



ACADEMIC OZ AND THE INSIGHT
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A magical wizard, thinly disguised as one of India's leading scientists, reached out and tapped me:

"You."

"Me???"

"Yes, you – with the hair. You could spend a year in Academic Oz."

"Where's that?"

"It is a land called Wiko."

Mystified, I listened as he described Elysian fields of intellectual treasures and personal pleasures: keen minds, sharp wits, a thousand and one cultural delights – and the librarians. Slack-jawed, I applied.

Months of worry preceded acceptance, which precipitated months of half-believing anticipation. What would it be like? Who would be the other Fellows? Could I fit in? Could I accomplish what I wanted to do? Why me???

Papers, books, and clothing were packed two weeks before departure. Domestic valuables (the few that I own) were taken elsewhere as I prepared my house for safekeeping by my son. Another son helped take my belongings to be shipped. All three of my children, now grown, gave hugs and well wishes. I departed.

Berlin in late summer dazzles a newcomer. It bustles by day and pulses by night. Twilight lingers long – but not as long as the patrons of sidewalk cafés. The Grunewald forest is alive with nature and also nature lovers, who are not the same as bird and flower lovers in the States. I hit the streets and took to the trails. I walked from Wallotstraße to Alexanderplatz. By October I had walked over much of the city. With the luxury of time, I came to know Berlin.

I had arrived in September to learn German, as I spoke none. I was not alone. A room of professors learning names of vegetables is not a pretty sight. Shared humbling is unifying, however, and we came to know and like one another. Once the academic year began, our scholarly community was built on that foundation.

In late September I spent a week in St. Petersburg to attend a symposium on life cycles in social insects. Discussions there stimulated my thinking, and the contrasts of that city with the one where I had landed reaffirmed my enthusiasm for the year to come. New Fellows arrived; the Dienstagskolloquium was inaugurated. I settled down and began to read.

Reading as my primary engagement lasted scarcely three weeks. Dissatisfaction with the passiveness – not to mention the content of what I was reading – necessitated a changed mode of operation. On October 23rd I opened a new computer file. On page one I wrote: “A Book Yet to be Titled.” Control Enter. On page two, I dedicated the book to my children. Control Enter. Page three: “Table of Contents.” Control Enter. “Preface.” Paragraph. I was on page four in scarcely a minute, and the writing from there wasn’t hard – it flowed. Preface, Acknowledgements, Introduction – I was into Chapter One

within the week. This was my chance – the chance of a lifetime – and I wasn't going to squander it.

The context for my motivation was embodied in the tale that opened my Dienstagskolloquium. Thirty years ago I had an insight. I envisioned the gateway to knowing the evolution of insect sociality. I knew the idea was good, but Edward O. Wilson told me it was not. Or, rather, his words said it was not, but his body language said it was. Soon thereafter I moved to St. Louis to take a temporary job. My vision for my not-yet-launched career was ten to fifteen years of research, then wrap it up in a book. After that, generalize the solution. Life, of course, intervened. St. Louis became far from temporary. Marriage and divorce bracketed three wonderful children, to whom I devoted much of my 1980's and 90's. I became mired in an academic department in which I was moved ever more to the periphery. By the millennium I was beset by growing worry that I might never find the time, motivation, or energy to write the book. Then came the wizard; now I was in Oz. This was my chance. There was no way I was going to blow it.

My basement lair in Villa Jaffé had a ground-level window above my keyboard. A bird feeder assured constant stimulation by day; candles in five colors danced on my windowsill by night. And as I wrote I discovered something wonderful – the European plan: take time away from your labors. Once again, I headed into the city and into the forest. Restaurants, bars, wild boars. How many operas – twelve? Fifteen? The Pergamon with Egon Flaig; Picasso, Matisse, arts nouveaux and deco; *Archaeopteryx lithographica*. A Lebanese restaurant in Prenzlauer Berg, a woodwinds shop in Mitte, used clothing shops in Kreuzberg: John Rieser thinks there is nowhere in Berlin I haven't been. All the while, I kept writing.

Noise in the Villa Jaffé kitchen meant that Stefan Litwin was there. Time for a break. At four one afternoon we sat (no, Amy, not in our boxers) laughing over wine and cheese. At 9:30 that night he was in white tie and tails, fronting the BSO in the sold-out Schauspielhaus. Plainly, this was not normal life.

A favorite meal was the last Thursday before the holidays. I sat beside Bernard Jussen. We leaned close in conversation, pursuing loose ends from his Dienstagskolloquium. As I inclined my head to listen, I looked round the table and enjoyed the sight of three other pairs of in-leaning conversations. A moment later I stepped away for wine and cheese, and as I looked over the room I was stunned. Every person was in conversation, and every conversation was a pair, leaning close to hear and be heard. No conversation of three or more could function above the din. I looked and smiled in amazement – as a class, we had arrived. The night wore on; people drifted away; conversations merged into a final gathering

at the table for eight. Les Chefs came out from the kitchen and joined us. Wine passed freely. Thanks; toasts; candle light and good cheer.

A favorite day was a Sunday in winter. Stefan played a morning concert in the Sophien-säle. The sky was gray; it was bitterly cold. Previously fallen snow whirled through the narrow streets of Mitte, carried aloft by bone-chilling wind. Every Hollywood-inspired vision of Europe in wintertime was abundantly fulfilled. I wished such weather could have lasted for months.

Winter transitioned into perpetual never-spring. New short-term Fellows arrived. At 2 a.m. in never-spring, fog curls around Grunewald streetlamps that look like gaslights of a century ago. Mallards fly in darkness and land on lakes still ringed with ice. In late April, a nightingale sings by the rabbit bridge.

Also in April, *The Insight* came. Thirty years of work fell instantly into place. Everything fit. Better still, *The Insight* arrived at the right moment to include it in my text. No re-writes; no edits. It integrated smoothly from where I was into where I was going. At the same time, *The Insight* changed everything. Hereafter we will see insect sociality in totally new light. Best of all, the insight from thirty years before – the idea that launched this quest – was at the center. I had looked in the right place at the very beginning. Now I understood how and why it was the right place to have looked.

In May I spent time in Florence – in an office at Museo Zoologico “La Specola”, in high tech labs, and at field sites for wasp studies in the Tuscan countryside. I scarcely saw the city. Colleagues then came for a seminar at Wiko. I went home for my daughter’s graduation. Next came June and, at long last, spring. I kept writing.

In early July, a colleague whose work had sparked *The Insight* came to Wiko for a week of writing. We drafted *The Insight* into a manuscript that passed through more than thirty revisions on its way to publication. *The Insight* has sparked research plans and proposals. My academic future is assured – and it will assuredly be busy and deeply engaging.

On July 18th, at 7:55 in the evening, I pronounced “finished” a manuscript that now had a name: “The Evolution of Social Wasps.” At 253 text pages it was long enough to be a book but short enough to be one that might be read. With 767 references, I intended it to be taken seriously. The librarians deserve co-authorship.

The end of July was time for rest and reflection. Wildlife and scenery in the Danube delta are a naturalist’s delight – bee eaters, rollers, gulls and terns in the marshes, nesting storks in the villages. I explained my enthusiasm by saying that there are no storks in America.

“Then where do babies come from?” :o)

What can one do after Wiko? Life can never be the same. On my third day home I cut my hair – it is gone. In my third week home I bought a car – a silver convertible. In my third month home I bought a house – in two years it will be a century old. None of these can fill the void. I had come to Wiko to work on a book and perhaps, oh possibly, just maybe, to in some small way change my life. I could not have imagined my successes. I wrote a book from start to finish and in the process had an insight that will reconfigure my discipline; I learned a city and a bit of a language; I lost 10 kilos; I have memories to last a lifetime. Thank you, my fellow Fellows. Thank you, Wiko staffers – one and all. Thank you deeply, lastingly, forever.

Now at home, I look forward to spring when my wasps will fly again. Envisioned research excites me. In the fall I will begin a year away at a major Midwestern university. Another year in another place is something to look forward to, but it can never be the same. Academic Oz can never be equaled; it will never come again. Together with my years at Berkeley and Harvard, it was and will remain one of the best years of my life.

Works produced, 2003-04:

- Seal, J. N. and J. H. Hunt. 2004. "Food supplementation affects colony-level life history traits in the annual social wasp *Polistes metricus* (Hymenoptera: Vespidae)." *Insectes Sociaux* 51: 239–242.
- Hunt, J. H. and J. M. Carpenter. 2004. "Intra-specific nest form variation in some Neotropical swarm-founding wasps of the genus *Parachartergus* (Hymenoptera: Vespidae, Epiponini)." *Journal of the Kansas Entomological Society* 77: 448–456.
- Hunt, J. H. and G. V. Amdam. 2005. "Bivoltinism as an antecedent to eusociality in the paper wasp genus *Polistes*." *Science* 308: 264–267.
- Hunt, J. H., in manuscript. *The Evolution of Social Wasps: History, Dynamics, and Paradigm*.