

9 February 2005

## The thrill of making money!

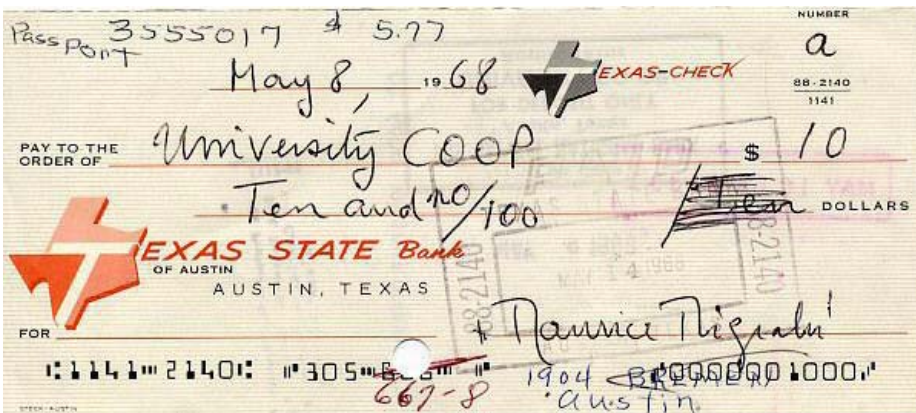
Dr Maurice M. Mizrahi

When I arrived in the United States, on February 26<sup>th</sup>, 1968, I literally did not have a penny to my name. The Egyptians did not let us Jews take anything out with us. After a week with my sister Maryse in the New York area, I landed in Austin, Texas, and stayed with my sister Lillian for the first six months.

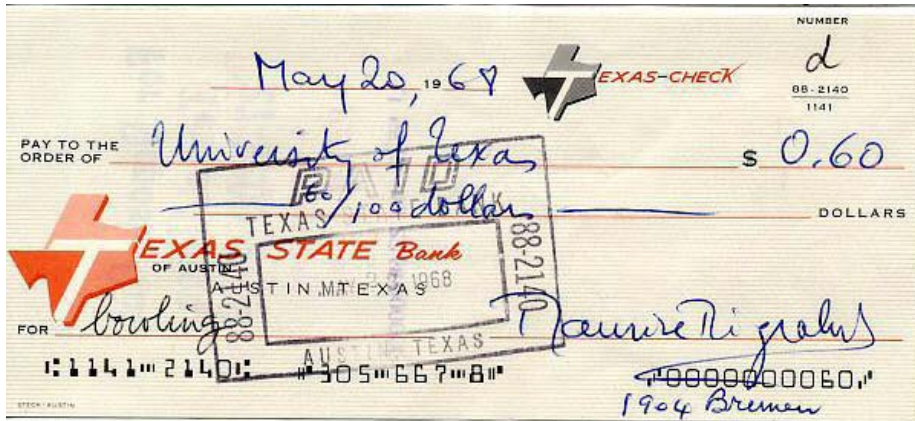
The most immediate concern was finding a job. It took some doing and lots of interviews, but finally I landed a position as student operator in the Computation Center of the University of Texas. I had to extract, handle and route computer output for faculty and students for a few hours a week for \$1.15 an hour. A month later, I took a second job, as a part-time research assistant for a professor of Romance Languages.

Finally, in early May, I opened my first bank account, at Texas State Bank, on the main drag of the university!

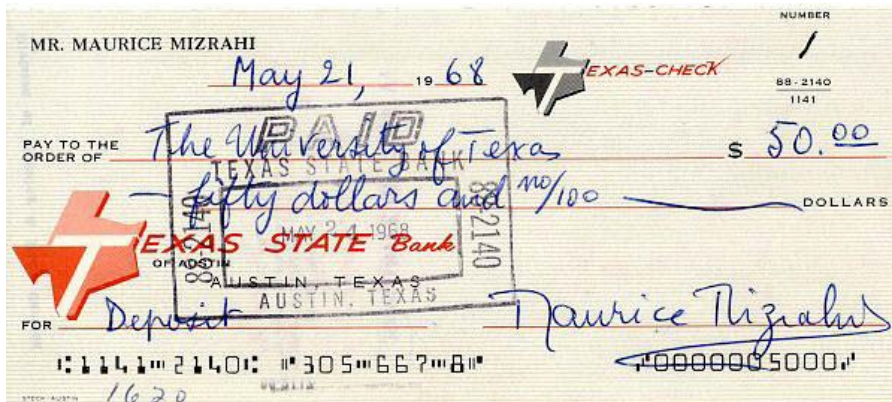
I wrote my first check on May 8<sup>th</sup>. I made a few mistakes. I wrote the amount as "10" with space before and after it, rather than "10.00" next to the dollar sign on the left; the "ten" was initially written incorrectly in full on the second line; and there was no description of what I bought (it was for a \$5.77 purchase, plus cash). But it was a start! Since it was a temporary check and my name was not printed on it, I had to give them... my Italian passport so they could write the number! It was the only piece of identification I had.



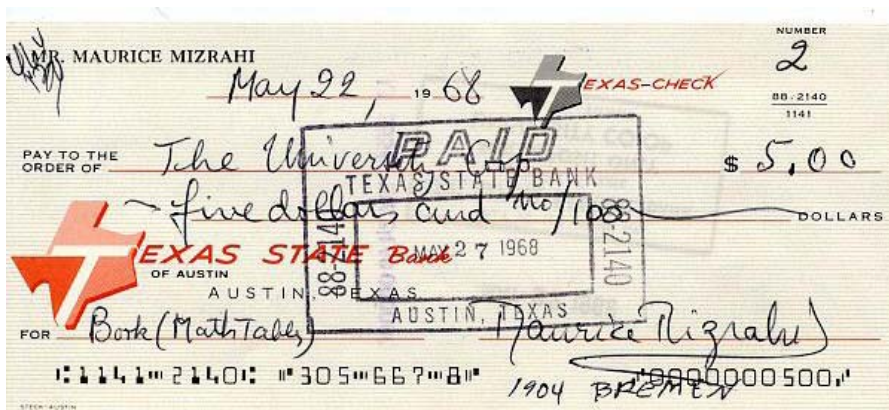
One game I had heard a lot about but never played was bowling. So off I went to the Student Union for my first game of bowling. It was a lot of fun!



I wasted no time registering for classes at the University of Texas, for the upcoming summer session. They wanted \$50 right away as a security deposit! Swallowing hard, I wrote them a check – the first check with my name printed on it! It made me feel important.



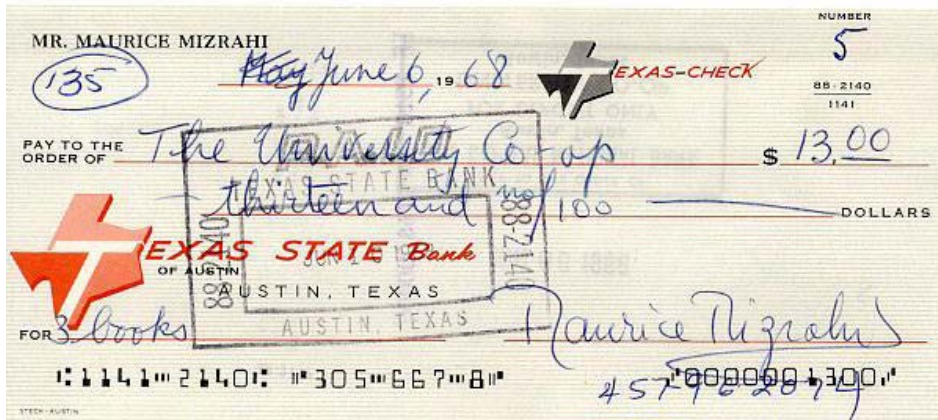
My first truly pleasant and fulfilling expenditure was a mathematics reference book, the CRC Tables. It cost \$5, and that's just about what I had earned that day. I had the distinct feeling that I had worked specifically for that book, and had therefore earned it with the sweat of my brow!



There were several math classes for which I had gotten credit through my high school work in the French School in Egypt. But I wanted to make sure I truly knew all the material,



particularly analytic geometry, so I bought used copies of the textbooks, just to have as reference material!

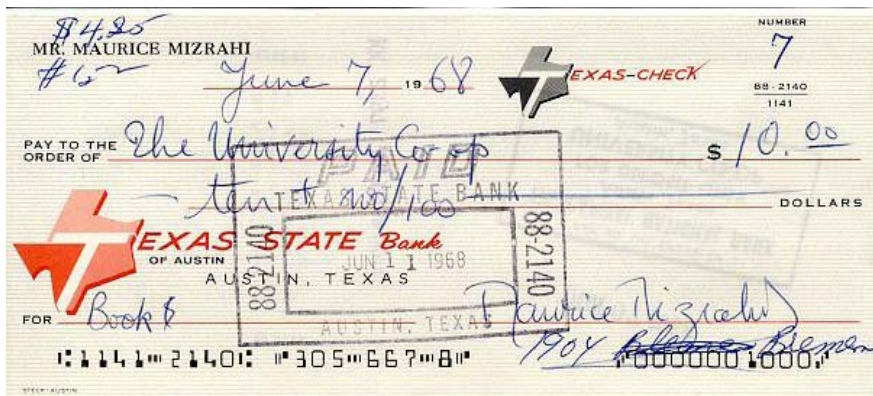


The long-dreaded moment had arrived: I was faced with my first tuition bill. A whopping \$77.25! It sounds dirt cheap today, and even back then it was, but it was a fortune to me. By working for the university, I had gained the right to be considered a Texas resident and pay in-state tuition – otherwise the bill would have been triple that! It would be a few days before I had the full required amount, so Lillian paid the bill and I paid her back a few days later.



Then, of course, I had to buy the textbooks for the classes I was taking.





I didn't always pay by check, because each check cost me a dime. So I would periodically cash various amounts of money, to handle smaller expenditures. The University Co-op, which sold textbooks and student supplies, was good about giving cash for checks.



I even found it in my wallet to give little Charles, my nephew, a present for his second birthday! It was only \$5, but it was from the heart!



My first truly major purchase was a portable typewriter. I considered this to be a necessity in a college environment, and found a good used one at one of the student stores on the drag. It cost me a whopping \$65, and was truly worth it. I still have it, for those occasional forms that still can't be done by computer, and it has withstood the test of time.

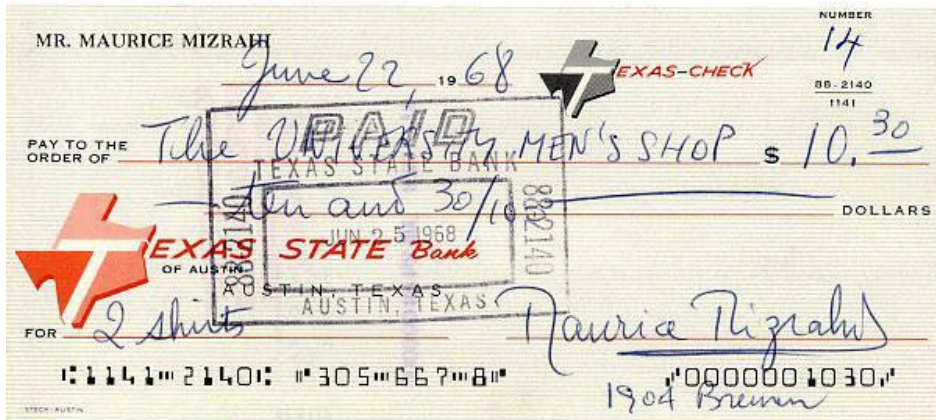




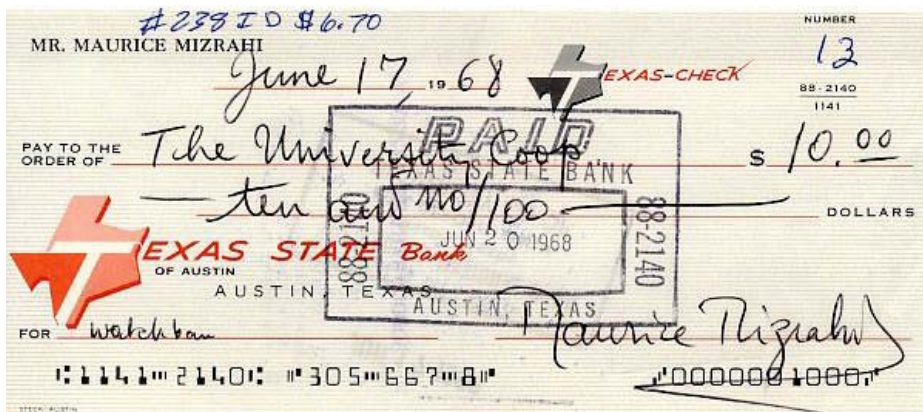
But I quickly found that I could not use it to type in French or Italian, because the accented letters were missing! Since I used French often, not least in letters to my family, I wanted this capability. So three weeks later I brought the typewriter back to the store for the repairman to insert two keys that had the acute, grave, and circumflex accents and that did not make the typewriter advance one space when they were used. For this I sacrificed \$10 and two keys that were seldom used, including  $\frac{1}{2}$  and  $\frac{1}{4}$ .



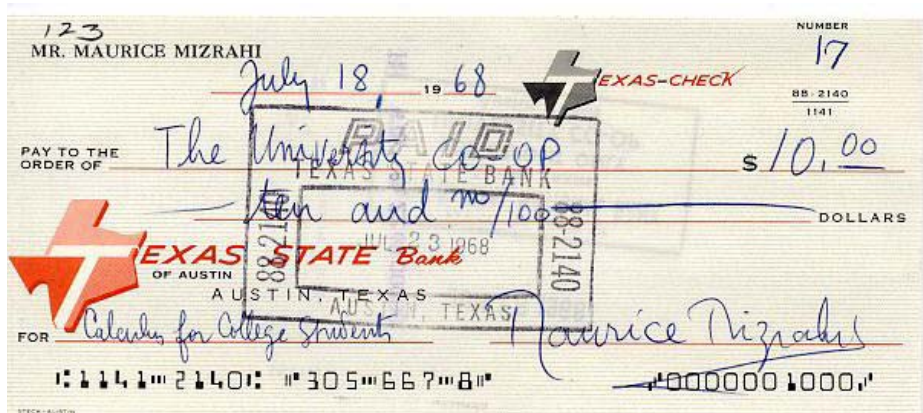
Now that the “essentials” were taken care of, I started thinking about my wardrobe. My made-in-Egypt shirts were a little out of fashion, so I bought two shirts for \$10 at the University Men’s Shop. Wash-and-wear – imagine that! The wonders of modern technology!



The wristband of the watch my father had given me just before I left Egypt broke. I needed that watch as my time was budgeted to the minute between work and study. So I spent \$6.70 for a new band – probably a little more than I should have spent, but I wanted something that would last. (It is still attached to that watch today!)



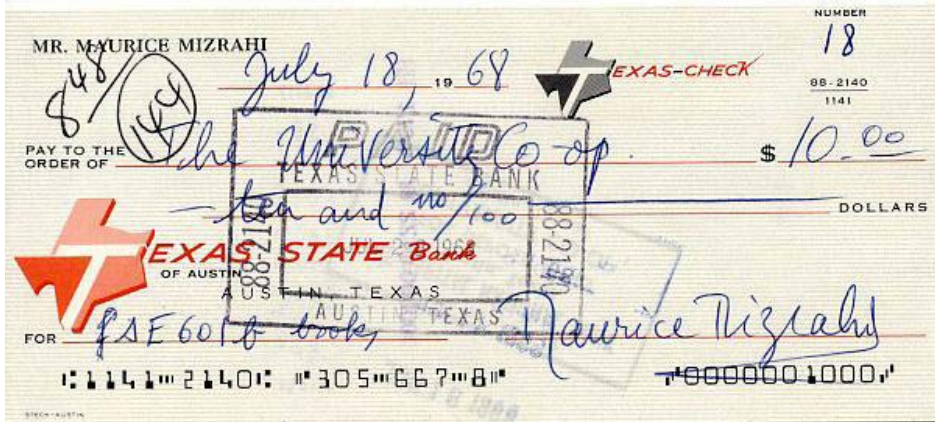
I took to calculus like a duck to water. I particularly liked both my teacher, a graduate student named Joe Chance, and my textbook, which I quickly devoured.



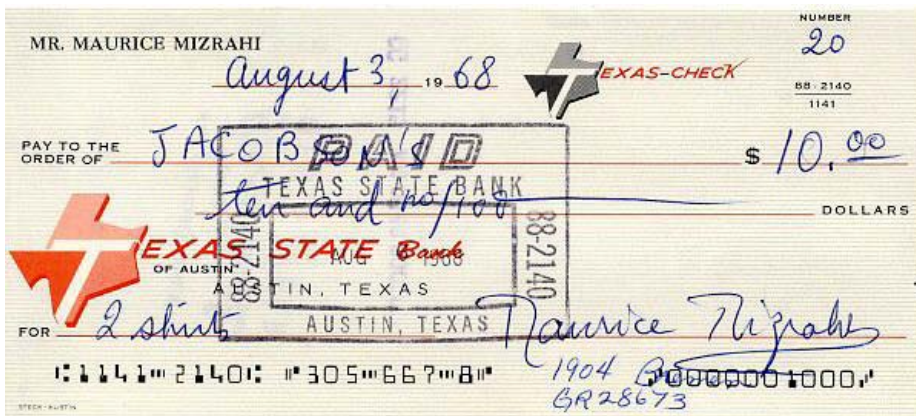
Much to my surprise, I did particularly well in my two English classes that first summer – English 601a and 601b. In the first, I even had one of the only two A's. The other A went to



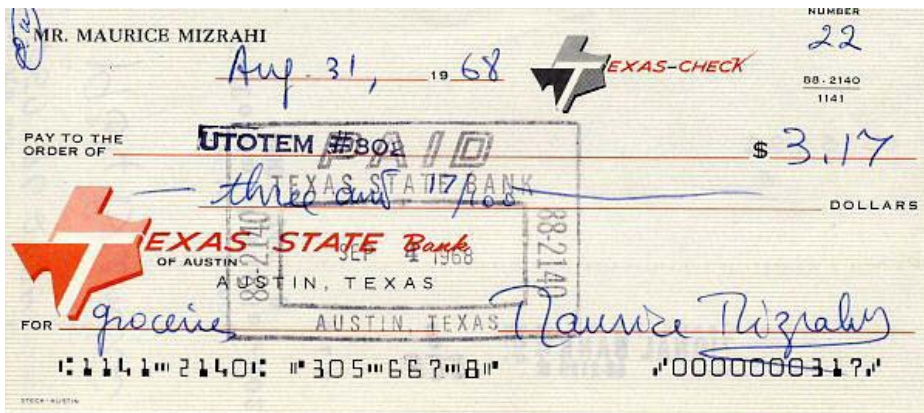
a girl named Gladys Sparkman. With this in common, it was only natural that we would go out on a date -- my first date in the New World!



Buoyed by that first success with girls, I went to buy two more shirts! I wanted to look my best, of course, and wasn't going to let \$10 stand in the way of that!

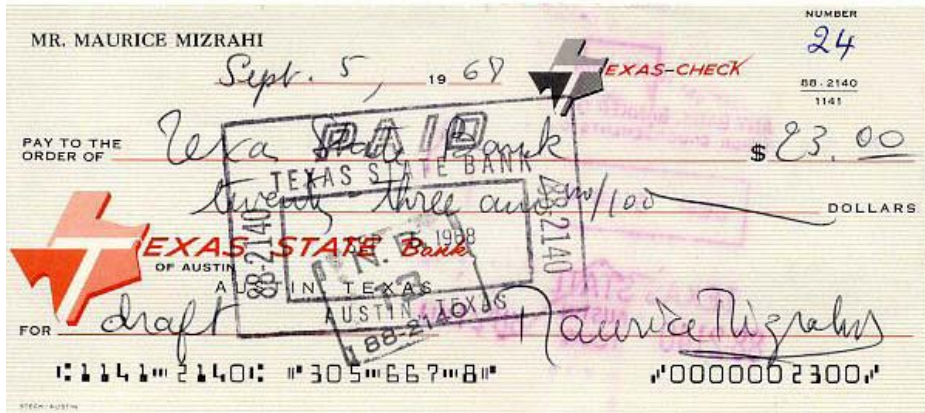


I ate all my meals at Generous Lillian's, but occasionally I bought a few snacks on the side to tide me through the day.



Then it was time to do something totally unnecessary. Hey, life is not all work and no play! I really loved French singer Georges Brassens, whose songs were catchy, funny, witty,

original, occasionally deep, and written in excellent French. But no one ever heard of him in Texas. So I asked my friend Henri Bagdadi in Montreal to send me four of his records. He promptly did, and I sent him the \$23 it cost him in a special check written by my bank in Canadian funds. My favorite relaxation time was listening to those records at Lillian's!



The fall semester was approaching. It was time to declare my independence and move to campus housing. But it was all so expensive! Well, there *was* San Jacinto Dormitories, spartan World War II barracks with communal bathrooms that had no walls.

-Sure I'll take it!

-Which one? There is Dorm G (the bottom of the barrel), Dorm H, and Dorm A, slightly more upscale.

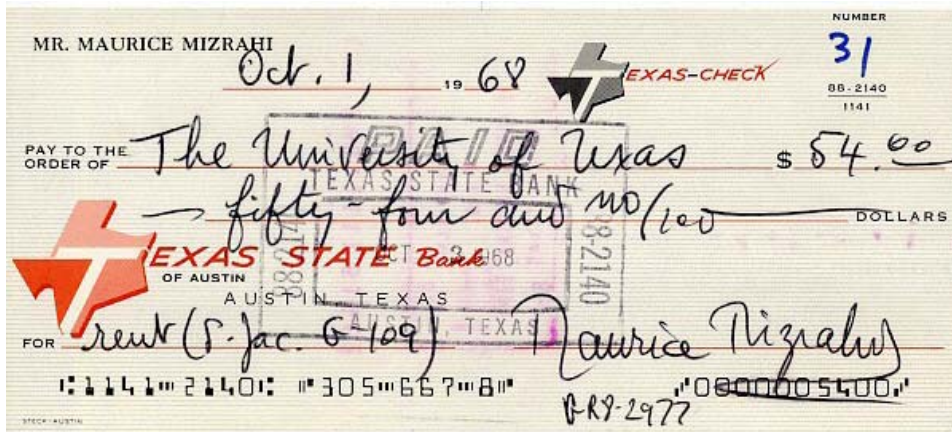
-I'll take Dorm G. How much is it?

-\$54 a semester.

-Sold!

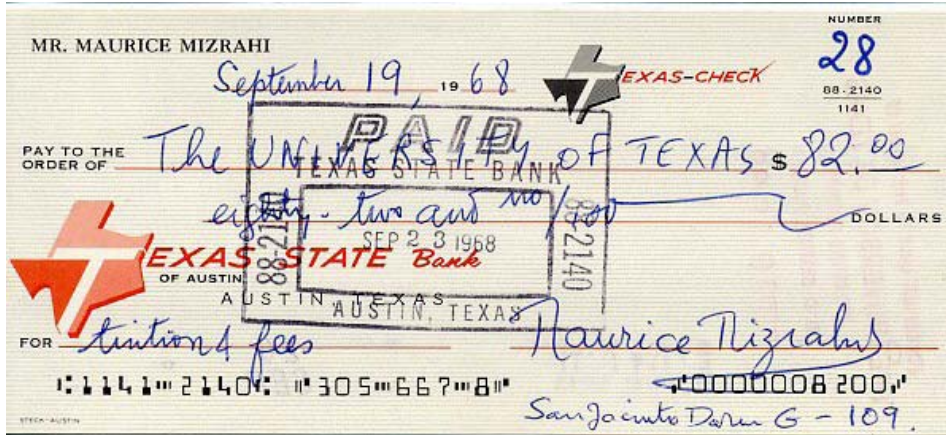
-Sir, we strongly suggest you visit it first.

-No need. It'll be fine.

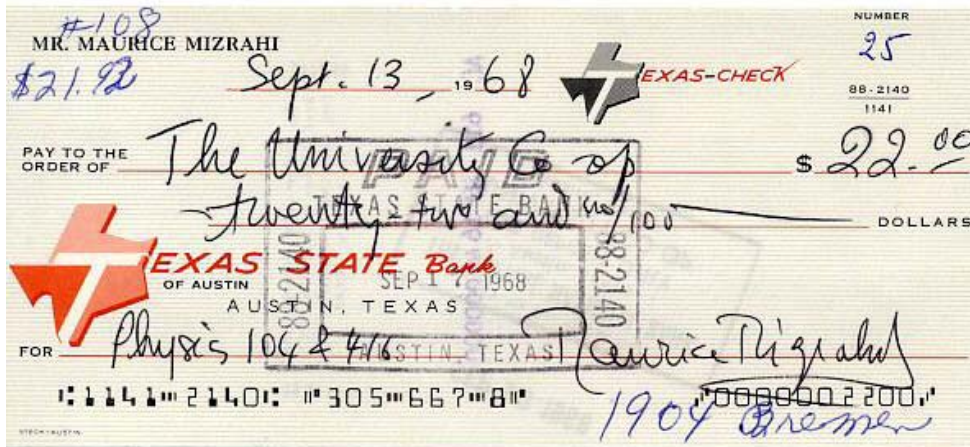


Then, of course, the second tuition bill came. \$82! My finances were running dangerously low, but I had no choice.



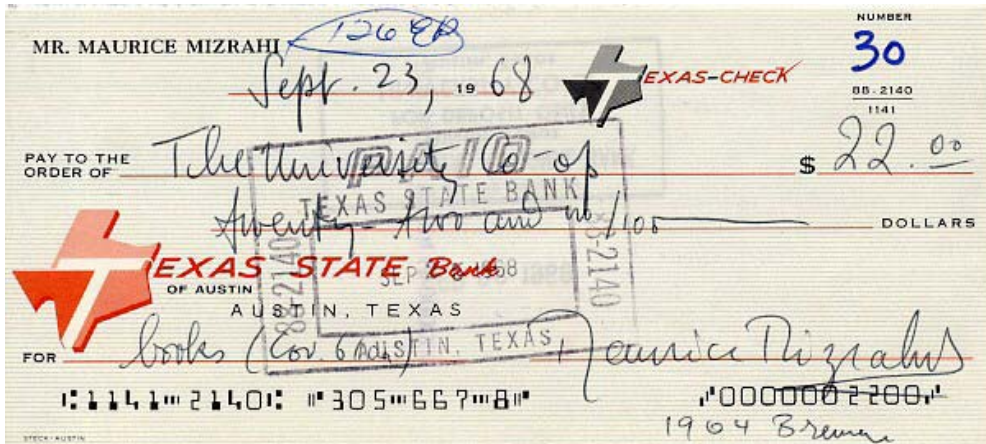


And then I had to buy the textbooks. Used, of course. The usedest the better.

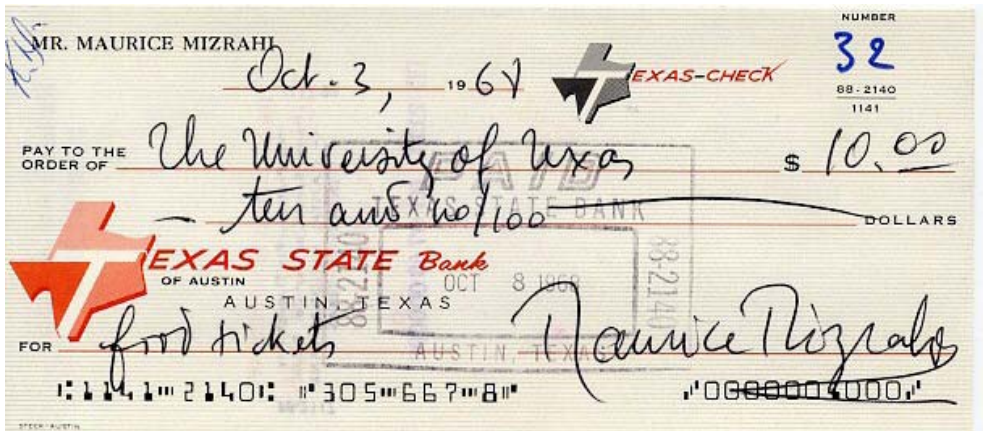
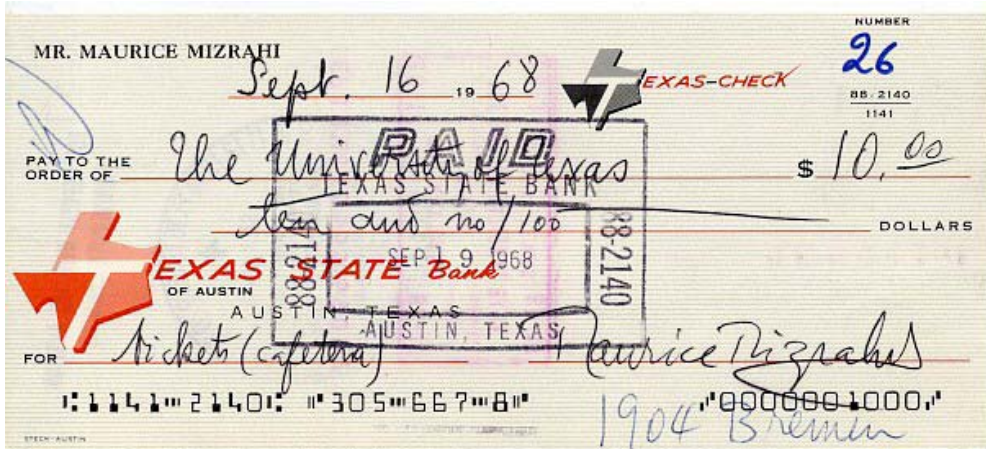


I had to sign up for required American Government. I made the mistake of disdaining the special class for foreign students and went to the one for Americans instead. I really could not follow as too much basic knowledge of the U.S. was assumed. I ended up with an incomplete, later changed to a C – the only C in my academic career.



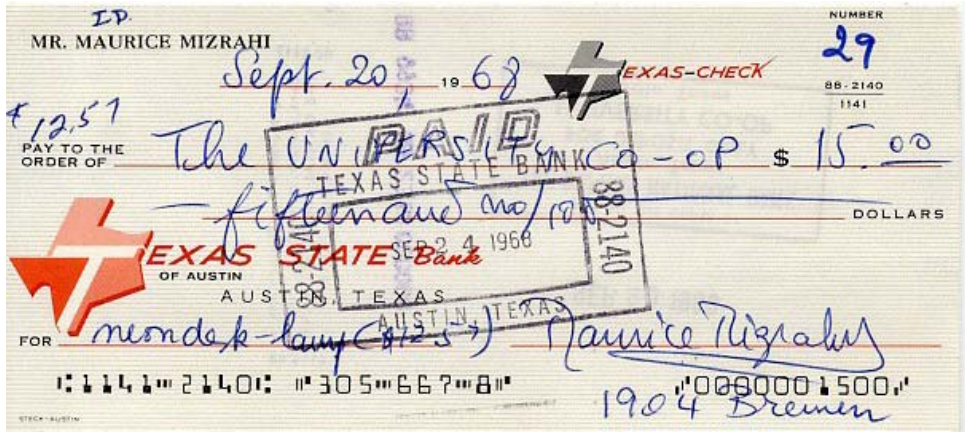


Lillian frequently invited me over for dinner, but most of the time I was on my own, and had to figure out ways to eat cheaply. The university cafeterias sold meal tickets that allowed small discounts, so I bought them and ate there frequently.

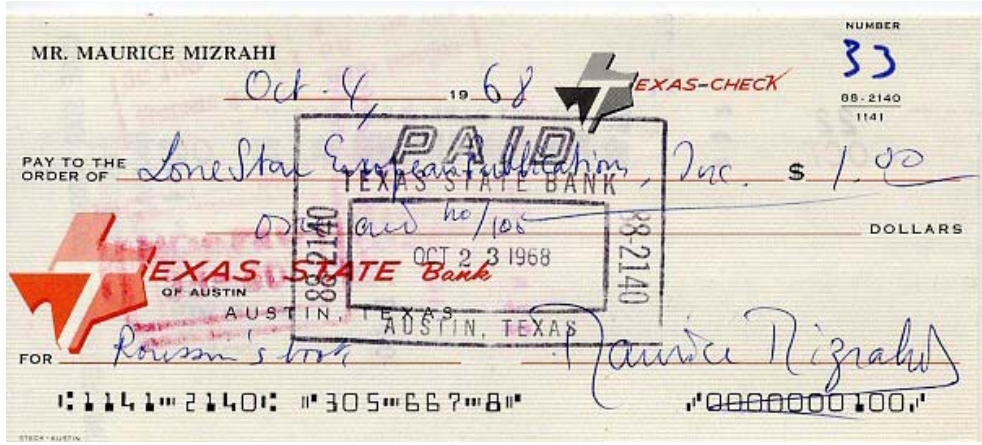


My room was poorly lit, so I bought a fluorescent desk lamp for \$12.57. It was really good! I've been using it for 35 years and it still works great. They knew how to build them back then. 😊

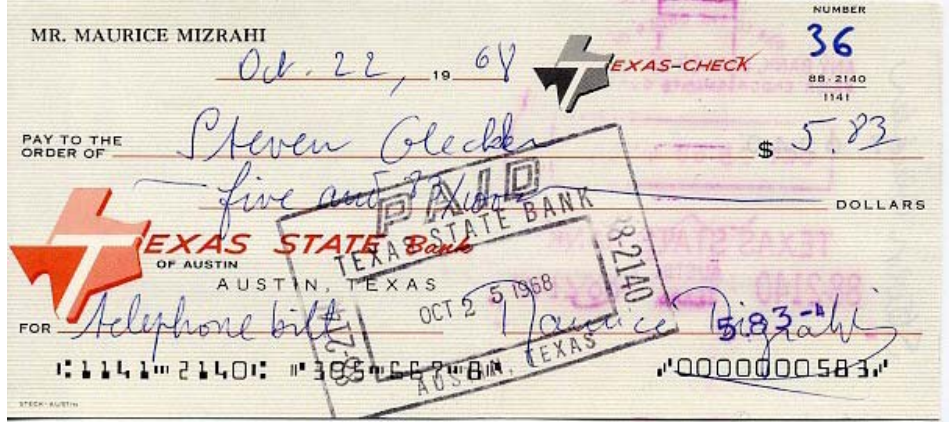




I missed French culture, so I “audited” a French theater class that was preparing for a play, “Les oeufs de l’autruche” by Andre Roussin. I got the part of Henri – a small part – and made new friends by going to the rehearsals. It was fun, and also earned me my first serious American girlfriend, Leslie Kotcher, who also had a part.



I couldn't really afford, and didn't really need, a telephone, but it was hard to say no to my three suite mates, so I signed up with them to share the phone bill.



I discovered there was such a thing as a public library, from which you could check out non-academic items of general interest for free! It was quite a walk to get there, but I

enjoyed going there occasionally. We did not have that in Cairo! Alas, I also discovered that records must not be kept in the sun or they will warp! I had to pay the library \$3.98 to replace a record by French singer Enrico Macias I had damaged. My first "fine" in the New World.



It was getting cold, even in Austin, and I was not thrilled at the prospect of wearing my old-fashioned coat from Egypt. So I bought a nice sports jacket for \$18.20.



And this ends 1968, my first year as a free man. Free to spend money, among other things!