

September 18, 2018

Dear Alex,

We first met in September 1986 when you interviewed me for a position in the editorial office of *Geophysical Research Letters*. At the time, I was struggling to finish my dissertation in the humanities and teaching in Rice's ESL program. You had just returned to SPAC from a stint as the director of the Space Science Laboratory at Marshall Space Flight Center and had brought the *GRL* office with you. The office was not running as smoothly as you wanted, and meeting the journal's goal of rapid publication was causing you significant stress, anxiety, and loss of sleep. You had enlisted, as a temporary measure, Lorraine's help, but were desperately looking for someone who could manage the editorial office's day-to-day operations and allow your home life to get back to normal.

Hannes Voigt contacted me about the job and arranged the interview, which took place in his office right before or right after the traditional SPAC Thursday afternoon seminar.<sup>1</sup> Because my background was in the humanities, I was clueless about what sort of research fell under the rubric of "geophysical." I remember thinking on my way over to the Space Science and Technology building that the journal probably had something to do with rocks and petroleum exploration. That didn't strike me as being very interesting and even seemed a wee bit "grubby." I didn't put it together with the space physics of which Hannes, as I knew, was a practitioner. For that fact, I had no idea exactly what it was that Hannes and the other Rice space physicists did other than that it was not the same as astronomy.<sup>2</sup>

I don't remember the details of our conversation, but your ebullient optimism and enthusiasm dispelled my reservations about taking the position, should it be offered. Hannes called me later that day and told me that the interview had gone well and that you wanted to hire me. I started work a few days later, after a follow-up meeting in the *GRL* office. My transition from grad student to a member of the SPAC staff was smooth and painless and handled with typical efficiency by Umbe Cantu. Shortly after I began, we hired a part-time assistant, Sally Hubbard.

At the time you hired me, my future was uncertain, my dissertation was languishing, and I was basically treading water on the other side of campus in what C. P. Snow, in his classic 1959 Rede lecture, called the "traditional culture" of the "literary intellectuals." Snow's description of two cultures, exemplified by physicists at one pole and literary intellectuals at the other and separated by a "gulf of mutual incomprehension," suffers like all typologies from oversimplification and lack of nuance. And yet there is also truth to it, and certainly in September 1986 I was one of those who "like to pretend that the traditional culture is the whole of 'culture,' as though the natural order didn't exist. As though the exploration of the natural order was of no interest either in its own value or its consequence."<sup>3</sup>

The move across campus, from Rayzor Hall to the second floor of the Space Science and Technology building, changed all that. For one thing, after I'd been working in the *GRL* office for three or four months, you gave me the extra push I needed to wrap up my dissertation, which the new job had given me a welcome excuse to continue to neglect. More fundamentally, the move led to an awakening of my interest in and curiosity about the "natural order," to which I had up to that point been largely indifferent

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<sup>1</sup>If I remember correctly, when I first started working at SPAC, Pepperidge Farm cookies were served at the Thursday seminars. When you became department chair a year or so later, you reviewed the department's finances and implemented some cost-saving measures, one of which was to serve cookies that were less "high end."

<sup>2</sup>I was not alone in my cluelessness. When I mentioned my new job to a friend, a specialist in the history of late antiquity, and told him that space physics appeared to have something to do with radiation belts, his response was: "Hey, whatever keeps your pants up."

<sup>3</sup>C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures*, 18th printing with an introduction by S. Collini, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

and about which I had been embarrassingly ignorant. Thanks to conversations with you and others, the papers and referee reports that passed through the *GRL* office, and the talks given at the Thursday afternoon seminars, I was introduced to a range of topics and concepts, all new to me, from the physics of everyday life to stratospheric ozone depletion to planetary magnetospheres. Rocks even lost some of their grubbiness.<sup>4</sup>

The two years I spent as a member of the SPAC staff were a happy, stimulating, and fulfilling time. They enabled me to bridge the gulf separating Snow's two cultures, the literary and the scientific, enriching my life immeasurably; and although I didn't realize it when I first set foot in the *GRL* office, they were the beginning of what would become my improbable thirty-year career as a humanities major in the field of space science. Our meeting in Hannes' office that day in September 1986 changed my life, intellectually and professionally. For that, Alex, and for the two happy years in the Rice *GRL* office, for the push to finish my dissertation, and for bringing me into the SPAC family, I have always been, and always will be, deeply grateful.

You, like me (and Margie Kivelson, with whom you share a birthday), are a Libra. According to the astrologers, the ruling planet of Libra is Venus. We all know, however, that astrology is bunk; the planet associated with you is clearly Jupiter, not Venus. When I picture the *GRL* office, I see, on the wall to the left of your desk, a large sheet of poster paper with a drawing of Jupiter by one of your grandchildren. And, of course, there is the *Physics of the Jovian Magnetosphere*, and there are the many papers about the Jupiter system co-authored with Tom Hill, Bill Sandel, and others. But what I have in mind here are those "jovial" qualities that tradition attributes to Jupiter's influence and that have characterized your approach to life and work—good humor, cheerfulness, optimism, generosity, and a philosophical bent. As you enter your tenth decade, I am confident that Jupiter, the "Bringer of Jollity,"<sup>5</sup> will continue to hold sway over your life. Happy 90th!

With profound gratitude, great fondness, and best wishes,

Bill

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<sup>4</sup>One memorable phenomenon to which I was introduced during that time proved not to be part of the "natural order." I'm referring, of course, to Lou Frank's controversial small comets. Despite numerous well-argued critical comments, it was only after Tex failed to observe them that the controversy was finally laid to rest and the explanation of them as an instrumental artifact gained universal acceptance.

<sup>5</sup>Gustav Holst gives Jupiter the epithet "the Bringer of Jollity" in his orchestral suite *The Planets*.