

**Mark Hurt – Personal Writing SIG
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Elegy for an Old Soul

Bavaria in the late 1940s was a blank slate. The Nazi regime had been toppled in this part of Germany and was under American military control. Few knew the threats the Soviets were posing to the security and resources of this part of Germany. All of the original institutions of government and civic society had been overthrown. To the young Marilyn, however, the world seemed almost Edenic. Though she was only three years old, she remembered the sensations of this time vividly. The pure, alpine snowflakes melting upon her head engulfed her in a winter wonderland. Nature and the world around it seemed vast and limitless. While her parents and friends realized she was extremely precocious, she did not realize she was exceptional. Despite her young age she could translate from German to English and back for conversations between the local population and her parents. When she attended services at the nondenominational military chapel, she frequently reflected how this gave her a sense of a vast and limitless community of humanity.

Several years later, after a brief return to Texas, her father was again stationed in Germany. Marilyn, who was now slightly older, embraced the opportunity to better understand life and civilization. Therefore, she decided to memorize the entire dictionary. Asking her about this many years later, she quietly and calmly stated this task was not daunting but comforting.

As an adult when she was an esteemed physician, she always spoke in a humble and understated way when a variety of topics spoke to her thirst for knowledge and understanding. She frequently asked, "How often do we speak of or talk of some famous person or celebrity?" Her point was that fame is fleeting and we should understand we are just one small speck in the long course of history. After she passed away, one of her coworkers at the Scottish Rite Pediatric hospital where she worked said, "She knew no strangers and the children, she loved them all." It will always be the tenor of her voice and her demeanor which was the key method for communicating her equanimity.

Camp Randall Memorial Arch, Madison, Wisconsin, May 13, 2023

Standing tall, my chiseled and sculpted structure has endured for over a century. My foundations were set 50 years after the first volunteers gathered at this once tranquil and sylvan hillside above the lake the Ho-Chunk, Fox, and Sauk nations called Mendota. Elderly men who had trod this earth as one of 70,000 volunteers to save the Union consecrated my birth. My granitic arch stands as a sentinel to the entrance of their old camp. Only five years after my dedication, a great colosseum for celebration of sport was erected on the Civil War campground site.

I have long stood as a witness to a long procession of graduates going to the commencement exercises at that massive stadium edifice. When I was young, the students still had a tradition of reverence for the service and sacrifices of those who had hallowed and honored this piece of earth. By the time I was 50, compassion and pity for the anguish and travail of those courageous citizens of the past who treasured liberty was being forgotten. As my stone gradually erodes, my significance disappears into the darkness. Recent students follow their passion rather than learning T.H. Huxley's first lesson of education: "The ability to make yourself do the thing you have to do when it ought to be done whether you like it or not." They know the arch only as an anonymous landmark to guide visitors to the stadium grounds. In this era where history is continuously being rewritten to serve as a source of power for a self-serving modern professoriate, truth withers into dust. I have grown too old in the service to this state. Stone decays too slowly, for my purpose is lost.