During September 2004 I organized material I already had and prepared for what would be the bulk of my PDA—reading in the Margaret Mead Papers at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

For two and a half months in Washington I spent my days in the Manuscript Reading Room in the James Madison Building of the Library of Congress. During this time I read, organized, and xeroxed letters of anthropologist Margaret Mead to her family, friends, lovers, husbands, colleagues, and extended family in preparation for a book manuscript, “Selected Letters of Margaret Mead.” I read over 3,000 letters and ended up xeroxing about 750 of them to think over and cull down into a manuscript of about 350 pages, commentary and letters included.

There is a saying that people become historians so that they can read other people’s mail. To have the chance to do so with such a massive collection as the Margaret Mead Papers, which contain over a million documents of various kinds, was a historian’s dream.

I am editing this book of letters with a friend who is an independent scholar living in Washington, D.C., and we have a contract with Basic Books, and a September 2005 deadline to get the manuscript in. This PDA could not have come at a better time for me to finish this work.