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be our final visit. We had a conversation and then she rang the bell with her trembling arm, and I left with Mrs. Chemin to return home. When I arrived, the other housekeeper was already at my house to announce to my mother that Georgette had died. I was the last person who spoke with her. To this day, I cannot remember what we talked about. After trying psychotherapy to remember our conversations, I finally decided to leave it to the secret garden of life. Once in a while, I can still smell the mixed odor of cigarettes and perfume and I am immediately transported to 44 years ago in Georgette's boudoir.

Eighteen years ago, I met Susan, the love of my life. It is extraordinary how many aspects of her physical appearance, presence, and personality remind me of Georgette. Life has its secrets and sometimes there is no apparent explanation. But such affinities run deep. They are part of who we are and what makes each life unique.

My second important influence introduced me to the world of cars. Growing up in a middle-class family did not allow us to go on vacation often, but I was fortunate to find a marvelous opportunity to spend time with my dad's good friend, Mr. Coulon. He had a car repair shop he had taken over from his father, who assembled and repaired Bugatti cars.

Mr. Coulon was an autodidact with a natural talent. Some of his clients were car collectors and would bring their cars to the shop. I would see racing cars like Aston Martins, Ferraris, or Maseratis. Oh, man, I was in heaven!

Each school vacation, I would go to the shop and Mr. Coulon would give me a project and teach me all his tricks. I would stay quietly next to him, listening to his conversations with other car collectors, talking of design, engines, painting, and everything around cars. He made me appreciate the mechanics of an engine, the aesthetic of the body, and the intricacy of the inner design: how everything works, how precise it is. At that time, I could recognize any sport car engine just by listening to its sounds.

All my life, I would regularly go to see Mr. Coulon when visiting my parents. He was curious, creative, and always ready to engage in conversation. The last time I saw him, he showed me his sculptures. Without any training, he was able to respect proportions and capture fine details in his work. He was a very talented and delightful man.

The third person who had an impact on me was my neighbor, Mrs. Simone Citel. She was a highly educated woman and a blessing in my life. She arrived in our town when I was around 13 years old. Her father was the first auctioneer in Paris in the late 19th century, and her teacher was Victor Hugo, the famous French writer. She was very well spoken and well read. When she moved in, she brought all her paintings, collection pieces, and books. It was an eclectic collection from many time periods.

Being a widow and alone, she often invited me to visit. This was a perfect opportunity to learn from her.

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She taught me how to recognize a piece, how to look at it, what to look at, how to appreciate it. Every visit was like going to art class, and I took a lot of them. She developed my appreciation and eye for aesthetics. I am grateful to her for teaching me that everything is in the details. She gave me all the tools to recognize when a piece is special and valuable. Sometimes I do not know the actual financial value of a piece, but I know it is special when my instinct tells me, “You have a fine piece here, pay attention, take a risk, and go for it.”

Mrs. Citel also developed my sensitivity to art, how to feel its essence and rely on my instinct. Although I didn’t know it at the time, I was unconsciously preparing to one day become a watch collector and dealer. In this period of my life, I learned two extremely important things that you need when collecting and buying watches. First, you must pay special attention to detail when looking at a watch, particularly the dial, as its details will often tell you if the dial is original or redone, and it will be exactly the same for the movement. The polishing of the case is like a car; it takes time and experience to detect if it is the original paint job or not. The second thing I learned is fundamental: Listen to your feelings about a timepiece. Never try to convince yourself that it is the right watch if something bothers you, even if you do not know why. Then let it go and move on. There will always be another wristwatch.

My passion for watches arrived when I was about 14. I still do not know why I chose watches.

Of course, I love beautiful objects—cars, accessories, paintings—but watches evoke something in me that’s hard to express in words. I can only describe it as a warm feeling, a profound absorption in which the universe does not exist and nothing can reach me. It is like reading a book that is so good the world is absent and you are in your bubble, living in the moment. Even if you’re employed in another profession, having a special interest can change your life and give it focus and meaning.

It has taken me many years to understand how profoundly these three individuals, in addition to my parents, have influenced me—first and foremost, Georgette. (To this day, I have an easy rapport with elderly women, and I know that stems from the many hours I spent with Georgette.) When I was young, I simply took the opportunity that was offered to me, never imagining that one day I would use it to achieve what I love most in life, being a watch collector and dealer. I believe having mentors in life is as important as having an education.

I was fortunate to experience this with several different people. They were unconventional mentors. Each of them offered me their knowledge, experience, passion, and joy, and I will never be thankful enough for their kindness. The result was like a puzzle; I put together all the different pieces I’d gathered from each, creating a whole that would become my guide for my professional life as a watch collector.