project took on a different aspect. Basil Entwistle, my old school friend, who had an excellent academic record at Oxford and wide experience in Asia – China before the war, Japan after the war – had undertaken the job of chairman of the Board of Trustees. In that capacity he had seen to the transfer to the proposed college of the MRA buildings which had been used for conference purposes only a few months in the year, when the ice went out of the Great Lakes and the ferries ran to the island.

Basil had also facilitated the granting of a charter by the Michigan Board of Education. They were supportive when they had satisfied themselves that the college would not be an instrument of indoctrination but a genuine hall of learning. He had also enlisted sponsors, hired faculty, drawing on others' expertise in areas where we were lacking. Dr. Douglas Cornell, executive officer of the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, was prevailed upon to become the president of the college, a position for which he had far better credentials than did I.

Feelers were once again extended in my direction. Would I become the academic dean if a senior academic, a former dean of the University of Alberta, did all the preliminary work of hiring faculty and drawing up the curriculum? With a show of confidence that I did not really feel, and mostly in deference to Peter Howard's vision for a college, I agreed. I had done all I could on the Buchman biography. Here was the next challenge

In June 1966, I arrived with Enid in New York, was met by Doug Cornell, who from that time became my close friend and collaborator, and drove with him via Niagara Falls to

Mackinac Island. We talked long and earnestly about what lay before us. I was told all that had happened since I had turned down the job Doug was now shouldering.

The more he told me, the more grateful I was that vainglory had not pushed me to try my hand at it. Much was already prepared. The buildings were there; the faculty was being collected; there were even students signed up to attend. There was some money. We closed our eyes to all but a rosy future, and Mackinac College was in business. We were on our way to fill a niche in American education that we believed to be especially reserved for us: the training of leadership for a radically changing world.

Meanwhile, American education on major campuses was in turmoil. The GI Bill generation had passed through the system and was making its way in the world. A new breed was springing up, children of prosperity of the fifties, calling for change. President Kennedy had ignited them and his death had frustrated them. The universities became powder kegs. Students became activists. They saw the inequalities of American life, the poverty amid wealth, the repression of minorities, the plight, particularly, of the blacks, and like the Oxford generation after World War I, blamed their elders for these conditions.

Universities are institutions that have been built up over a long period of time; they change slowly and deliberately. For this new generation they seemed to be moving too slowly. They appeared to be protecting the status quo, perpetuating the wrongs of society, not open to new ideas. Student generations are short – three or four years. Change had to come in their time, at once, not in a professorial generation of twenty or more years. They had experienced the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy and of Martin Luther King. The older generation had involved the newer in an unpopular war in Vietnam. And was there not always the threat of atomic destruction hanging over their world? There was no time to waste on the traditional curriculum. Everything must be focused on the changes needed. Make all things new!

Added to this mood of conflict between the generations was the rise of drug culture and of new music styles stirring emotions and built on the Beat, which annoyed the elders and, for that reason, if no other, was the delight of the young. Mass performances or tribal gatherings asserted a solidarity among the young of which their music was the badge of honor. Confrontation took the place of compromise. University authorities found their offices occupied by "sit-ins." Buildings were trashed. "Free" universities set themselves up on campuses with courses whose common bond was "relevancy." Vietnam brought "Strategies of Peace," minority questions brought "Black Studies," and the new feminist consciousness brought "Women's Studies" into the curriculum. It was a time for newness.

I had been fairly remote from all this. I was just beginning to feel deep changes in my own life and thought. Now, in all this turmoil, I was suddenly called on to think seriously about the nature and structure of education. My first reaction was, naturally, cautious. We would try and make changes, but within the system, within the established curriculum. It

was not much, but since I knew so little about education in America, this was the best I could come up with.

Doug had wisely arranged for me to attend a conference of the American Association of Academic Deans, which took place almost immediately on my arrival in the United States. It was a fascinating and confusing occasion: fascinating because we were a new college starting up with the aim of improving the quality of people available and equipped for public life; confusing, because I knew little how we intended to do it, how we hoped to graft our purposes onto the hickory-hard stock of state-approved education. Fortunately, I knew as yet so little about this that I was prepared to use a very broad rush in outlining our purposes, and since, as yet, we had done nothing, we could not yet be held accountable for anything.

It had long been obvious that Peter Howard's idea of a college, which aimed basically to spread the ideas of MRA in public life and administration, was unworkable. He had assumed that degrees could be awarded, but these would be of no worth without the recognition of the college, first by the State of Michigan, and then by the Accrediting Agency of North Central Colleges and Universities. Criteria for this recognition were rigorous and sternly unimaginative – how many books in the library, how much money in the bank, what proportion of faculty to students, what basic studies in humanities, in natural sciences and social studies were offered. We were faced by a mighty dilemma. Should we adopt the existing framework at a time when it was being questioned on many major campuses in the country? Or should we try to link our desire to train leadership for society with the contemporary demand for "relevance" and change, and cut loose from the whole degree-giving structure of American education?

We had already gone far down the road of working within the system. We had a charter from the state, we had a curriculum as required by the authorities, we had students. If we now changed direction, how many students would stay with us? Even more importantly, how many parents would back their children going to an unknown college in remote northern Michigan that would not be able to award a degree or to give credits that would be recognized by any other university to which students might wish to transfer? It was now August, and students would be arriving in September. We decided to keep on the course we had chosen.

Here there were great opportunities. Inexperienced as I was in the American way of education, I had one great asset, which I brought from my Oxford days. I had a deep conviction that knowledge could not be divided up into watertight compartments, which was the basic scheme of education in America, but was a flowing river of personal learning that derived from many sources.

Interdepartmental teaching seemed to me a basic and natural requirement in a world shaped by the interplay of ideas from many areas and cultures. Language, history and literature should be studied together, history, economics, and geography likewise; the natural sciences along with social needs; all subjects were interwoven with developments in each other and should be studied in that context. I was ignorant of mathematics and

natural sciences but I knew their significance in modern life; others, well equipped, would be doing the teaching. I was a quick learner, and ready to work to find the best way to move in the short time available.

I had a great faculty to work with. Half of them had some MRA affiliation, another quarter were fully understanding of the college's mission. A few were there simply to teach their subject as professionals and were content with that. A number had experience in different professions, and came from varied backgrounds, French, British, Indian, Chinese. Franklin Chance had been with Pfizer Chemicals and would teach chemistry; Daniel Lew had been a diplomat and would teach modern history. Vaitheswaran, an outstanding graduate of Hyderabad University, would teach economics. David Blair, a Scot who had been a teacher before MRA, became a most effective and beloved teacher of English literature (he was our Mr. Chips); John McCabe, actor, writer and lover of Shakespeare, was a great teacher of theater; and Edric Cane, a French scholar who had spent much of his life in England, was a fine teacher of French literature and economics, Audrey Cooke, a teacher and poet, was a creative force in the English Department, while Kay Smedley infused her students with a passion for American history.

Our first semester was full of high moments. Everything was new and improvisation by students, staff, and faculty carried us through the unanticipated crisis. The fact that we were several miles out in the Straits of Mackinac was an added attraction, as long as the autumn sunshine warmed us. We had not fully anticipated the effects of high winds, driving rain, and then snow on our sports program and on the spirits of our students. When blizzards blew, a visiting team could be marooned on our island for several days; they even attended our classes. Nor was it easy to provision several hundred people as the island stores closed down one by one and almost everything had to be brought in by ferry or airplane. But we took that in our stride.

Our situation became more serious, however, when students reassembled for the second semester. Now the temperature had dropped, the straits were freezing over. Airplane service from Pellston was erratic and two-seater planes were hardly adequate to handle our returning students. But it was just another challenge, something to be coped with. Spirits were still high.

About a third of our Charter Class also had some MRA links and were creative and helpful in getting the college off the ground. The rest had various motives for enrolling, most simply wanting a good education at a college where the fees were very reasonable. Geographically we were far away from the world of student demonstrations and revolt against traditional education. To a certain extent we were also spiritually remote. We conceived ourselves to be a happy harmonious family without any problems that could not be settled by a few wise words from authority – administration, faculty or student. Student rights had not entered our vocabulary. Our discipline was imposed rather than agreed. But it was not long before the winds of change blew also into our remoteness.

In addition, the London leadership of MRA was fundamentally opposed to what we were doing; Peter Howard's death had again left a vacuum, which was filled by the most

cautious and most British of the existing leadership. There was a streak of anti-Americanism and a streak of obscurantism that led them to believe that education itself was not an objective of MRA, and especially not American education.

Buchman had always been critical of higher education. In the late forties there had been a very promising development at Caux, called the College of the Good Road, which responded to the great desire of young people to be learners and was instantly successful. Some splendid teachers gave exciting outlines of topics and areas of knowledge that expanded the horizons of the Caux conferences. I remember teaching an outline course on philosophy, which stimulated my audience and me greatly; but the effort was short-lived.

Buchman, never happy with anything that appeared to divert from what he saw as the major mission of MRA – to offer individuals an experience of God – closed it down. London appeared now to be of the same mind. They washed their hands of the college. The American leadership of MRA continued its support, though their funds went largely in other directions.

Our first year was full of fresh ideas. The student body, though it numbered only 140, included some outstanding individuals. But our dean of admissions soon found it difficult to enlist more students of this caliber. Newness, remoteness, and our high expectations became disadvantages. As the student body grew to around 350, it was clear that some students would have been happier at a less dedicated college. The questioning of authority, that serpent as we conceived it, entered our mini-Paradise from the Berkeleys and Columbias so far away. Students took sides and found natural allies also in some faculty members who, knowing the current mentality on larger campuses from which they had come, saw such questioning as the mark of the times and something to be encouraged.

As dean I had to face much that was unknown and new to me. But, realizing that any authority I was to have needed to be conferred on me less by my office and more by agreement of the student body and by my faculty, I accepted a simple truth. These students were coming to us because we claimed to give them the best education possible. We had no mission to indoctrinate; to make students fit any mould, however high-minded. Our task was to give an education, and in addition, I, as dean, was to be a stimulator of innovation, not a defender of the past. Slowly the government of Saints was transformed into a more cooperative and responsive body. But in so doing, I was further transformed.

A minor matter, as it appeared to us at first, began to take on larger proportions. The inhabitants of Mackinac Island, the hardy natives, about six hundred in number, lived year-round on the island. After a first flush of friendship, twenty years earlier, with Buchman, who brought so many people they hoped would shop in their fudge shops and ride in their carriages, and who also befriended a number of them, hiring and training them as staff for MRA's buildings and conferences, many islanders had over the years switched to a position of armed neutrality. MRA was a little mysterious and its end of the

island was a little remote, and who knew what was going on there? MRA's attempts to reach out to the inhabitants were given a cool response, apart from a few who understood it and became strong allies.

We had expected a warmer welcome for Mackinac College. It was not an "MRA college," though it tried to instill values as well as information while distancing itself from the religious and political innuendoes attached to MRA and Buchman. The islanders would have none of this the MRA is the MRA was their standpoint, and nothing appeared to shift it. Although the college was a new creation, we inherited, along with the beautiful property and setting of the island, a quiver full of prejudices which slowed our progress.

We had planned on using the deserted television and film studio, built with so much pain and effort for Buchman's hoped-for but non-appearing movies, as library and classrooms for the college. The island's fire marshal proved uncooperative; because there was not the necessary layer of insulation in the studio's construction, it could not be approved for educational purposes. We had not thought to find this out earlier, so we launched with our main building inoperative and our students soon arriving.

The requirements of being a college demanded that we build a library and a science laboratory. Building anything on the island was a Byzantine operation. First, no mechanical vehicles were allowed on island roads; second, to bring heavy machinery on to the college property, a county road had to be crossed from the dock to the property. For this, permission had to be obtained from the town council of the City of Mackinac Island, as well as from the county commissioners – two different entities.

Once these two permissions had been obtained, each piece of machinery – backhoe, bulldozer, cement-mixer or truck – had to be preceded by a couple of horses hitched up to it as it moved across or along the county or city road. It was the sort of delightfully archaic legislation that in most places had gone out with the red flag preceding the automobile. By a major concession, once the horses had been hitched up, the piece of machinery was allowed to proceed under its own power, but at a horse's pace! This bred constant friction between builders and the local authorities, which added heat to the comic opera proceedings.

So our fledgling college was caught between contemporary demands for change and a social environment, which had hardly changed since a century before, when the splendid Grand Hotel was built on the other end of the island by Cornelius Vanderbilt and the New York Central Railway.

In addition, we had sadly misjudged the amount of money needed to open and operate a college. Peter Howard had been serenely sure that public money for education would "be available." The strictures of the Vietnam War put an end to such largesse from Washington. We had been forced to spend a couple of million dollars on buildings for which we had not budgeted. We had the great faith and financial naiveté of enthusiasm – something we had brought with us from MRA. Difficulties were to be brushed aside, friendly warnings were suspected of being attempts to deviate us from our inspired

courses. The Board of Trustees included some men of long experience in education and industry. They told us that it was prudent to have twenty-five million dollars in the bank, or pledged, in order to start such an educational institution. But in the face of our confidence that the world was waiting a college such as ours, they hesitated to contradict our expectation with their mundane bean counting and fell silent.

By the end of the second year of Mackinac College, it was clear that even if we had the maximum number of students on campus, around eight hundred, we would still have to raise a million dollars a year to keep out of debt. The banks cast an ever-more-skeptical eye on our balance sheet; Doug Cornell dug deep into a family foundation to keep us afloat. Some generous donors helped us complete the needed buildings. But we began our third year with the knowledge that the writing was on the wall. We were heading for a financial disaster.

During this time we had started a refreshingly original approach. Interdepartmental teaching was a great success; there was a lively atmosphere of learning throughout the college; forays off campus to Detroit and Chicago had led to field work that balanced to some extent our isolation amid the snow and ice of the Great Lakes. But on the other side our isolation was making some students stir-crazy and what was an excellent milieu for study was devastating for morale. We were dying the death of a thousand cuts, as every difficulty became a problem instead of a challenge.

At this moment I was invited by my fellow deans in the Association for Academic Deans to address their convention on the topic, “An Academic Dean Looks at the Next Ten Years.” I accepted, hoping that there might still be some way the college could be rescued. My talk was unconventional, as I had not yet become sunk in the jargon of the profession, but it naturally lost some of its glamour when a few months later our difficulties became public. My colleagues were all most sympathetic and glad to receive our students and hire our faculty as the doors of the college began to close.

In addition to the financial difficulties, two philosophies regarding the college had been at work in our minds. From our academic backgrounds we drew the love of learning, free discussion, and experimentation with the new. From MRA we brought optimism, a passionate concern for students and the world, but also a need for control, for safe limits, and respect for the old. Both faculty and students were aware of this fault line running through our endeavor. Temperamentally, I was cautious about freedom, and so was out of step with those who wanted more. This created a tension which I wished away, looking on it as a sign of the failure of my leadership as dean, as a negative element in our common experience, and acquiesced in the putting on of brakes which was advised by the more active of our trustees.

Many years later, I was discussing different elements in the American character. I compared the Hobbesian philosophy of the nature of human life as “nasty, brutish and short,” which demanded control by Leviathan, with that of his almost contemporary John Locke, the philosophy of the “perfectibility of man,” which advocated freedom and agreement of the governed. One reflected the medieval view of human nature, which had

prevailed in Europe; the other, the philosophy of a future, which profoundly influenced American thought. I was in an "Either-Or" frame of mind. But the friend with whom I was discussing made a simple statement: "Why think of the opposition between them as negative? Could not that tension produce the creative impulse in life and government?" I wish I had been able to digest that thought in my days as dean.

An abortive and ill-considered attempt to create an off-campus experience for students by linking the college with the traveling program of *Sing Out* (later to become *Up With People)* which, like the college, had been a spin-off from the last MRA conference on Mackinac, failed, and our days were numbered.

The decision to close down Mackinac College was not received by the student body with great equanimity. Students met for hours to come up with proposals to save it. They met with faculty and with administration, registering their disillusion with the decision. They were not impressed with the dry facts of the finances; they wrote letters, solicited all kinds of financial aid, but the dreary facts remained. The best we could do for them was to find them places at other first-rate places of learning to complete their studies.

Thirty-one men and women who had been members of the Charter Class, the Class of 1970, decided to stay and graduate. I honor them. They undertook to save money by operating the kitchens themselves, cleaning the grounds and buildings, handling all internal business matters, while the college retained sufficient academic staff to complete their instruction (a number took no salary for that year), to set examinations, and to award the grades that would enable our students to graduate.

I myself saw to it that the courses required were available, that they were adequately staffed, and then left the island so that there would be one less salary to pay and two less mouths to feed. Enid, for whom the whole experience of the college was a mixture of high pleasure and much pain as she saw the traumas, which we all went in the search for survival, left the island with me for another chapter in our lives.

In a letter I wrote, thanking the students for their loyalty in difficult times, I said:
Not until we get away from Mackinac into the atmosphere of colleges and universities, which, for a variety of different reasons, feel that little or nothing cam be done in the way of innovation, do we realize what we undertook at Mackinac. The most important thing was that we were ready to try, rather than merely discuss, new things. Not that everything we tried to do was new; it was not. Not that we were successful for more than half the time. But that we tried and were more successful than those who never attempted anything, is our justification for having existed.

Ten months later we returned for the graduation ceremonies, and Doug Cornell and I draped the well-earned hoods around the necks of a group of young men and women who had had more than an education; they had had an initiation into a hard life and had triumphed. There have been frequent reunions of this group and of their fellows who graduated elsewhere, and they are generous in their tribute to what the college managed to do for them, even if much of it they had to do for themselves. And therein perhaps lies

the secret of a relevant education. It involves you in life and therefore stays with you for life.

So Mackinac College failed. And yet…and yet. Around it hangs, in the memory of the alumni, the sweet smell of success. "The best time of my life." "Where I learnt more than anywhere else." "Where I discovered myself." Even those few who had been summarily dismissed for their overenthusiastic interpretation of student rights have told us, "That's when I grew up!"

The imaginative forays into the Chicago and Detroit ghettos, the enforced creativity of an ice-bound campus, the convinced minority enacting educational reforms only attainable in the extreme emergency of a financial squeeze - this is what is remembered beyond all the frustrations of lack of money and unsuitable geography. The creative careers that have followed and are continuing to enrich society – these are what, in the long run, count. The fierce devotion of the Charter Class that carried them through graduation, the demand for reunions on the sacred soil of the campus – all this goes beyond, far beyond, the judgment of success or failure.

And I honor the faculty and staff, many of whom became close friends, who devoted themselves to the students and the college. They echo what the alumni say. One wrote to me, "Never have I been given such an opportunity with such eager students; never did I enjoy teaching more." Most of the faculty would have agreed. It was learning for learning's sake and teaching for the students' sake with many opportunities and few restraints, except the ones that eventually doomed the enterprise.

What had it meant to me? Beside the only sleepless nights of my life to date, it had given me the knowledge that I loved teaching; it had proved that I could capture the imagination of the student, without which the labor is in vain. I had also learnt to doff the jackboots of authority. And though I realized it only slowly, I was on the way to becoming a new human being, shedding the carapace of the past to be ready for new adventures. Enid, too, faithful, loving and devoted as a wife, became a stronger person, ready for the unknown, and we began to venture together as we never could have done without the experience of Mackinac College.

Out of this crucible no one emerged unchanged. A few found it so painful that they never wanted to see or think of the place again. But for an astonishing majority, it was among the best days of their lives.

Fresh influences that had been working on me since Buchman's death – the reflection on the nature and growth of MRA and Buchman's life, the experience of the Second Vatican Council, the return to the examined life, and the discovery of my vocation as a teacher – all this was coming together to set me on the road for whatever might come next.