

## Introduction

I picked up a couple of scraps of paper on a window ledge behind me at a restaurant in Scottsdale, Arizona. I'm tidy. The scraps of paper were two post-it notes with a few words on them. I was going to throw them away, but I read them first. I decided to find the story behind the words written on the scraps of paper. This is the story.

Or perhaps just the beginning of the story.

# Scottsdale

Posted Monday, March 24, 2014

March 12, 2014. I started writing this as a blog post but I got carried away. I may go back and try to break it up into pieces and post it as a series but I really don't know what to do with it. I am trying to make sense of something I was in the middle of—and those are always the hardest things to really understand. I almost started it by typing “Dear Diary.” Seriously. But I got over it.

I found two slips of paper in the bottom of a purse I had stopped using years ago. When I finally get around to cleaning out a purse I look at everything before I throw it away.

Who am I kidding? I am a hoarder from a long line of hoarders. I seldom throw anything away. I thought I recognized the paper as a post-it note from GoDaddy where I used to work. The pre-printed banner on the note says “We made it happen again!” There is also a banner down the right side that says “FY '06.” That was the year we were looking at doing the IPO. I figured the slips were old grocery lists and I was actually about to throw them away when I noticed the handwriting was not mine.

Weird.

But then hoarders hang on to things and forget why they hung on to them.

The first note was obviously a grocery list and note worthy only because the handwriting was not mine—and I was fairly certain I knew whose handwriting it was. (*Note worthy?* I love puns. Was that a pun? Oh, well, it doesn't really matter what it was. I just love playing with words.) The first note said:

Baby Powder  
Water

I would have thrown it away even though it was not my handwriting (and therefore muse worthy) were it not for the companion note. It started out as a continuation of the shopping list or seemed to but then it obviously veered off into something else:

Orange / Exasol  
Kevin B / Dante = Discovery  
Form  
Fairey

The “E” in front of “xasol” is actually a bit of a guess. It looks like the symbol for the Euro with a capital “E” written over the top of it. “Fairey” is either a misspelling of *fairy* (or *faery* or *faerie*) or my transcription error. I'm going with fairy.

I honestly don't remember stashing the notes into my purse, but I know when they got there. I was using that purse back in 2007 when I last saw her. It was the first time I had seen her in ten years, and it was a bittersweet reunion. Back in college when I met her I had no doubt we would remain close for the rest of our lives.

I never knew her actual ethnicity or even nationality—but then, I never asked. My kind of college students never do. All I knew for certain was that she was in graduate school at Jena University in Germany and must have been pursuing a degree in something like political science. Her name was Margeaux or Margot. That might even have been a nickname she got from her American friends. She certainly seemed to fit the type—blonde, beautiful, free spirit, free with an opinion about everything and free to join every cause *du jour*. All I know for certain is that she had enough of something to get Jena University to contact Dartmouth College during my freshman year to ask if I would be interested in a year of study abroad at Jena during my sophomore year. I am a champion “go with the flow” kind of gal but I at least had the sense to ask why. Truth to tell, I partly asked just to seem witty because the work study guy behind the desk was good looking. My dad always said “you never get a second chance to make a first impression.” With the usual American princess insecurity about my appearance, I never trusted my looks to make that first impression. So, I usually tried to come across as witty. I would have preferred sophisticated or cool or aloof or even bitchy smart but I didn’t trust those skill sets either.

He handed me a form that explained how to apply and I started to walk out, then stopped and did a half turn with a hair flip (I hoped it would flip anyway and not end up in my mouth) and said, “I suppose I should ask. Why me?”

He laughed and said, “I was hoping you’d ask. Get this: it is because of your name: Frances Lieber. That’s a new one to me.”

I was too flummoxed to think of anything witty or cool to say; so, I turned around and walked out without a word.

“Dork.”

That’s my favorite word for myself.

That was February 1997. I started at Dartmouth in the fall of 1996. According to the application, my “year” in Germany would begin in August 1997 and end in May or June of 1998 depending on what all I wanted to do.

I signed up.

What the hell.

I asked Jena University the same thing: “Why me?” I was told that Jena University had searched for descendants of Francis Lieber because he was once a student at the university and a scholarship had been created in his name for his descendants but none had ever applied. I had no idea who he was or if I was related to him. Apparently, they knew more about me than I did in that regard. Kind of creepy when you stop to think about it—which I really didn’t back then. In hindsight, I should have. I didn’t find out that Margot (easier to spell than Margeaux and she did not really turn out to fit the type) was behind it all until she arranged for me to meet her at a wine and cheese party a week or so after I got to Jena.

Jena University is in Nuremburg, Germany. The only thing I knew about Nuremburg was that it was where the war crimes trials were held after World War Two. I watched the movie with Spencer Tracy, Burt Lancaster and James T. Kirk right after I completed the online application. I read some reviews before I watched the film. The critics were not kind to Burt Lancaster because his German accent was

weak. Since I didn't have the critical chops to evaluate his accent all I could do was judge his performance for its impact on me and I've got to say he blew me away. I thought he was great throughout the film but his testimony as he admitted his guilt and the guilt of the German people in general was amazing. But what do I know? Tracy was great in that understated way of his, and Shatner was actually under control and, for once, not trying too hard to show off.

That film and a crash course in German the summer before I left was the sum total of my preparation for my first sojourn "abroad."

Or total sum...

I was handed a German language biography of Francis Lieber when I arrived at Jena. They obviously had a mistaken impression about my fluency in German—either that or they really didn't care. I spent my first night alone in my room translating it. Housing was with a local German family. They all spoke English better than I did, but they had been instructed by the university to speak only German to me. I was hoping their discipline wouldn't last long.

Remind me to say something about the discipline of the German people.

The biography said Francis (or Franz) Lieber was born in Berlin, fought in the Prussian army in 1815 and was wounded at the battle of Waterloo.

I had an ancestor who fought against Napoleon!

He tried to get into the University of Berlin but he was part of the Berliner Burschenschaft opposed to the Prussian monarchy and he was denied admission. He enrolled at Jena in 1820 but he stayed there less than a full year. While he was there, however, he wrote a fairly famous dissertation in mathematics.

I had an ancestor who was smart!

He must have liked the military or was looking for career advancement or just liked joining causes because he soon volunteered to fight in the Greek War of Independence. He ended up back in Germany and in prison for being a revolutionary, and while he was there he wrote a collection of poems entitled Wein- und Wonne- Lieder (songs of wine and bliss).

I had an ancestor who was a poet and wrote "girly" poems about wine and bliss!

He got out of prison and was in England for a while before ending up in Boston where he helped start a "gymnasium" which was some kind of school combining swimming (and other athletic training) and academic education. It was Greek to me. (I said I like making puns or things that are like puns—but I really wanted to point out that my ancestor was apparently participating in some sort of attempt to revive the ancient Greek gymnasium. You did know that Plato was a tremendous wrestler—right?)

I had an ancestor who is the reason I had to pass a swimming test when I matriculated at Dartmouth! (At least they stopped making students do it in the nude by the time I got there.)

Francis stayed involved in education and met a bunch of famous people. He ended up in one of the Ivy League colleges—Columbia—as a professor of history and political science, and he taught at the

Columbia law school. He sided with the North during the American Civil War (glad of that) but had a son who joined the Confederates. During the Civil War, he did the thing he shows up for in Civil War history books: he wrote the “Lieber Code” which was adopted by other military organizations and would become the basis of the first laws of war.

I am descended through his third son, Guido Norman Lieber. He graduated from Harvard law (obviously, I come from a long line of Ivy League academics). During the Civil War he served in the Union army, climbing the ladder as a career army lawyer until he became Judge Advocate General of the U.S. Army and advised President William McKinley during the Spanish-American War.

Depending on your perspective, I had a lot to live up or down to.

I am not going to say a great deal about my experience as an American abroad (or a broad abroad as my German friends used to say about me) except to admit I was a disaster whose only useful function was to serve as a source of amusement for Europeans. My German nickname was Huckleberry. I was about to book a flight back home when a student from Jena came by my German family’s residence and invited me and my hosts to a party to introduce me to university people as the first Francis Lieber scholar. I suspected a trap but I was desperate for social interaction and I showed up anyway.

Margot was the unofficial Master of Ceremonies and/or my handler. She took care of me without being condescending or patronizing. She told everyone I was Sarah Jessica Parker (and swore an oath to me that I looked just like her—how could I not love her?). Best of all, she introduced me to Austrian Emmenthaler cheese and a white wine called Silvaner from the Franken region of Germany. Of course I thought it was Swiss cheese and some kind of Riesling. I did not become a wine and cheese sophisticate until much later in life.

Like I said, I thought I was going to remain great friends with Margot but I only saw her once after I left Germany. I was living in Scottsdale, Arizona, working for GoDaddy, and it was sometime early in 2007, almost ten years since I first met her in Germany.

I was Executive Assistant to one of the attorneys serving as in house counsel for GoDaddy in general but really for Bob Parsons, the CEO and owner of GoDaddy. I was working 100 hours a week. GoDaddy was planning on doing a public stock offering. The mere possibility of a GoDaddy IPO was generating a lot of attention. There was speculation that Parsons intended to use some of the proceeds from the IPO to provide financing for another tech startup. He had already done it once before when he used proceeds from selling his financial software company to fund the startup of GoDaddy.

Parsons is a genuine member of the American rags to riches archetype. His family was poor. He joined the Marines and served in Vietnam where he was wounded. After he left the military, he went to college, became a CPA and then created finance and accounting software called Money Counts (think Quicken). It was part of his company called Parsons Technology. In 1994, he sold Parsons Technology to Intuit (which owns Quicken) for \$64 million. In 1997, he founded Jomax Technologies which later became GoDaddy. By 2005, GoDaddy had become the largest ICANN-accredited registrar on the Internet and had more domain names registered than any other single company.

We brought Lehman Brothers in to manage the IPO. We were expecting to raise more than \$100 million. We filed the S-1 registration statement in May and everything was green to go. For reasons which were

never made public, a few months later Bob Parsons announced that he had withdrawn the company's IPO filing.

In 2007, Margot called me out of the blue (I still have no idea how she got my cell number) and asked if she could take me to dinner. I said sure and gave her directions to my favorite Italian place: Arrivederci Ristorante. I stay away from the chains and this place was established by master chef Franco Cacace who actually did learn to cook in Italy.

She showed up 20 minutes late and started out speaking German. By the time she got there, I was two and a half glasses of wine into the evening with nothing more than a piece of bread to nibble. She was pissing me off and my impulse control was barely functioning. I was on my home turf. Most importantly, I was no longer a frightened sophomore overwhelmed by insecurities and personality disorders. I had learned to embrace my personality disorders.

So, I yelled at her: "Shut up, drink your wine and speak American." She closed her mouth with a smile, raised her glass to me, settled back into her chair and drank half her glass of wine before starting over.

"You are working for GoDaddy, yes?"

I nodded.

"Still no boyfriend, yes?"

It might seem odd to you that these two statements (they were not questions despite the question tag at the end) were the first understandable things she communicated to me after a decade apart, but I did not expect anything different. This was her idea of chit chat. I did not respond to either statement since she clearly did not need confirmation and posed a statement/question of my own I knew she would not answer:

"Someday, you are going to have to explain to me how it is that you always know so much about me. Is this stuff published somewhere I don't know about?"

"Yes."

I was wrong. She did answer.

I should explain that, despite my command that she speak American, each "yes" was really *ja* but I do not want to invoke any caricature of a German that might arise in the reader's mind. Margot is no type.

I looked at her quizzically.

Is that phrase a cliché? Can it be a cliché if it is precisely the accurate and correct thing to say? Is "accurate" and "correct" redundant? I think not. Something can be accurate from a semantic point of view but not the correct thing to say based on etiquette or some other cultural perspective. I will answer my own question. The phrase was both cliché and accurate. Whether it is correct depends on my intended audience... and I am a bit fuzzy in that regard. So, I will leave it up to you even though I do not know exactly who you are.

She smiled enigmatically and said, "I always keep track on my girls."

Here we go again: cliché but not as accurate this time. I am being "writerly" and a good editor would have the right to challenge this one. By the way, since I hope you are now paying closer attention, she really did say "track on" and not "track of." At least, that is how I remember it and I really don't want to inject an unreliable narrator issue into this reading for you. You will have issues enough without that one.

I asked the one question I should have asked back in Germany:

"Who are you, really?"

"That is not important. I want to know why Parsons pulled the bolt on the IPO."

"Plug. Pulled the plug."

She must be rattled or sleep deprived or something because she never makes mistakes with American idiom. I would be more likely to screw up an idiomatic phrase than she would.

She did not take the bait: "You did not answer the question."

"You did not ask a question. You said you wanted to know why he pulled the bolt but you did not ask me if I knew why or if I would tell you why and please don't because I cannot tell you."

"Can not or will not?"

"The difference matters to me but it does not matter to you, does it?" Another statement posed as a question.

"*Doch*, it does matter to me."

I should have seen that coming.

I used the German *doch* because there is no English word for it. Germans are logical and precise. She wanted me to be very clear that she did not accept the statement I had made. So, she responded by saying, in effect, "I do not accept your proposition: the difference does matter to me."

"I can not because I am legally and ethically bound to not disclose anything I know or even whether I know anything"

She growled: "I hate English. The rules say to not split the infinitive but you cannot say 'to disclose not anything' and it seems less precise if you say 'not to disclose' because the 'not' should be paired with 'disclose.' If it were not for Shakespeare I would say we should simply do away with the language altogether."

"Who is **we**?"

I was playing but I was also caught up in justifiable paranoia.

“Who *are* we. *Dummkopf*.”

No need to explain why I kept the German.

“*Nein*. Bitch. I am asking who the word ‘we’ references. In other words, ‘To whom is the word *we* referring?’”

She chortled (a good word in this case) and then sighed: “I have missed you, sweetheart. You are good at this and fun with whom to play.”

“Oh, brother.”

We talked until they closed the restaurant and then we went back to my place and drank more wine, played more word games and danced around the topic she really wanted to discuss. She never got me drunk enough to disclose anything—at least not that I remember. I did find out why she was interested.

I think.

She was looking for angel funding for a tech company that she said had developed a new kind of in-memory database. She claimed most people did not understand how revolutionary the approach was. At one point I asked her why it was so important to her.

She replied by saying, “It is important to you.”

“Seriously? I could care less about it except I care about you (for some reason) and you care about it.”

“*Dummkopf*. It is the reason I brought you to Jena.”

I tried to get more out of her than that but she distracted me with more word play. I can’t help myself. It is one of the personality disorders I have embraced.

I passed out at some point that night or morning and when I woke up she was gone. I looked for a note from her or I might never have found the notes she scribbled and left behind. I admit I am a slob in addition to being a hoarder. Let’s just say it would be easy for two slips of paper to go missing in my place for a decade or more.

I must have shoved them in my purse... and then promptly forgot about it.

I decided to figure out what the notes meant as though the note was a poem deserving of close explication. I mean I do have a liberal arts education from an Ivy League college. I tackled the easy stuff first—anything that might have actual history I could discover through research.

Assuming I was correct in transcribing the word as “Exasol” I looked it up and found an interesting history—one that stirred recollections from my long evening with Margot in Scottsdale. Exasol is a German company founded in 2000 as a spin-off from a parallel computing project begun at... wait for it... Jena University. Dr. Michael Gutzmann is primarily credited with developing the technology behind Exasol but he had help from Falko Mattasch. The names stirred some vague recollection. Both men were

at Jena when I was there in 1997-1998. It is possible I met them with Margot's help (she was always introducing me to people—"Here is my bright, beautiful American ingénue"), but I could not shake off the cobwebs. Gutzmann developed a novel approach to database management, an approach using massively parallel computer systems maintaining data in memory.

Yes. You are correct. We should assume this is the company Margot wanted Angel funding for when we met in 2007. At least it is a working theory.

The company begun by Gutzman was tottering along trying to develop a clientele and did get the angel funding it needed in 2008. Dr. Rouven Westphal was the angel. From 2000 to 2003, he built up the most successful business angel network from scratch in Germany, providing startup capital for the formation of more than 50 companies with a total volume of over €50 million, while privately investing in ten information technology companies. (As I understand it, to be an angel, you have to invest your own money; otherwise, you are simply a venture capitalist and those guys take all the credit but never use their own money.)

The name Exasol derives from exabyte (1 million terabytes) and solutions. Exasol has created a hybrid column-based/in-memory database management system that can be delivered either pre-installed on appropriate hardware or simply as software. There was nothing particularly ground-breaking from the columnar perspective: the Exasol "solution" compresses the data and avoids the need to scan the entire table, but so do most column-based databases. The in-memory solution, however, was unique. An artificial intelligence algorithm determines whether a query can be answered directly from the column-based storage in use or if it needs to create a look-up index or join parallel indexes. The indexes can be saved to a disk or retained in-memory, along with the data that is retrieved (which applies regardless of whether you need an index or not), so that future queries can be answered directly from memory. The response time for a query is virtually instantaneous regardless of the size of the database. Exasol is a clustered solution: the database management system runs on top of Exacluster OS, which is the company's own operating system built on top of the Linux Kernel. Separating the clustering software from the database has significant advantages. For example, the three terabyte benchmark that Exasol published runs on an 80 node cluster, which is far more than most databases with built-in clustering. Under the Exasol approach, it would be possible to run a thousand node cluster.

And you thought I was just a pretty face with good hair and straight teeth. I wonder if Margot knew I had a knack for this sort of stuff.

What I find much more difficult to decipher is the fractal or dichotomous relationship she created in her note/poem between "orange" and "Exasol" as well as between "Kevin B" and the three "Dante equations." I had no idea how to create a relationship between orange and Exasol. I would have thought orange was simply a continuation of the shopping list but it is clearly set against Exasol in the same manner that Kevin B. was set against Dante. Assuming algebraic logic applies, we might be able to figure out what orange means in relation to Exasol if we first figure out what Kevin B. means in relation to Dante.

Kevin B. has to be Kevin Bacon. Why? Use House logic—as in Dr. House. If it isn't a metaphorical, mythical or popular celebrity "Kevin" but is a unique, particular, private "Kevin" of some unknowable variety, then this patient is going to die because we are not going to have a diagnosis that allows us to save him. Kevin Bacon is more than the celebrity Kevin Bacon because he has become a meme: the six degrees of separation Kevin Bacon, a law which posits that any two persons on earth can be linked

through acquaintances by six degrees of separation or less. In the movie industry, persons have been assigned a “Bacon number” representing the degrees of separation of that person from Kevin Bacon. Perhaps Margot was applying the Bacon law of separation to people or concepts.

The first “orange” that comes to my mind (other than the citrus and the color) is the Ukrainian Orange Revolution because Ukraine is in the news. The Orange Revolution took place in Ukraine from late November 2004 to January 2005—a couple of years before Margot came to visit me in Arizona. It was prompted by a corrupt presidential election. Kiev, the Ukrainian capital, was the focal point of the movement's campaign of civil resistance, with thousands of protesters demonstrating daily. The protests in Kiev prompted nationwide acts of civil disobedience, sit-ins, and general strikes. The Orange Revolution succeeded, briefly, in new elections, but, as Russia began to assert more influence over Ukrainian affairs during the ensuing years, the Orange Revolution was stigmatized by pro-government, anti-democratic groups as a liberal, western-influenced, unlawful mob. Ukrainians took back to the streets nine years after the Orange Revolution and forced a change in government but it cost Ukraine the Crimea which has now been annexed by Russia.

I think there may be more than six degrees of separation from Exasol to the Orange Revolution.

Then I focused on the fact that Exasol is a tech company and I remembered that there is a beast of a tech company called Orange. Orange is a French multinational telecommunications corporation. It is a global provider for mobile phone, landline, internet and internet television services. Orange is even in the film business. They have 226 million customers and generate over 60 billion Euro in revenue worldwide. Orange's rise to prominence and power occurred about the same time that Exasol was developing its solution to organizing massive databases. It began really taking off in 1996-7 while it was a public company but it was taken private when it was acquired by the German conglomerate, Mannesmann AG, in 1999. It has continued to grow and devour competitors, becoming one of the true multi-national beasts controlling the world's information capital.

It turns out that the Bacon Number for Exasol and Orange is only two. Exasol partners with SHS VIVEON AG, a business and IT consulting company active throughout Europe and has a unit specializing in customer risk management. With more than 200 customers in 15 countries and over 210 employees, the SHS VIVEON Group is one of Europe's leading customer management providers. Orange is a client of SHS VIVEON for customer management consulting services.

To make the math work, I need to find a Bacon Number of two connecting Kevin Bacon and Dante.

Turns out not to be a difficult task. There was a film called *Dante's Inferno* released in 2007. It was playing when Margot and I had dinner and conversation in Scottsdale. Dermot Mulroney was Dante (or more precisely, he was the voice of Dante because the film was made using puppets, claymation and animation). So, for our purposes, Dermot = Dante. Dermot Mulroney and Sarah Jessica Parker were in a wonderful film, *The Family Stone*. Sarah Jessica Parker and Kevin Bacon were in *Footloose*. Bacon Number is two.

Does that make Sarah Jessica Parker equal SHS VIVEON?

The mere fact that we can establish a connection between two people or two corporations is an amusing parlor game, but a connection is not necessarily a causal connection. I wonder what more the poet (Margot) had in mind?

Would that be an example of the intentional fallacy? I studied the New Critics in college. I had to read The Verbal Icon. W. K. Wimsatt wrote that, “the intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art.” So, never mind guessing what she was thinking. What did she write? Following my algebraic approach, there should be a clue to the underlying thematic relationship between Orange and Exasol in the three equations following Dante: Dante = discovery, Dante = form, Dante = fairy.

Great. I was really hoping to avoid going to hell.

I have to start with the obvious: Dante’s Inferno. There are nine circles of hell, but, since there are only three “Dante equations” in the note, there might be a better (easier) parallel with the three beasts that appear at the beginning of Dante’s epic journey: a lion, a leopard and a she-wolf. The three beasts represent three types of sin “blocking” Dante from the straight path to salvation: self-indulgence, violence, and malice. Even if we went straight to hell, the nine circles of hell can be grouped into these three types of sin: the first 5 circles for the self-indulgent sins, circles 6 and 7 for the violent sins, and circles 8 and 9 for the malicious sins. How do self-indulgence, violence and malice relate to discovery, form and fairy? The three concepts in Margot’s note have positive connotations. The three categories of sin are putatively negative. It is one thing to relate a positive to a negative in mathematics but most of us shrink at an equation which states: good = evil.

Perhaps it would be better to look at the structure of Dante’s entire Divine Comedy which is in three parts: Inferno, Purgatory and Paradise. In a larger sense, the three parts represent sin, life and virtue. We live our lives between being dragged down by sin and elevated by virtue.

The thought occurs to me that we are in a massive database—the entire universe of thought and/or things. What are the degrees of separation between sin and virtue, between self-indulgence and self-discovery, between an act of violence and an act of will—even simply the will to live—and between condemnation and praise, punishment and reward? How do we index the massive database of the universe of thought between good and evil? Discovery is the knowledge of both good and evil. Discovery is self-indulgent. It is taking a bite of the apple. Purgatory is the violence of life being lived between sin and virtue. In Platonic terms, it is the real world of forms which take shape from ideas. Discovery indexes an idea from the universal database linking it with substance, making it a living, existing thing in the real world of being—the *formed* world.

What is there of faerie in heaven? I am hearing a passage from Shakespeare—from Midsummer Night’s Dream:

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet,  
Are of imagination all compact:  
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold —  
That is the madman;  
The lover, all as frantic,  
Sees Helen’s beauty in a brow of Egypt.  
The poet’s eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;  
And, as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet’s pen  
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing

A local habitation and a name.

I find that I am satisfied with this explication even though there is no real likelihood it corresponds to reality in any particular. I am convinced Margot had some connection to Exasol and that the rest of the note was a word game she left for my enjoyment. I am bothered by the statement she made (now that I have recalled it from memory) that she brought me to Jena for Exasol and by her reference that she keeps track on "all her girls." I wonder how many girls like me she has out there. How did she select us? What are we "programmed" to do? Are we programmed or is she simply counting on us to behave like she knows we will behave when she selects us? How did she know I worked at GoDaddy? The scary truth is I did not pick GoDaddy out of college. They recruited me. They said they got my name from the college placement office. I wonder. I wonder why Parsons decided to pull the bolt on the IPO. I wonder why I was lured away from GoDaddy two months after Margot met me for dinner. The attorney I am working for at Google was surprised when he got another assistant. He hadn't requested one. He is in mergers and acquisitions.

I think I will take a peak at some of the correspondence he has been receiving lately from Orange.