

## Hand-made Temporalities

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### Abstract

We all store photos from our past – often in shoe boxes tucked away up in the attic. I store my dad's hand-drawn cards - addressed to me (and later to me and / or my partner). This paper proposes the idea that my dad's personal card drawings (and associated texts) are a visual memory vault for me from various moments of my early life. Because the cards are almost always dated, they allow a type of memory time travel backwards into that exact temporality. The written text topics vary: my father may be thanking me for a phone call to my Mum; or thanking me for a gift to him; or notification of a death of some local person his town; or simply describing the weather of that weekend; or a fatherly rebuke to do something that I had forgotten to do! The rediscovery of these artifacts is a visual signpost to exactly what was happening at date in time. As we all know, this can happen in association with a particular scent or a certain song, our memories and emotions flood back to that special moment with a few moments of intense nostalgia. This paper will unpack some of my shoe boxes and present a few of my Father's cards to the reader showing the humility and grace of his early morning hand-made doodles that have lain dormant for years. Will we do the same with the myriads of emails or text messages that bombard our current uber-paced lives?

### Keywords

Hand-made drawings; Spatial temporalities; Personal memories, Family communications.

### 1. Introduction

Some of Bruce Rennie Cards and envelopes.



**Figure 1.** Hand drawn envelope received from Bruce Rennie 6<sup>th</sup> September 1991.

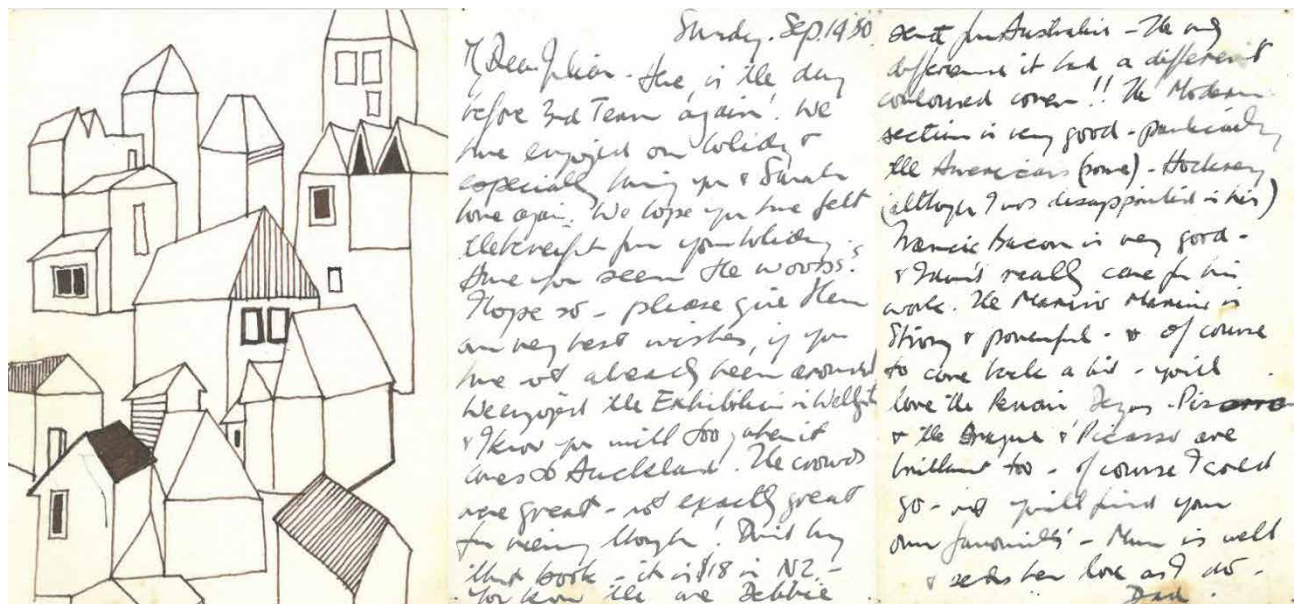


Figure 2. "Wellington Art Show" card to the author, from Bruce Rennie 14<sup>th</sup> September 1980.

14<sup>th</sup> September 1980 (Sunday) - on that day in history:

- Charles Strouse and David Rogers' musical "Charlie and Algernon", based on the book "Flowers for Algernon," opens at the Helen Hayes Theatre, NYC; runs for 17 performances.
- Dwight Clark begins NFL streak of 105 consecutive game receptions.
- #1 Song on the American Music Charts: Upside Down - Diana Ross.
- #1 Song on the British Music Charts: Feels Like I'm In Love - Kelly Marie.

On This Day Pte. Ltd., "What Happened on September 14, 1980."

#### Discussion:

The internet is a wonderful (and terrible) thing, one can go online and with just a few clicks: up pops "what happened a chosen day in history." If the reader looks at the historical events cited including the marriages, births and deaths these may mean something to her or him - but probably not? But what may affect the reader more is what was the popular song on that date.

"...music is a total constant. That's why we have such a strong visceral connection to it...Because a song can take you back instantly to a moment, or a place, or even a person. No matter what else has changed in you or the world, that one song says the same, just like that moment." (Dessen, 2006, pp. 96-7).

This paper also argues that our personal items that we save (and often forget about) can be triggers our travel-back-in-time to those events that are unique to each of us. As Orhan Pamuk suggests in his Modest Manifesto for Museums:

"Large national museums such as the Louvre and the Hermitage took shape and turned into essential tourist destinations...the[se] institutions, now national symbols, present the story of the nation - history, in a word - as being far more important than the stories of individuals. This is unfortunate because the stories of individuals are better suited to displaying the depths of our humanity...We all know that the ordinary, everyday stories of individuals are richer, more humane and much more joyful...The future of museums is inside our own homes."

(Pamuk, 2012, pp.55-7).

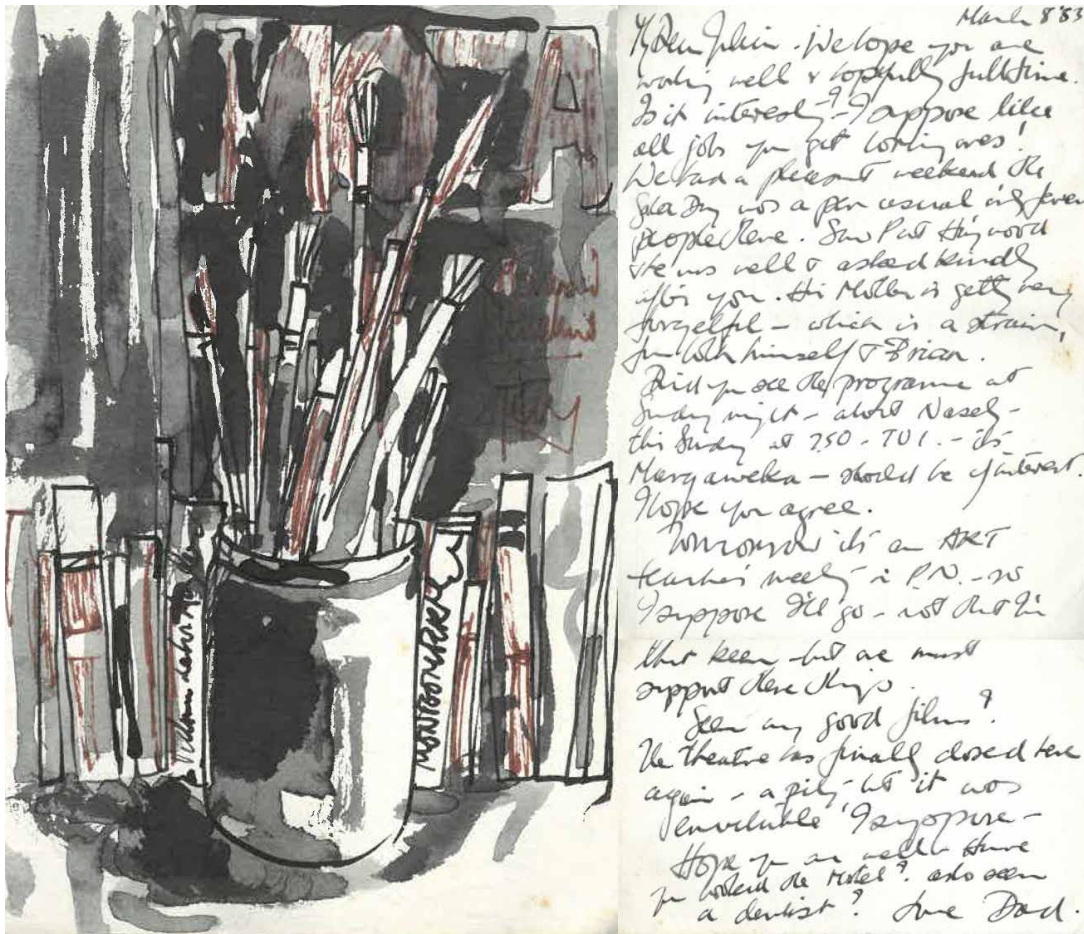


Figure 3. "Catch-up," card to the author, from Bruce Rennie 8<sup>th</sup> March 1983.

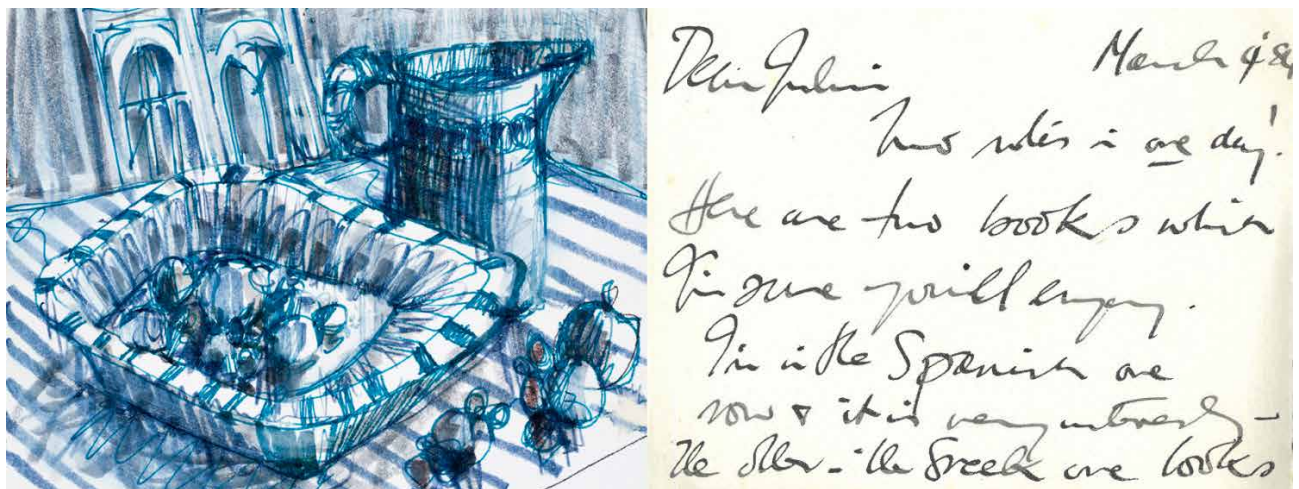
8<sup>th</sup> March 1983 (Tuesday) - on that day in history:

- President Ronald Reagan referred to the Soviet Union as an "evil empire" in a speech before the British House of Commons.
  - House Foreign Affairs Com endorses nuclear weapons freeze with USSR.
  - IBM releases PC DOS version 2.0.
  - Mark Worrell's birthday, American baseball player.
  - William Walton, English composer (Troilus & Cressida; Belhazzar's Feast), dies at [age] 80.
  - #1 Song on the American Music Charts: Billie Jean - Michael Jackson
  - #1 Song on the British Music Charts: Total Eclipse of The Heart - Bonnie Tyler
- On This Day Pte. Ltd., "What Happened on March 8, 1983."

#### Discussion:

Early March, 1983, I had just graduated from university with an honours degree in Architecture and had just started my first paid job in an Architect's office. In case the reader cannot read my father's script, I quote: "Is it interesting? - I suppose like all jobs you get boring ones." I laughed when I re-read that, (bit of a put down really, perhaps he meant 'that parts of any job having boring components?'). Anyway, what Dad wouldn't know that his friend Pat, who "had asked kindly after me," loathed me! Eight years before, he had been helping paint our house and I flipped a paint lid, (like a frisbee) towards the house, and it went rather awry, the lid skimmed just above Pat's head and smashed into a windowpane, showering him with glass! Pat never forgave me for that incident!





**Figure 3.** "Two notes in one day" card to the author, from Bruce Rennie 4<sup>th</sup> March 1984.

4<sup>th</sup> March 1984 (Sunday) - on that day in history:

- Tennis legend Martina Navratilova retains her WTA Tour Championship in NYC; beats Chris Evert 6-3, 7-5, 6-1 for her 5th overall Championship title.
- Ernest Buckler, Canadian novelist (b. 1908).
- Geoffrey Lumsden, British actor (b. 1914).
- Jewel Carmen, American actress (b. 1897).
- Shalva Mikhailovich Mshvelidze, Russian composer, dies at [age] 79.
- #1 Song on the American Music Charts: Jump - Van Halen.
- #1 Song on the British Music Charts: 99 Red Balloons - Nena.

On This Day Pte. Ltd., "What Happened on March 4, 1984."

#### Discussion:

Father was a gift giver: to me; to his wife; to my sisters; to his friends; acquaintances; and even strangers! But the giving of a gift from my dad was laden with a hidden message (or task) - for example, perhaps I was meant to write a letter in reply to thank him, or ring him up to thank him over the phone. In later years, my partner, Rose, got caught up in a hilarious "tit-for-tat exchange of gifts." She sent a gift back to my dad, (as a 'thank you'), after he had sent her one for her Birthday. But no, Dad had to have the last say and he sent her another gift as a "thank you" for the "thank you!" Crazy, but that was my dad for you.

The two books referred to in text were "Living in Spain" and a book on houses in Greece, (I now cannot find in my library). I can still remember their colourful and glossy images of interiors and landscapes containing Mediterranean umbrella pine trees, (*Pinus Pinea*), so different in shape and form to our rather tame *Pinus Radiata* of distant New Zealand.

The drawing on the card itself I still find beautiful, it always reminds me of the Cathedral in Siena, Italy, with its distinctive horizontal striped stonework, (which I would get to visit in 1986 on my first trip overseas). Something about dad's choice of the ink colour, the striped tablecloth, and the rendering of the Italian plate and Jug (*Corso De Fiori* ceramicware which adorned our house and dining table). It seems to me like evocation of another place and time, yet Dad had never ventured beyond the shores of New Zealand at that time. Given Bruce was a visual person he surrounded himself and filled our house with thousands of books, (and thousands of LPs and with their associated sleeves). Many picture books of landscapes, people, and cities, including that *Time Life: The Cities* series of books of the 1970's, (where you paid a subscription in advance and one book would arrive per month, adding to the excitement of wondering what City would be next!). LibraryThing, "Series > Time-Life: The Great Cities."

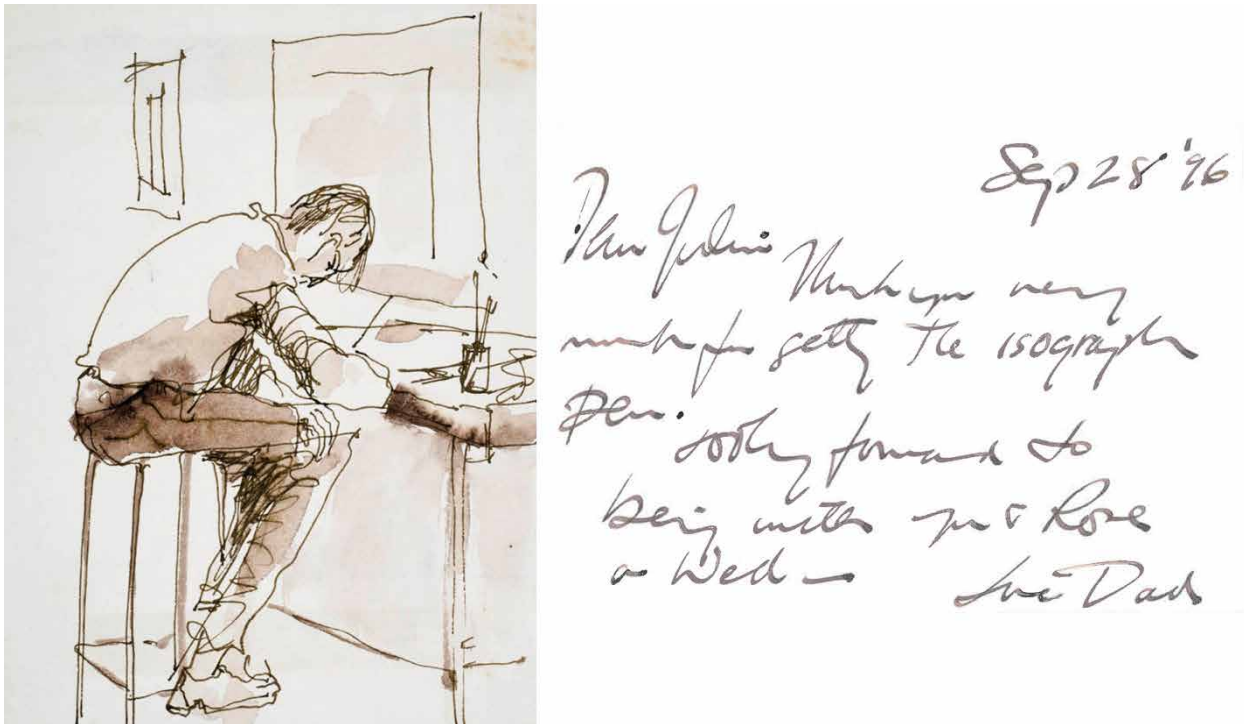


Figure 4. "Thank you for the *Isograph* pen" card to the author, from Bruce Rennie 28<sup>th</sup> September 1996.

28<sup>th</sup> September 1996 (Saturday) - on that day in history:

- 1st ODI [Cricket] played in Kenya between home team & Sri Lanka.
- Bob Gibson, American folk musician, dies at [age] 64.
- Menato Boffa, Italian race car driver, dies at [age] 66.
- August Maus, German Navy officer and World War II submarine commander., dies at [age] 81.
- #1 Song on the American Music Charts: Macarena (Bayside Boys Mix) - Los Del Rio.
- #1 Song on the British Music Charts: Ready or Not - Fugees.

On This Day Pte. Ltd., "What Happened on September 28, 1996."

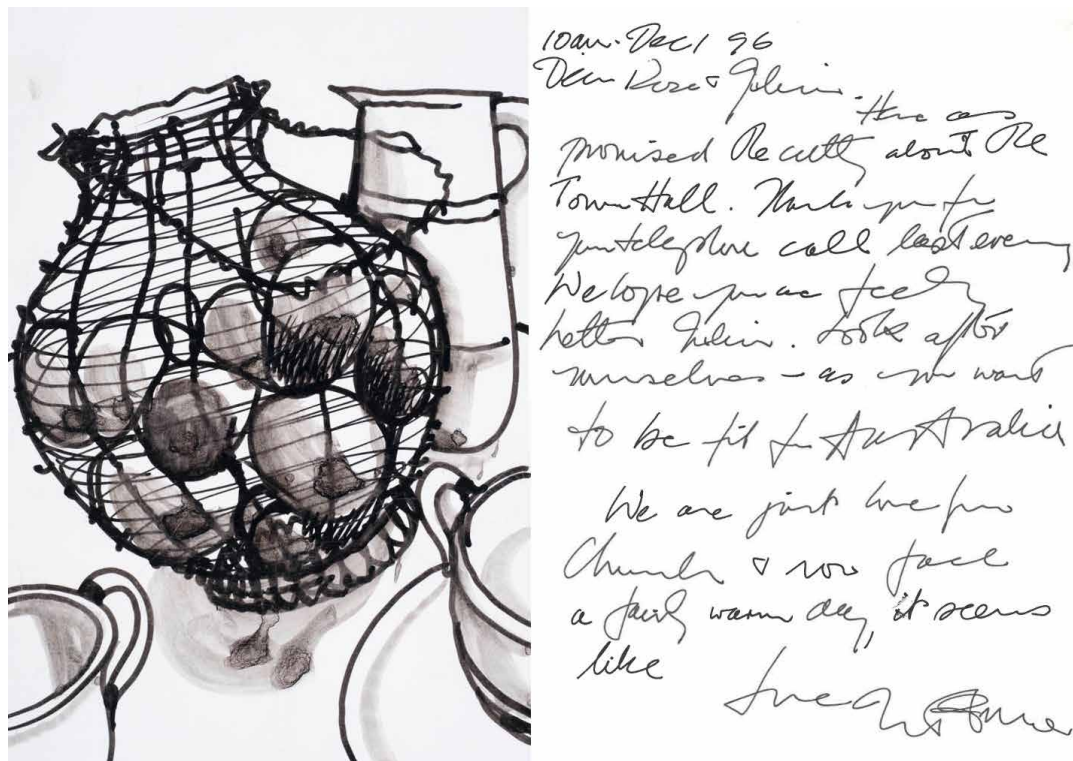
#### Discussion:

That person bent over his drawing board is meant to me! (Slaving away on my drawing board trying to earn some money as a self-employed architect!).

The deft linework of the drawing with its quick splash of water (via a soft sable brush), over the still wet penwork creating a scene well remembered by me (before computers and CAD were in vogue). To give the reader some idea of dad's speed – such a card might take 2 or 3 minutes of his

rendering time, then he would set it aside and start another one, waiting for the first card to dry and then he composed and handwrote a message to me on the inside of the folded card.

Father lived in a small country town approximately 500km from the city we lived in, so the availability of the *Isograph* draughting pens that he coveted were non-existent in that small country town. So, I would be tasked to drive into the city and purchase the correct sized nib (or pen) and send off to him via the post. Woe betide if I forgot to carry out this task; or was too busy to pick it up; or purchased the wrong sized nib/pen! The briefness of the script also now tells me, that I must have dilly-dallied in that instance. And the second sentence: "looking forward to seeing you & Rose on Wed -," tells me clearly of the threat if we don't turn as we promised, (remember it was 500km drive to stay with Mum and Dad for a few days). Because of the nature of our profession, (closely linked with the ups and downs of the building-cycle in a small country of just 3.5 million people). We would often, and at the last minute, change our minds about the trip south due to our work commitments. This was followed by a period of silence (including no phone calls) from Father!



**Figure 5.** “Catch-up,” card to the author and partner, from Bruce Rennie 10.00am, 1<sup>st</sup> December 1996.

1<sup>st</sup> December 1996 (Sunday) - on that day in history:

- Davis Cup Tennis, Malmo, Sweden: Arnaud Boetsch beats Sweden's Nicklas Kulti in closest deciding match in Cup history 7-6, 2-6, 4-6, 7-6, 10-8 to give France 3-2 victory.
- Model-actress Angie Everhart (27) marries actor Ashley Hamilton (22) at the Beverly Hills Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles.
- Flamboyant Australian rugby union winger David Campese ends his 15-year, 101 Test career at Cardiff Arms Park in Wales; Wallabies beat Wales, 28-19; Campese scored record 64 career tries.
- Babrak Karmal, Afghan politician (General Secretary 1979-86), dies at [age] 67.
- Irving Gordon, American songwriter (“Unforgettable”; “Me, Myself, And I”), dies of multiple myeloma cancer at [age] 81.
- Peter Bronfman, Canadian businessman (Edper Investments; co-owner of Montreal Canadiens, [Ice Hockey team] 1971-78; Labatt Brewing), dies of cancer at [age] 67.
- #1 Song on the American Music Charts: Un-Break My Heart – Toni Braxton.

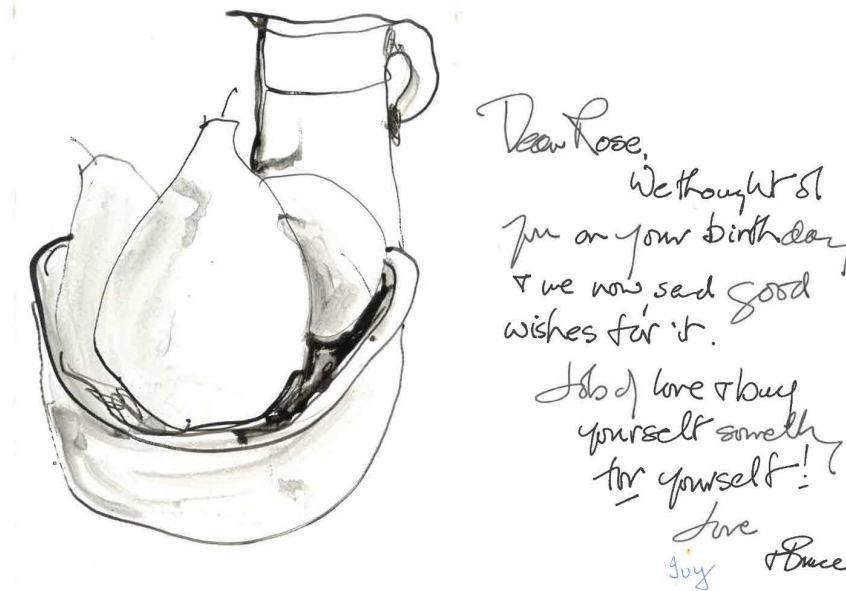
- #1 Song on the British Music Charts: I Feel you – Peter Andre.

On This Day Pte. Ltd., “What Happened on December 1, 1996.”

#### Discussion:

From the date of this card and the reference within the text, this was the time when I was employed (on contract), as a Site Architect on the Auckland Town renovation project? With the reference to me being unwell - it must have just after I whacked my head on a horizontal scaffold pole - hidden by the peak of my Safety Helmet – (“Durr.” So much for safety!). And the veiled hint of envy from Father regarding us heading off to Australia, whilst he is attending Church.

But what I really like of this drawing is delicious evocation of the wiry nature of the rendering of egg basket. The hand-eye-brain coordination of Bruce's drawing quality is clearly shown here within this rendering, culminating in thing of beauty: no AI, no CAD, no photographic trickery, just the use of a humble pen and ink, and a little bit of water via the hand of a human.



**Figure 6.** "Birthday card to my partner," from Bruce Rennie 11<sup>th</sup> January 1997.

11<sup>th</sup> January 1997 (Saturday) - on that day in history:

- Telstar 401 Satellite Fails.
- Cavan O'Connor, British singer ("I'm Only a Strolling Vagabond"), dies at [age] 97.
- Duncan Wood, English TV director and producer (Hancock's Half Hour, Steptoe & Son), dies at [age] 71.
- Helen Foster Snow, American journalist (reported from China in the 1930s), dies at [age] 89.
- Sheldon Leonard, American actor, producer and director (Danny Thomas Show, Big Eddie), dies at [age] 89.
- #1 Song on the American Music Charts: Un-Break My Heart - Toni Braxton.
- #1 Song on the British Music Charts: Become 1 - Spice Girls.

On This Day Pte. Ltd., "What Happened on January 11, 1997."

#### Discussion:

This birthday card was sent in an "Three-candlestick stock" envelope (which Dad always used for its heavy texture and overall feel of quality). Being in an envelope also allowed the insertion of cash! In this case "Rose" could use it to buy something she wanted. My father was forever gifting presents and gifts to people, even to total strangers - which were often received with amazement (that someone could

be so generous!). But within the family - he could get "brassed off" when one of his gifts did get the response he sought - so, he would then revert to money. But dad was tricky, there is an undercurrent sentiment of "let's see if you can do better than me!" He would judge you by those gifts duly bought. Gifting presents to and from my father was rather a complicated activity.

For me though, what is quite moving is single word beside Dad's name - the word "Ivy," (my Mum's name). As can be seen her handwriting was quite different to my Dads, and yet that style and that one word still sends shivers down my spine: Ivy passed on the 11 January 2000, well, we as a family agreed to "switch off" her life-support system in ICU, (following an incident in outlying country hospital just after the Y2K events, (on the cusp of 2000), and that hospital could not find any oxygen within 3 minutes after she started aspirating). That word "Ivy" takes me back in a nano-second, to all her care and loving that a Mum gives a child, all her tireless and beautiful home-cooked meals, cakes, and pikelets. (She was a great cook as well as a loving Mum). But most of all her ((HUGs)) - just like that word here, with its double brackets - extra warm, extra cuddly, nothing said, just a primal deep loving connection between a Mum and her son.





Figure 7. "4.00am card" to the author, from Bruce Rennie 27<sup>th</sup> February 1997.

27<sup>th</sup> February 1997: (Thursday) - on that day in history:

- British singer Sade arrested in Jamaica for disobeying a police officer.
- Kingsley Davis, American sociologist and demographer (coined the term "population explosion"), dies at [age] 88.
- #1 Song on the American Music Charts: Wannabe - Spice Girls.
- #1 Song #1 Song on the British Music Charts: Don't Speak - No Doubt.

On This Day Pte. Ltd., "What Happened on February 27, 1997."

#### Discussion:

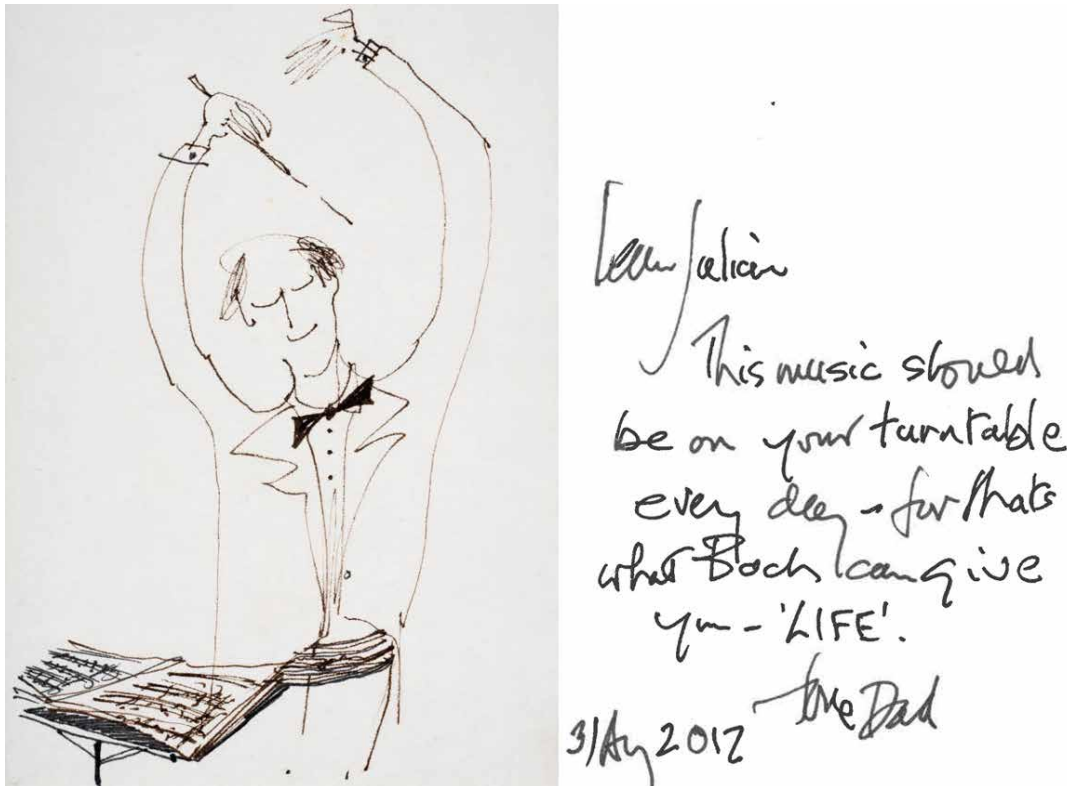
Within this card's text is the mention of a trip 'down South,' (to the South Island of New Zealand), for Bruce this was

very enthralling as he was up at 4.00am working away on this still-life image of a glass coffee plunger and associated coffee cup and saucer, fruit and a magazine. This trip was with some old friends from Teachers' Training College days and was a type of road trip (in a hired car picked up at Christchurch Airport).

The use of a hand-drawn card thanking Rose and I for a mere phone call from the night before shows how grateful he was for such a little thing.

Father probably did draw this early that morning as the reader will note how the "forged" Mum's signature, (probably not wanting to wake her up such an early hour). Compare this signature with that of Figure 6., above.





**Figure 8.** “Birthday card” to the author, from Bruce Rennie 31<sup>st</sup> August 2012 (along with a CD of J.S. Bach’s Brandenburg Concertos No’s 1,2 & 3).

31<sup>st</sup> August 2012 (Saturday) - on that day in history:

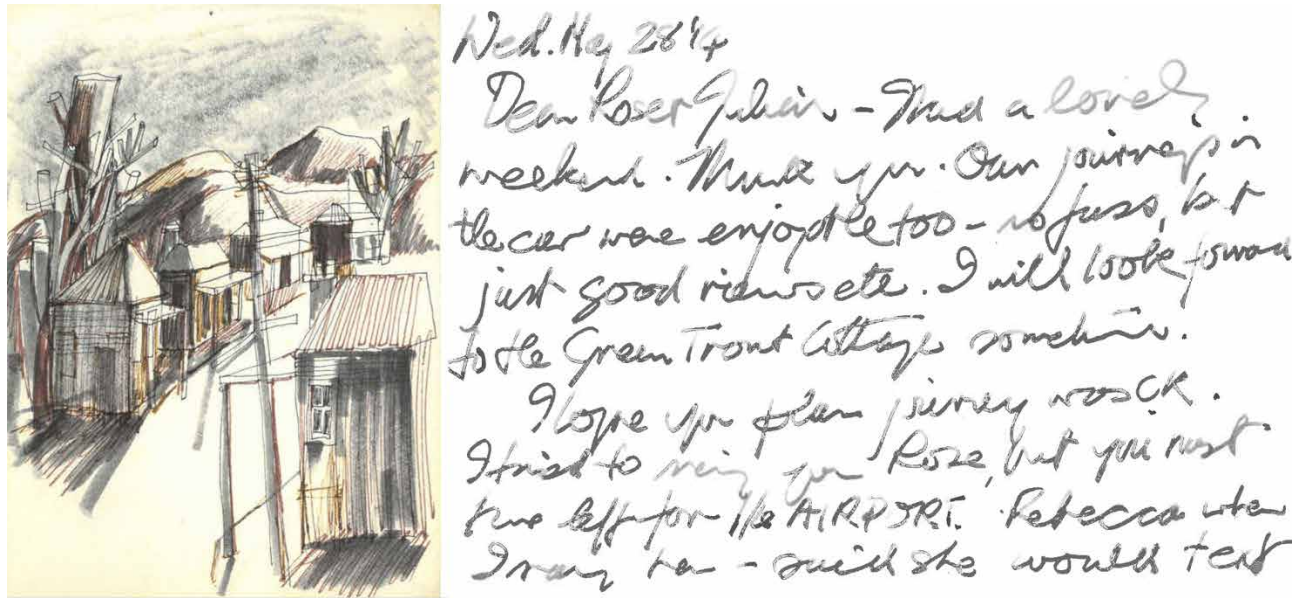
- British entertainer Max Bygraves, who had been suffering from Alzheimer’s disease, dies in Hope Island, Queensland, Australia, at the age of 89. (BBC).
- A 7.6-magnitude earthquake in the Philippine province of Eastern Samar kills at least one person. (CNN).
- Armenia suspends diplomatic relations with Hungary after Ramil Safarov’s extradition to Azerbaijan. (BBC).
- Wang Xiaoning, a Chinese dissident who was detained in 2002 with information provided by Yahoo!, is released. (BBC).
- Apple loses a patent dispute against Samsung Electronics smartphones and tablets in Tokyo, Japan. (Bloomberg)
- Roman Abramovich, the owner of Chelsea FC, wins his legal action against fellow Russian oligarch Boris Berezovsky. (*The Guardian*).
- Parliamentary elections take place in Angola. (Al Jazeera).

- Enrique Peña Nieto of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) is declared the winner of the Mexican presidential elections. (Fox News).

Wikipedia, “Portal: Current Events / 2012 August 31.”

#### Discussion:

Probably, like a lot of fathers, my father was shocked by my early taste in music. Later, when I learnt a little about the power of silence and the calming effect of Classical music (listened too when working late in the evenings on my architectural drawing board) – did I come around to my dad’s love of classical music, especially the soothing piano concertos of Mozart and Chopin. But early on I was the son rebelling of course: my mid-1970’s (secondary school years) was dominated by the likes of Suzi Quatro, (Her *Suzi Quatro Story* album was my first cassette tape I ever purchased). Then The Clash’s album *London Calling* (I saw them in concert in Auckland, February 1982), but hey: I ended up living in London from 1986 till 1990.



**Figure 9.** "Thank you for a lovely weekend" card to the author and partner, from Bruce Rennie 28<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

28<sup>th</sup> May 2014 (Wednesday) - on that day in history:

- Abdel Fattah el-Sisi is elected President of Egypt.
- David Nadien, American concert and session violin virtuoso, dies of pneumonia at [age] 88.
- James K. Randall, American composer, dies at [age] 84.
- #1 Song on the American Music Charts: All of Me - John Legend.
- #1 Song on the British Music Charts: Stay with Me - Sam Smith.

<https://www.onthisday.com/date/2014/may/28>

#### Discussion:

Dad would pass in three years after this card was sent to me, (February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017), seventeen years after his wife. Bruce's image of "shops on a Main Street" remind me of small "pass-through" type town called *Turakina* near where he lived, near where we all grew up as children. The text is rather mellow and loving - to quote dad from this card: "I had a lovely weekend. Thank you."

In dad's final years, I had worked out a tactic with my sister that we would pre-book flights to dad's hometown on alternate fortnightly weekends, (thus travelling once a

month to see our father), but dad would have one of us every second weekend for a few days company. During these visits I would make up a thermos of coffee and maybe buy a couple of buns and drive him out into the landscape. The alluvial plains and cuttings of the Rangitikei are rather sublime, and dad seemed to enjoy "being in the landscape" with me as his chauffeur, simply driving and savouring the road curves on a shingle backroad by some river, with the road dust hanging in the poplars, shadows deep over stream pools where perhaps some eels wriggled unseen. Around morning teatime dad would suggest a place to stop, and I would pullover and we would simply sit in the car, doors open, sniffing the morning air, listening to the rush of the stream water as we sipped our coffees, not saying much, nothing much needed to be said. After a lifetime of getting used to each other we didn't need to use words. Just being there in that moment, comfortable, past dramas and slights all forgotten. Father and son.

### 3. Conclusions:

The use of 'what happened on this day in the 'river of time' for each card in this paper is to help the reader to 'set the scene' in relation my dad's card dates. I like to think of time as a sort of 'travelator,' (which in airports are those horizontal moving walkways). Such a travelator can be put into reverse, and we can go back in time if we are prompted by some objects, fragrances, or perhaps a random song on the radio. The reader will notice the selections of 'what happened on this day in history' are narrow in their outlook (via a certain country that likes to 'write the news'). What was happening in your life dear reader on those same days I ponder? For me the Number 1 songs that were playing help position me more firmly on that travelator in reverse. But it is dad's hand-drawn cards that are personal, intimate, and mean something only to me.

It wasn't till later in my life, that I stumbled upon Julia Cameron's book *The Artist's Way*, and it was through this book I realized that my dad was a 'Crazymaker.'

"Crazymakers are those personalities that create storm centres. They are often charismatic, frequently charming, highly inventive, and powerfully persuasive...Crazymakers like drama...Crazymakers hate order – Chaos serves their purposes."

(Cameron, 1995, pp44-8).

If I may, I will give the reader a few examples of Bruce's Crazymaking tactics: if dad lost his wallet; or keys; or both, (inside our family home) the whole household had to basically stop what they were doing and help find the items. Even though it was his stuff, and he lost it (he wouldn't do the same for us if lost ours by the way!).

If my dad sent a letter to me and he forgot to put the correct address on the envelope, (or left off the street number) – it would all my fault that his mail hadn't reached me!

Later, when we opened a private mailbox in the city for our business mail, Father would send his mail there, and the Postmaster got to know us via Dad's decorated envelopes (and packages) quipping: "Julian, your dad has been busy again!" That same Postmaster later became a client of ours,

and I arranged one day for my dad to send him a card (and envelope) directly to him. He was gobsmacked and thrilled all at the same time. His smile was priceless as he showed it to me.

By sharing my father's penwork here (of just a few card his many cards) that he took the time to render, to add a brief handwritten message, and slip that card into an envelope (also often receiving the 'treatment'), then pop in the post to me was special to us within our family unit. Dad's drawing talents combined with his distinctive script, they take me back to another time, a personal temporality, that won't have the same power for the reader. (Although, I also know of a family friend of Bruce's that still has a board of many of Dad's cards pinned up in her house as reminder of their friendship).

*PERHAPS YOU THE READER MAYBE PROMPTED TO CLIMB YOUR OWN ATTIC STAIRS AND SEARCH OUT YOUR SAVED LETTERS / CHILDHOOD DRAWINGS AND BE TAKEN BACK IN TIME FOR A FEW (PERHAPS) INTENSE MOMENTS OF PERSONAL MEMORIES, REFLECTION AND REVERIE. ENJOY.*

### Acknowledgements:

If the reader wants to find out more about Bruce Rennie's art, in 2018, I commissioned (in 2018), the writer and journalist Carly Thomas, and we produced a book entitled: *Verve: 60 years of the Work of Bruce Rennie*.

ISBN: 978-0-473-45186-8



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