

Bradley P. Dean: Some High School Memories, 1969-1972

Part 1 of “A Remembrance”
Thoreau Society Annual Gathering
First Parish Church
Concord, Massachusetts
July 8, 2006

Good afternoon, my name is Michael Southwood. More than thirty years ago, Brad, Debra Kang (Brad’s future wife), and I were classmates at the same city public high school in Hawai‘i. Today, my wife Natalie and I reside in northern Virginia, not far from Washington, D. C. Natalie, who is in the audience, and I are both employees of the Federal Government.

Although I am a member of the Society, this visit to Concord marks the first time that I have attended the Annual Gathering. Like many of you, I initially became aware of the Society and its valuable work through my friendship with Brad. Like all of you, I developed a deep admiration and respect for Brad’s tireless efforts to promote Thoreau studies and his path-breaking scholarship.

My earliest memories of Brad date back to the fall of 1969, when we were starting our sophomore year. Brad was the oldest son in a large Air Force family that included his four sisters and two brothers. Brad’s freshman year was spent at a Department of Defense school in Japan, where his father Frederick P. was stationed. Later, I learned from family members and former teammates of Brad that he was an excellent athlete, a solid football quarterback—and an outstanding baseball pitcher with Major League potential.

Brad’s journey to the Hawaiian Islands was set into motion when his father received orders for duty at Hickam Air Force Base. Not long after beginning the new assignment, Mr. Dean enrolled eldest daughter Cynthia and Brad in Honolulu’s Theodore Roosevelt High School.

At Roosevelt, I first saw Brad on the football practice field. At the time, I was drilling with the defensive backs. The arrival of a strapping Caucasian player with an air of confidence produced a buzz among the players who were mostly of Asian/Pacific Islander heritage. Who was he? Brad told the coaches that he would like to try out for quarterback, the position he played the previous season. Although Brad had missed our summer practice, he was very impressive at quarterback and fullback. Since the first-string quarterback had already been selected, the backfield coach believed that Brad’s size made him an ideal

candidate for fullback. I still remember that a single lineman or linebacker could not bring Brad to the turf by himself. On each of Brad's runs, it took three or four players to gang-tackle this strong athlete. Because of Brad's size, strength, and mobility, the line coach wanted him to try out for guard or tackle. After having played quarterback, the idea of now playing in the "trenches" as an interior lineman did not have great appeal for Brad. After a few days, Brad stopped coming to practice. His absence, as I eventually found out, was due to the difficulty in arranging transportation home to the base after our long practices.

Even though Brad and I did not become acquainted on the football field, I certainly remembered him. Our paths crossed again, and soon Brad and I were part of the same circle of friends, many of whom were drawn from the football and track teams. At around this time, Cynthia, Brad, and I began to have lunch together. Everyone who got to know Brad came to recognize his intelligence, easy-going nature, independent spirit, deep sense of fairness, wide-ranging imagination, and great sense of humor. There was, however, one exception—a certain prejudiced individual, who resented the ease with which Brad entered and was accepted by our "group." One afternoon, to the great surprise of all, this person challenged Brad to a fight. My efforts as a peacemaker failed, and Brad told his challenger more than once that he had no interest at all in a fight. Then, as this person threw the first punch, Brad, in a flash, pinned him to the ground and held him there until he promised to give up this notion of fighting.

From the earliest days of our friendship until our senior year, Brad and I visited each other's home on a regular basis. My parents were really impressed with Brad and always looked forward to his visits. We early learned about Brad's love of walking. Typically, instead of calling us to pick him up at the bus stop, he preferred to walk to our home, which was situated in the upper reaches of a forested valley that overlooked Honolulu. Through my visits to the Dean residence at Hickam, I also got to know all of Brad's other wonderful brothers and sisters. Although Brad's father had a reputation as a strict disciplinarian, he always treated me with great courtesy, and I certainly enjoyed listening to this world-class marksman's tales of competitive shooting for the Air Force, stories about service life, and hunting and fishing exploits in Michigan, Alaska, and elsewhere. Brad's mother Ida Mae also made me feel very welcome, and she always set an extra place at the dinner table for this frequent guest.

[Can anyone here picture Brad as a pineapple-picker? Well, in the summer between our sophomore and junior years, Brad picked pineapples on the small island of Lana'i, which was then devoted almost entirely to the growing of the fruit. (Lana'i is one of the eight main islands that comprise the state of Hawai'i.) In letters I read in the comfort of my room at home, Brad described the grueling picking process, the long hours, tropical heat, and his trying to understand the pidgin English spoken by most of his co-workers.

No discussion of Brad's high school days would be complete without mention of the legendary Dean family (Ford) station wagon. My first driving experience was behind the wheel of this workhorse vehicle that transported Brad and his friends all over Honolulu and the island of O'ahu. Any time I hear one of the popular songs of our teen years that we first listened to on the car radio, I recall those drives to the homes of our other friends, Roosevelt sporting events, popular tourist spots, the seedy parts of the Honolulu harbor district, the drive-in theaters, and various Dean family outings.]

After learning that the various positions on the school's baseball team were already set, Brad eventually earned a spot on the varsity track-and-field team. Easily one of Roosevelt's strongest athletes, Brad chose to concentrate on the shot put and discus. Largely self-taught, Brad emerged as the team's top performer in these two events. I believe that if Brad had the benefit of expert coaching, he would have excelled at the state level. Brad never ceased to amaze us. One afternoon, he borrowed a pole-vault pole and easily cleared ten feet on his first attempt. On another occasion, Brad's try at the high jump produced a height that placed him among the top performers on the squad. If the javelin throw had been a competitive event back then, I'm confident that Brad would have been among the best in our state.

Debra entered our lives through her membership on the girls' track-and-field team. She was a year younger than us. Debra was also a former student of my father, who was the principal of the nearby intermediate school (grades 7-9) she attended before entering Roosevelt High. To this day, I'm not sure whether or not Debra was one of my father's track recruits. Throughout his career, my dad would scout the physical-education classes for anyone who displayed promise as a track athlete. From the beginning, Brad took note of how disciplined and hard-working Debra was in practice. But, I'll stop there. After all, the story of Debra and Brad is not mine to tell. . . .

I'm not sure exactly when, but it was sometime between our junior and senior years that I first became aware of Brad's early interest in *Walden* and Thoreau's key essays. As I remember, Brad had a paperback edition of *Walden*, which he read from regularly. Later, I saw that he had also purchased the "Cliff Notes" for *Walden*, part of the famous study guide series, with its familiar yellow cover.

If one is of a certain age, say, in the over-fifty crowd, Erhard Seminar Training or EST, as it was best known, might sound familiar. At its height in the mid-1970s, EST attracted a nation-wide following, which included many well-known Hollywood and television personalities. To some observers of American society, EST heralded the onset of the inward-looking "Me generation" as the movements of the Sixties began to lose steam. Founded by Warner Erhard, who was then based out of California, EST was a program designed to help people develop a deeper level of self-awareness while discarding accumulated layers of inherited outlook and habit. Well, like the earlier Hippie movement, this California export crossed the Pacific and soon found its way to Honolulu. So, at the suggestion of my parents, who somehow learned about EST, Brad and I, then in our final year at Roosevelt, enrolled in one of the earliest versions of the training, in a seminar taught by the charismatic Mr. Erhard himself. After the seminar, I noted Brad's silence and guarded comments, and compared his reaction with the bubbling enthusiasm of our fellow students. Perhaps Brad sensed something about the whole experience that most of the others missed. By the early 1980s, EST was mired in controversy about its founder, its methods, and whether or not Warner's empire was a "front" for a new cult. The debate about EST and Warner continues.

[I do not have any "wild" graduation stories to tell about Brad. While he took part in the school's graduation ceremony, I was participating in a track meet at the nearby University of Hawai'i. Although Brad and I had discussed some plans for college, we agreed to spend the summer in Flint, Michigan, his mother's hometown, where many relatives were still living. The Dean family move to Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in Goldsboro, North Carolina, and how Brad and I found ourselves in the Navy Recruiting Office there during the late summer of 1972 are beyond the scope of these remarks.]

The many high school memories that I have of Brad, some of which I have shared with you, are precious to me. The qualities that I saw in this exceptional young man three decades ago, many of you also came to know very well through your own long and close

associations with him. Those high school years I spent with Brad established the foundation of a friendship that lasted all of our adult lives. As a long list of impressive accomplishments would eventually show, Brad overcame some very real barriers that were present in our city public high school. Aware of our late friend's intellectual gifts and athletic potential, I sometimes wondered how Brad's life would have been changed if he had found himself in a different academic and social setting, one where the classical ideals of developing the mind, spirit, and body were truly appreciated and actively pursued. Such a place did exist, a college preparatory school barely a mile from our "Dear Old Roosevelt" (words borrowed from one of our football fight songs). This private school, famous in the history of Hawai'i for its high educational standards and long list of distinguished graduates, was founded in the early 1840s by New England missionaries, some of whom were of old Massachusetts stock.

Natalie and I are still not over the shock of mid-January. We think about Brad every day and miss him dearly. Brad was a friend in the truest sense. Thank you for your kind attention. It was privilege to be here today, and I'd like to express my thanks to Debra and David for inviting us to take part in this "Remembrance" for an inspirational and highly productive independent scholar, one whose vision will continue to guide us all.