

## Roses and Thorns

Writing a memoir is both a challenge and a risk. Telling the story of your own life has many upsides. In my case, reporting, researching, and reflecting on the events of my past has provided insights, revelations, surprises and fewer regrets than I might have expected. I certainly now understand reactions I had to various situations better than I did. Then, creating this Attic added to that personal history. On the whole, this experience has been a significant net asset.

But there is the risk of putting your story out there for anyone to take a shot at. Doing a name check on Google turns up any number of reviews of *An Especially Good View: Watching History Happen* and links to interviews on television and radio and some articles I have written as far back as the 1970s. It also means that reviews that are critical (after all the people writing them are called critics) are also posted for posterity.

One of, if not the least flattering comments on my memoir was, ironically, in the Washington Post review, my professional alma mater. No need to describe it here beyond this excerpt:

*One problem is endemic to books of this sort. Many Washington luminaries think their memoirs are worth writing, and reading, but they are often wrong. I think of these as “Dinner with Dean” books, in which the author – with a healthy measure of self-satisfaction – describes meals he (and occasionally she) shared with the noteworthy and notorious as in “Then I had dinner with Dean Acheson (my reference to Acheson, secretary of state under Harry Truman, serves to date me but the point is still valid) Osnos falls frequently into this trope...*

So be it.

Having absorbed this insult – because let’s face it, it is insulting – I made a mental list of places I have been over the years that reasonably I might never have expected to find myself. Some did involve food. Dean Acheson was never present.

Here are some of these places and a bit of explanation. They are presented in no particular order of significance, but rather of my recollection.

Then Prince Charles’s study in Kensington Palace in the summer of 1982. This was a room he clearly used and was not adorned in gilt and gold. He and Princess Diana were still in the early and misleading glow of their marriage. Prince William had just been born. Interviewing him for an American publication was rare if not unique. The British tabloid *The Mirror* called the interview “Amazing!” I have a picture on my wall.

Nancy Reagan’s dressing room in the White House with her perfumes, make-up, and jewelry on display. And the double bed she shared with her “Ronnie.” I was working on her memoir and was shown her personal space to get an understanding of their White House circumstances.

The family apartment upstairs at 10 Downing Street when Margaret Thatcher was prime minister. I had become acquainted with her daughter Carol, and we were there for drinks. Mrs. Thatcher was not in attendance. What I recall is that the premises were cozy enough but definitely not intended for ceremonies.

A lavish banquet hosted at the Kremlin by then Russian President Boris Yeltsin for all the global publishers of his book we called *The Struggle for Russia*. Yeltsin’s literary agent, Andrew Nurnberg, had arranged for one of London’s best French restaurants to prepare the meal. The

Kremlin chefs demanded to present their own cuisine. The guests, including Yeltsin and his wife Naina, were well fed, and lubricated.

The morning after that Kremlin dinner, we had been taken to the dacha inside Moscow where Joseph Stalin had died in March 1953. We were shown around by a docent. Except for cleaning the ashtrays, I had the chilling feeling that nothing had been touched since the dictator had taken his last breath on a chaise lounge covered with a rug like blanket.

In 2000, after Yeltsin had turned over the country to Vladimir Putin, we met about his book *Midnight Diaries* at his dacha outside Moscow. There were his grandchildren's snow boots in the hall and a pile of videos on a table. Only tea was served. The former president was relaxed and relieved, I thought.

The kitchen in Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter's home in Plains, Georgia. We were working on the first of the books I did with the Carters. We were served a meal by his housekeeper in a sweatshirt. Afterwards we went into their bedroom to watch Ronald Reagan make an apologetic speech about the Iran Contra scandal. We said grace.

Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill's porch at his house "down the cape" (Cod) as it was known. I was bringing Tip the first copy of his book *Man of the House* and discussing publicity plans. Phil Donohue wanted the speaker on his very popular daytime show. Tip was resisting because Donohue might ask him about abortion. "Tom," said Milie O'Neill, "he's begging you Tom." He did appear and abortion was not raised.

Donald Trump's private plane from Las Vegas to New York in the morning in 1991 that the Wall Street Journal had reported that he was about five billion dollars in debt. We were accompanied by Marla Maples, his still secret paramour. Trump and Marla spent part of the

trip in his private quarters. There was food on that occasion; actually, a great deal of it. But no alcohol. Trump is and was a non-drinker.

The office of deposed South Vietnamese President Nguyn Van Thieu on a visit years after the North Vietnamese had taken over the country. The Independence Palace was now a war trophy for the victors. As I recall, the premises had been cleansed of anything that would have shown that this was Thieu's and where, I imagine, he finally understood that he had been abandoned by his American allies.

The cell at Auschwitz where Pope John Paul II knelt and prayed for the memory of the priest Maximillian Kolbe, who was murdered there and named a saint. It was a small cell. Only the Pope and an a few reporters were able to join. On scrolls at Auschwitz are the names of people who were killed in World War II. There are nineteen people with my last name.

The library in former Fed Chair Paul Volcker's apartment on the Upper East Side. I had brought him a first copy of his memoir *Keeping at It*. He inscribed a copy to me which said, "It's all your fault." I have a picture of him smiling as he perused the book.

On [platformbooksllc.net](http://platformbooksllc.net), the whole of *An Especially Good View* can be downloaded. The full saga is there. Repasts are not, on the whole, specifically described as such.