I n 1981, I had the good fortune to be a guest lecturer for a week at the University of California, San Diego. The invitation to be Calbiochem-Behring Corp., UC San Diego Foundation Lecturer, which was probably instigated by my good friend and skiing companion David Kearns, included hospitality for Nell and me at a charming little inn in La Jolla, La Valencia. It had the reputation of being a getaway destination for movie stars when they sought a clandestine weekend. The week was a superb combination of chemistry, biochemistry, sight-seeing and social occasions in attractive surroundings. The week ended with a banquet at which I had the pleasure of sitting next to Joseph Mayer and the widow of Harold Urey. Professors Mayer and Urey had taught me physical chemistry at Columbia University more than 40 years earlier, so I could reminisce a bit when it came my turn to thank everyone for our glorious week.

By 1990, I seemed to have developed an attraction for testing myself by “working” at locations other than Urbana, Illinois, and a return to San Diego was high on my wish list. Murray Goodman of UC San Diego kindly arranged for me to be a Visiting Professor during June/July and reserved a one-bedroom, fully furnished apartment in the La Jolla Sol Apartments (aka UCSD Visitors Inn). The advantages of the Inn included maid service on weekdays, a reserved parking space, pool, and tennis courts. David and Alice Kearns were also hosts, although David was working through the debilitating results of a serious ski accident, which meant that I did not see as much of him as we had intended. He provided me, however, with the welcomed services of his assistant, Shelley Hexom. Again, hospitality and friendship were extended on every side. There was a feeling of optimism that surrounded one in La Jolla, probably due to both the people and the weather. It was certainly present also at Scripps Research Institute and the Salk Institute, which I visited.

The week in 1981 had brought me in contact with Leslie Orgel of the Salk Institute for Biological Studies, also a professor at UCSD, and made me aware especially of his fundamental research on the oligomerization...
of activated mononucleotides on polynucleotide templates. As a result of the earlier contact, in 1988 we published together on the poly(U) template-directed oligomerization of 3-isoadenosine 5′-phosphate as the activated imidazolide, which constituted a new contribution to prebiotic research. When I returned to UCSD as a Visiting Professor in 1990, we completed a sequel to the first oligomerization paper that was then published in the following year. The amusing feature of the sequel was the way in which it was written—at a series of four lunches in a delightful restaurant in La Jolla overlooking the Pacific. Each week I would produce a draft, and each week Leslie Orgel would provide me with revisions he considered necessary to incorporate in the next draft. I had the distinct impression of being a graduate student again under the tutelage of Dr. Leslie Sutton of the University of Oxford, who had indeed been a mentor for both Leslie (Orgel) and me in earlier years.

Residence in La Jolla meant that I could entertain visitors, including Kenneth, Barbara, and Jamie and special friends living in the area. Edith Roberts telephoned to tell me that Peggy Phelps had a beach house in Oceanside, about one-half hour away from La Jolla. I must have responded with something like “That’s nice,” but I did not think of telephoning her to ask if I might come up for a swim. Edith directed me to do just that. She had already told Peggy I was staying in La Jolla, and Peggy must also have said something like, “That’s nice. Why doesn’t he call me if he wants to come to St. Malo, Oceanside for a swim?”

The director was having trouble getting her actors together. Finally I called, was invited for a swim and lunch, and met Mason Phelps, Jr. The pavane continued with a duo dinner in Del Mar, between Oceanside and La Jolla. Peggy did not find that either chivalrous or romantic. It was just practical. Nevertheless, we did advance the relationship with a promise to go skiing together when next we met in Aspen.