

Chapter Five A Martial Interlude

As we got off the bus at Dix, a sergeant started screaming at us. That pretty well set the tone of the next nine weeks. Basic Training used to be a rite of passage shared by a wide variety of young men in America. It may surprise those who know me through my radical political writings to hear that, in an odd way, I enjoyed the experience, and have for the past forty-five years been glad that it was thrust on me.

Not that it was fun, or that I liked it. It was bloody hell, and I hated every minute of it. But it was a stress-free sort of bloody hell, and I wasn't supposed to like it. In fact, it was the first place I had ever been that I felt perfectly free to dislike, and once I had absorbed this fact, I found Basic rather relaxing.

We spent the first four days at something called Reception Company, standing in endless lines to receive our boots, helmets, shirts, helmet liners, fatigues, dress uniforms, and other gear. Most of the time I just hung around, not getting much sleep because the young boys in the barracks were excited at being away from home for the first time and stayed up talking and playing loud music on their radios. Late in the week, we were sorted out into training companies, broken down into platoons, and sent off to the four corners of Fort Dix to start the official eight weeks of Basic.

I was assigned an upper in a double-decker bunk, above a big, slow-moving lunk named Wilson, who came from Boston. Each training company consisted of three platoons, and each platoon of three squads. The NCO=s were mostly Korean War vets, a good many of them Black or Hispanic. This was the first time in my life that I had seen men in positions of authority who were not White, but this made very little impression on me. Budding anarchist though I might be, I very quickly absorbed the fundamental rule of the Army, which was that it was the stripes on

your arm or the insignia on your collar that mattered.

Those who have never served in the Army may imagine that military training is all about how to kill people. Not a bit of it. In eight weeks, we can=t have spent more than eight or ten hours learning how to do things that could conceivably be injurious to anyone=s health. The first thing we had to learn was how to make our beds. We were shown the secrets of hospital corners by a corporal who warned us that we would be inspected every day, and that each of us was expected to pull his top blanket so tight that he could bounce a quarter on it. Next we were shown the precise layout for the toilet articles in the top shelf of the footlocker that served as our closet, and also the precise position of the foot locker at the end of the bed. This, too, would be checked daily, and as we stood at attention each morning, the foot locker was to be open for inspection. Which brought up the matter of standing at attention. The Army had quite definite ideas about how one=s fingers were to be curled when the hands were at one=s sides, and took particular interest in whether one=s thumbs were exactly aligned with the seams of one=s fatigue trousers.

I have always been something of a neatnik. During the seven years that I lived on my own at Harvard and in Europe, I kept my room picked up and made my bed every day. When my sons come to visit me now, I am always astonished at the speed with which they can reduce a nice guest room to something that looks like a Goodwill drop-off center. So I was not too troubled by the Army=s somewhat idiosyncratic notions of neatness.

We also spent a good deal of time in the early days learning how to march in step to commands, and how to stand at attention, at parade rest, and at ease [this last no less precise and regulated despite its name.] Now, marching is basically a form of folk dance, not too different from the East European kolos in which a group of men join hands and do identical steps in a

circle. Done well, it is rhythmic, physically invigorating, and aesthetically pleasing, even when it is directed by a drill sergeant interspersing commands with imprecations. Anyone who has seen an old Busby Berkeley movie, watched the Radio City Music Hall Rockettes, or attended a performance of Riverdance will appreciate the attractions of synchronized movement.

When I was young, dancing was enormously important to me. I was, if I may say so unblushingly, a terrific fox trotter, jitterbugger, and folk dancer, although not in the same league as my sister, who had achieved performance levels in modern dance and folk dance. So I actually looked forward to our sessions on the parade ground. I especially liked the more intricate maneuvers, in which, on command, an entire platoon would wheel on its right foot and continue marching in the opposite direction, or turn abruptly to the right or left.

As we marched, we shouted out the old familiar marching chants, both to keep us in step and to lift our spirits. A Sound off! One two! Sound off! Three four! Sound off! One two three four one two B three four. @ A You want to go home but you can=t! You=re right [this last shouted as the right foot hit the ground]. You want to go home but you can=t! You=re right! You want to go home where the buffalo roam but you=re stuck at Fort Dix in a tent! You=re right. Sound off! ...@ and so forth.

The chants were usually led by the drill sergeant, but I was bored, and had nothing else to do, so I started making up new marching chants that incorporated bits of daily news from our platoon. The other men loved this, since it was a variation on the tedious old chants, and as I was doing this as part of a marching exercise, I could get away with some digs at the corporals and sergeants who were making our lives miserable. Very quickly, I became, in effect, the platoon minstrel.

I was also introduced almost immediately to the peculiar dialect of English spoken on

Army bases. I was familiar with dialects like Pig Latin, of course, which consists of moving the first consonantal syllable to the end of a word and adding on Aay.@ But the Army dialect involved infixes as well as prefixes and suffixes. Although this was complicated, and took some getting used to, it was made easier by the fact that in every case, the prefix, infix, or suffix was some variant of the same basic phonological unit B Afuck.@ I had used this word on occasion, of course, although it would be another decade before it became acceptable to use it in polite society. But I had never actually heard it inserted between two syllables of a multi-syllabic word, or even, in the hands of a real virtuoso, inserted several times into the very same word. Still, one could with a little practice achieve a certain rhythmic effectiveness that would have pleased a Welshman.

We also spent a considerable amount of time doing calisthenics, or p. t., as it was called. I had been a gymnast in high school, spending my phys. ed. period in the distinctive purple pants with gold seam of the Captain Corps, so I was in pretty good shape when I went off to college. Even though it had been seven years since I had done any sort of organized exercise, I was still only twenty-three, and my body had not yet begun the long, slow, inexorable slide that I now struggle to impede with diet and dogged laps in a pool. It was mostly sit ups, push ups, assorted jumping jacks and such. The day was organized into one hour blocks, with fifty minutes for a class and a ten minute break for some exercise. There were incentives aside from the constant yelling of the sergeants. At the entrance to the mess hall, for example, there was a chinning bar, and you had to do two full chin ups before being admitted.

It was actually during a sit up session that I achieved the intellectual breakthrough that transformed my experience of the military. We were paired off, with one of us doing the sit ups and the other holding the first one=s legs. As usual, a sergeant was yelling at us, telling us that if

even a single one of us was unable to do thirty sit ups in a minute by the end of Basic Training, our entire unit would get a black mark. At first, I reacted in true Pavlovian fashion to this stimulus by straining to do my sit ups faster. Then, a thought came unbidden into my mind, and I felt the weights falling away from me in a moment of supreme liberation. ASo what?@ I thought. AI don=t care whether my unit gets a black mark, and I don=t even care whether I am the cause of it. I am not trying to get ahead here. I am just trying to get out.@

I claim no originality for this thought, even though it preceded by five years the publication of *Catch-22*, which raised it to the level of genius. But it was for me a true revelation. All my life, I had been trying as hard as I could to meet the demands of teachers, principals, and dissertation advisors. I had been rebellious, angry, a constant challenger of authority. But it had never crossed my mind, when presented with a hurdle, simply to decline to jump.

Hard on the heels of this *eclaircissement* came a second, with even more profound sociological and pedagogical implications. It wasn=t I who cared whether I could do the required number of sit ups in the time specified. It was my platoon sergeant, and beyond him, my Company Commander. The Army held *them* responsible for the performance of their men. If a platoon failed to meet the minimum standards set by Army regulations, that would be a black mark on their records, and might very well stand in the way of their advancement to higher rank. Since they were lifers B career soldiers for whom the military was as important as the Academy was to me B their energies were entirely focused on making sure that we performed at least adequately.

This truth in turn implied two others which, taken together, determined the character and conduct of Basic Training. First of all, if it was absolutely essential to the career ambitions of the men in charge that every soldier perform up to standard, then the standard would have to be one

that every soldier was capable of meeting. A sergeant might shout and threaten; he might warn us that we were about to be ordered to double time all the way to the rifle range, and that if anyone fainted along the way, his ass would be grass. But should that platoon be so much as fifteen minutes late to the range, thus throwing the intricate schedule of the day out of kilter, it was the sergeant's ass that would be grass.

This may seem like a miserable tautology, as we say in logic seminars, but it constitutes a complete contradiction of the principles on which a university fashions its curriculum.

Universities like to think that their curricula embody the knowledge accumulated over millennia of intellectual investigation. They then offer this invaluable treasure to students on their own terms. If the students fail to master it, that is *their* fault, and can certainly not be held against their professors, whose job it is to *maintain standards*. Universities assume that some fraction of the students whom they admit, and whose money they take, will fail to meet the standard and be flunked out. In post-colonial countries like South Africa, universities fail half or more of their students, and then congratulate themselves on the rigor of their standards. The result, of course, is that universities routinely make a considerable number of their students feel like failures, and they take no responsibility for this fact, placing all the blame on the students.

The Army, in contrast, makes only such demands on its recruits as they can be counted on to be able to meet. It yells at its recruits, tells them they are going to fail, browbeats them, harasses them, and then at the end of Basic Training tells them they have all passed. The result is that by the end of the eighth week, the men are standing tall and feeling very good about themselves. And I was no exception, even though I had figured this out. I was proud that my bed was so tautly made, that my foot locker was precisely aligned, that my boots and my belt buckle shone, that I could march and salute and stand at attention or at ease in precisely the

correct manner. I marched out of Basic Training thinking that I was one hell of a fellow.

The second implication had equally profound consequences for the pedagogical style of the Army. Since every recruit had to master certain basic skills and a basic set of facts, and since, in every platoon, there were men of very different native abilities, the teaching had to be pitched to the *slowest* learner, not to the quickest. If learning was your thing, as it was mine, this made for some pretty dull classes. But there were slower learners in our platoon who had been mocked, looked down upon, ridiculed, and given bad grades in every school situation in which they had ever found themselves. The Army was the first school in which every classroom was tailored to their learning speed. In a class on military justice or infiltrating behind enemy lines or surviving in the Korean countryside [the Army always prepares for the last war], they could be sure that if they asked a question in the proper military manner [which for the most part meant prefacing it with, ASir@], they would be given a polite answer designed actually to help them understand.

Far be it from me to call into question the ethos of the institution in which I have spent my entire adult life, but I sometimes think that universities might have something to learn from the Army about teaching and the responsibilities of teachers.

There were of course a very small handful of men for whom even the Army=s demands were too much. A soldier who was judged mentally unfit for military duty could be given what was called a Section Eight discharge. I never did find out what this rule was section eight of, or what the other seven sections dealt with. One such soldier turned out to be Wilson. Wilson moved very sluggishly, and just didn=t seem to be able to handle such arcana as lacing up his boots, making his bed, and standing at attention. Marching in step was completely beyond him. After about three and a half weeks, he was given a Section Eight, and disappeared. Several

weeks later, a group of us were sitting around the barracks, idly aiming our empty rifles at the Company Commander across the road and reminiscing about Astupid Wilson. @ AI wonder where stupid Wilson is now, @ one man said. AProbably in Boston, @ another said, AStupid fucking Wilson. @ AYeah, @ we all said, Astupid fucking Wilson. @ AYou know what gets me? @ someone threw in. AHe actually has a fucking high school degree. How the fuck can someone get a fucking high school di-fucking-ploma and fucking not be able to tie his fucking boots? @ [We all talked in Army dialect when we were off duty.] We thought about that for a bit, and then a thought struck us, more or less simultaneously. We were in an Army barracks, sweating through the sixth week of Basic, and Wilson was back in Boston, walking around free. To this day, I wonder whether Wilson wasn't a genuine organic intellectual who grasped the inner nature of military life as soon as he got to Reception Company and crafted a successful plan to get out.

Far and away our most important piece of equipment was the M-1 rifle. Each of us was issued a rifle on the first day, and from then on we were responsible for it. We were told to memorize its serial number, which we were liable to be tested on during rifle inspections. The M-1 was a 30 caliber air-cooled gas-operated semi-automatic firing piece, to give it its proper description, which we were told had a range of 3,500 yards. As that is just a tad under two miles, it is perhaps understandable that the Army was not eager to let us actually put ammunition in it. The M-1 held a clip of eight bullets, which was inserted by cocking the piece with the heel of the right hand, depressing a spring mechanism with the thumb, and then snatching the thumb out of the way while simultaneously forcing the clip into the rifle. Done improperly, this could do serious damage to your thumb, and I never carried out the little maneuver without a twinge of anxiety.

For the first six weeks or so, we spent a good deal of our time marching with the rifle, cleaning it meticulously, learning how to do things with it like presenting arms, and practicing taking it apart and putting it together again until we could disassemble it, or Afield strip it, as the saying went, in ten seconds, and reassemble it equally quickly.

I had seen ASergeant York with Gary Cooper, so I knew that this was mother=s milk to country boys, but I was a city boy through and through, despite my summers in the Berkshires. I had never so much as held a rifle in my hands before Basic, and I grew rather fond of it. I even learned how to do the Queen Anne=s Salute, which is a nifty bit of juggling that involves spinning the rifle about and ending up in a kneeling position with it held on one=s shoulder. We were even instructed in the proper way to use the sling as a steadying device while aiming the rifle standing, sitting, and lying prone.

Finally, when the Army could not put it off any longer, we were marched double time to the firing range and actually permitted to fire at some targets set up a considerable distance away. We started out prone, stretched out in a long line, three or four feet apart. Behind us walked an unusually large number of corporals and sergeants, watching our every movement with eagle eyes. I thought this show of caution somewhat excessive, until a confused young man with a fully loaded rifle and his arm entangled in the strap turned and started to get up to ask a question, thereby swinging the rifle around so that it swept the entire line of recruits. Three NCO=s sprang into action and wrestled him to the ground before he could kill any of us.

I don=t think we got to fire more than a few dozen rounds, taking all in all. I turned out to be an indifferent marksman, perhaps because my eyes are not so good, or maybe because it takes real skill and a capacity for inner stillness to hold a rifle steadily enough. I could wrap the sling around my arm so as to freeze the rifle into immobility, but the bullets did not go quite

where I aimed them.

The most realistic moment of Basic Training is supposed to be the live fire exercise, during which you have to crawl on your belly or slither on your back under a network of barbed wire while real machine gun bullets whiz overhead. We had gotten word of this bit of fun from some soldiers whom we met at the PX during Reception week, but it never happened. In the cycle before us, a confused young man had actually stood up in the middle of the exercise, and had been cut down by the machine guns. Since Dix was not very far from New York, there was a good deal of newspaper coverage of the incident, and the Army suspended live fire exercises while it made a great show of carrying out an investigation to discover how a soldier could possibly have been killed when standing up in the line of machine gun fire.

I had just been awarded a doctorate in Philosophy by Harvard University, of course, but that fact, which became known in our Company, made little or no impression on my fellow recruits. One soldier did come up to me and say, AHey, Wolff. You got a Ph. D., huh? That=s great. You graduated from college yet?@ This was my first experience of a world that had no interest in my rather specialized accomplishments, a fact that I found restful. If you are a frog, there is no point in straining to puff yourself up when there are no other frogs around to take notice. Egrets and water snakes have quite different ways of calling attention to themselves, and won=t even realize that you are doing something remarkable.

The eight weeks finally came to an end, our Company was declared to have passed Basic Training satisfactorily, we put on our dress uniforms and marched in a final parade, and then we were sent off on a three day pass with orders to report to our next unit for specialty training. Some of the men were headed south for Advanced Infantry or Heavy Weapons training, but the Massachusetts National Guard assigned me to training in Communications, which I was to

receive at Fort Devens in Ayer, Massachusetts, thirty miles west of Boston.

When I got to Devens, I discovered that I had been placed in a training platoon of six months lodged within a regular Army Company. My platoon mates were all members of the Mass National Guard, and many of them were college graduates. Our first sergeant was Dooley, a bullet-headed by-the-book lifer who actually was a college graduate himself. When he heard that I had a Ph. D., he set me to work typing passes for the men in the platoon. Josephs came in and asked to help, telling Dooley that he had an M. A. Dooley was unimpressed, and told him to sweep the floor.

Communications has a hi-tech sound to it these days, but in 1957 it had a slightly different meaning. We started off mastering the mysteries of the Prick-10. The PRC-10, which presumably stood for something like APortable Radio Communications,@ was a hand-held device weighing maybe five pounds, attached to a long black rubberized line that unrolled from a drum. The idea was to string the line out maybe a thousand feet or so to the next unit on the battlefield and hook it up to a second PRC-10, so that the two units could talk to one another. After we had learned how to roll out the wire, we were introduced to the protocols of Prick-10 communications.

This brings me to a subject that has, for the past forty-five years, been an especially sore point with me: the proper use of the terms Aover@ and Aout.@ A PRC-10 worked the way a CB radio works. To talk, you held down a button. So long as you held the button down, your radio would transmit your voice. When you lifted your finger from the button, the radio stopped transmitting. If you were holding the button down, the person at the other end of the line could receive, but he could not transmit until you released your button.

To avoid the confusion that would result from two people trying to transmit at the same

time, the Army used the standard ham radio operator=s technique. When you were finished transmitting, you would say Aover,@ which meant, AI am finished transmitting; I am lifting my finger from the button; now you can transmit and I will listen.@ In this way, two people could carry on an extended conversation without stepping on each other=s lines. It was, in a way, a device ideally designed for Charlie Parsons, who could not engage in the customary give and take of half finished sentences that is the typical mode of most casual conversations, but instead would persist obsessively until he had reached the end of whatever sentence he had started. When you were all finished with the exchange, you would say Aout,@ which meant AI am done talking and I don=t want you to transmit any longer, because I am not listening.@

Now, a moment=s reflection will make it perfectly obvious that Aover@ and Aout@ are intended to send contradictory messages. But for my entire adult life, I have been listening to hotshot characters in action movies saying into various handheld devices, Aover and out.@ Having done my time in the military, I know that is just not right.

The second sort of communications equipment in which we were trained was signal panels. These were large oblong pieces of colored cloth, with loops around the edges for pegs, that could be staked out on the ground in various arrays to send a message to an airplane flying overhead. Our schedule called for a three hour class on the proper method of setting out signal panels. A luckless Spec-4 was assigned the task of conducting the class. It was a prematurely cold November day, and we were all going a bit stir crazy. The instructor marched us out to a flat piece of turf, sat us down on the cold ground, and began his lecture. When we realized what the subject of the morning was, and that we would be there, shivering, for three hours, we spontaneously rebelled.

He began by saying a few words about the purpose of the panels, and then showed us how

to put the wooden pegs through the little loops, driving them into the ground with the heel of a boot. When he got done, someone raised his hand and said, ASarge, what are the panels for?@ He had just said what the panels were for, but as I have explained, the Army pitched its instruction at the dimmest bulb in the chandelier, not the brightest. So he repeated his set speech about signaling planes. Someone else piped up, AWhat are the pegs for, Sarge.@ AAh well,@ he replied, warming a bit to his task, Athose are for holding the panels down, in case it is windy.@ ABut what are the loops for?@ ATo put the pegs through.@ AAnd why put the pegs through the loops?@ ATo hold the panel down.@ ABut Sarge, what happens if it gets windy? @ Showing the just the faintest bit of concern, AThen you put the pegs through the holes.@

Well, we kept it up for the better part of three hours, round and round and round, rapidly driving the poor man crazy. But there was nothing he could do, because it would be on *his* head if it turned out that we had failed to master the proper placement of the signal panels.

Far and away the greatest challenge of our communications training was learning to climb telephone poles, using lineman=s gaffs. These are pairs of big sharp steel spikes attached to a metal and leather frame that fits under the foot and straps onto the leg in such a way that the spike, or gaff, points down and in at an angle from the inside of the ankle. To climb, you jam the gaff into the pole, hold on with your hands, put your weight on the gaff and step up. Then you jam the other gaff in higher up, and proceed like this, walking up the pole. When you get as high up as you need to go, you Abelt off.@ This means that you unstrap one end of a long leather strap from a ring on a belt around you waist, pass it around the pole, and strap it back onto the ring. If you then lean back, resting your feet on the gaffs, your hands are free to work with the tools that are also hanging from your belt. To come down, you reverse the process, pulling one gaff out of the pole and lowering it before jamming it back in, then lowering the other one. An

accomplished lineman can move so fast that he looks as though he were running up and down the pole like a squirrel.

Done properly, pole climbing with gaffs is quite easy. There is, however, a problem. If you get nervous and think you are going to fall, you must do the totally counterintuitive thing and lean *back* from the pole. The reason is that if you lean forward and hug the pole, the angle of your gaffs with the pole narrows, they pull out, and you slide down the pole collecting splinters as you go. Leaning back increases the angle of the gaffs with the pole, and makes them catch more securely.

Most of the men in my platoon were a good deal younger than I, and it mattered to them not to lose face by showing that they were the least bit scared. The Army counted on that, as it turned out. One day, when we had mastered the basic elements of getting up and down the pole, the training sergeant told us to try moving around the pole once we got to the top. To accomplish this, one had to pull out a gaff and edge around part of the pole before jamming it back in. If you try to see this in your mind's eye, it will be obvious to you that this little move is a good deal scarier than just going straight up and straight down.

When it came my turn to try, I froze. I was only ten feet or so in the air, but I was terrified, and I didn't move. "A Wolff," the sergeant shouted, "move around the pole." "I can't, Sarge," I replied, "I'm scared."

This posed a problem with which he had never before been confronted. I wasn't refusing a lawful order but there were clear rules about that. I was willing to move around the pole; I wanted to move around the pole [if I may paraphrase Mr. Doolittle in Shaw's *Pygmalion*]. But I just couldn't do it. The sergeant spent some time trying unsuccessfully to cajole me, encourage me, shame me into moving around the pole, but when I responded to every effort with the

statement that I was scared, he told me to come back down. The other men were, of course, just as scared as I was, and when they saw that I had got away with confessing my fear, they all started to say they were afraid. After a bit, the sergeant gave up and canceled the class. We never did learn how to move around the pole.

Along about October, Sargent Dooley was reassigned, and we got a new platoon sargent, Sgt. McVicker. Life suddenly got a good deal worse. The rumor was that Sgt. McVicker had been removed from duty at the Fort Dix Stockade because he was too hard on the prisoners. He walked in the first day, took one look at us, and announced in a voice we hadn't heard since Basic that we were going to shape up. He started holding daily inspections, and each time we failed, which meant every day, we had to get up a half hour earlier to G. I. the barracks. When he arrived at 6 a.m., fresh from his daily inspection of his six children, he lined us up outside the barracks and subjected us to an inspection complete with rifle drill and snap questions about current news events. He once ordered me to tell him my rifle serial number backwards, and snarled when I stumbled over two of the digits. On the morning of October 5th, when we fell out after an hour of barracks scrubbing, he had us look into the sky to watch Sputnik move sedately overhead. The next morning at inspection, he asked us for its altitude and velocity.

Unlike Dooley, McVicker held no brief for college boys. When he heard that I had a Harvard doctorate, he said with a malicious grin, >Well, Wolff, I guess you think you have leadership potential. O.K. You are now in charge of the latrine cleaning squad.@

Just as I was earning this promotion, the Magazine Section of the Sunday *New York TIMES* published an article by the famous World War Two war correspondent and cartoonist Bill Mauldin, on the Anew army.@ The thrust of the article was that the Army was failing to make use of the talents and educational accomplishments of the college graduates who were being

drafted. I thought my own military experience might have something to contribute to the discussion, so I wrote a short letter to the *TIMES*, which they published. Here it is in its entirety:

To the Editor@

As a private in the United States infantry, I read with great interest Bill Mauldin=s article on intellectuals and K. P. I hold a Ph. D. in philosophy from Harvard University and am a member, therefore, of the group of soldiers of which Mr. Mauldin wrote. I feel that my experiences may serve to counteract somewhat the bad impression of the army which he sought to create.

When I first entered this company, I was assigned to daily latrine duty. Each morning at 0530 hours I cleaned the sinks and bowls and scrubbed the floors. So far, one might think the Army was making little use of my advanced education.

However, as soon as my platoon sergeant learned of my several university degrees, I was elevated to the position of *chief* latrine cleaner. I became, in effect head man. This position I held for some time, and I flatter myself that I discharged my duties so as to reflect favorably on the university which trained me.

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The rigors known as Ashaping up@ have a certain unavoidable inner rhythm. They accomplish their purpose only if they eventually come to an end. So after a bit, McVicker was forced to ease up on us, and allow us to go off base like the regular soldiers when the official Army day was done. I had no transportation, but a number of the other men had brought cars to the base, and since most of them were from the Boston area, I could usually catch a ride into town.

I headed for Cambridge, naturally, and having nothing better to do, I would visit Adair Moffat in Whitman Hall at Radcliffe. I was just looking for somewhere warm and friendly to sit and talk. One afternoon in November, when I showed up at Whitman, a very pretty young

woman was sitting at the bell desk. Men were not allowed above the first floor, so when a man arrived to pick up his date, the student with bell duty would call her floor and announce his presence. Sometimes, a student would wait downstairs to save her the trouble, as this young woman was doing. I was very taken with her, and asked Adair who she was. Adair told me that she was a senior named Cindy. Her full name was Mary Cynthia Griffin, and, Adair warned me, she was Catholic, so she was probably not someone I wanted to get too interested in. I could see the point of the caution, but I was really attracted, and called the next day to ask whether she would like to go dancing.

Cindy said she would let me know, and when I called back, she said yes. It was only some while later that I learned why she had agreed. Apparently, she was on the point of getting engaged, but the other students thought that one ought to be nice to our boys in uniform, and told her she should go out with me.

We went dancing Thanksgiving eve. I was smitten, and sent her flowers the next day, a move that was apparently just right. I started coming in to Cambridge every chance I could to see, her, and by December 9th, I was ready to announce to my parents in a letter home that I had fallen in love.

Cindy was from a very wealthy Shaker Heights family. Her father was the manager of the Cleveland Group of Sears, Roebuck stores, one of the largest groups in the country. He had been made a Knight of Malta for his services to the Church, and served on the national board of the National Council of Christians and Jews. Cindy was an English major, but she was pre-med, and planned to attend medical school as soon as she graduated. She was slender, pretty, with short brown hair, very feminine, and she had a razor sharp mind. I can still see her sitting in a little café near the Radcliffe Quad, drinking coffee and talking. I gave her a logical puzzle I had heard about

eight coins and an apothecary's scale, and she solved it right off the bat. I think she must have fallen in love with me as quickly as I with her, because I never heard any more about the boy she was about to get engaged to.

Cindy had a quick, intuitive mind, and the ability to penetrate the surface of literary texts to get at the inner feelings and thoughts of the author. She told me that as a young Sophomore, she had taken the Shakespeare course taught by the famous critic Harry Levin. Her first paper had not received a very good grade, so she had gone to the graduate student grader to find out how she might improve her work. He started to explain the sorts of things she might have said in response to the question, but before he could get very far, she had said, "Oh, that is what you are looking for." After that, she had never gotten less than an A again in the course.

Cindy was writing a senior honors thesis on Thomas Hardy's novel *Jude The Obscure*, under the direction of Albert J. Guerard, another quite well known literary scholar. I had never read any Hardy, so I went right out and bought a copy of the novel, which I read during boring Army lectures on communications in order to be able to talk to her about it. *Jude The Obscure* is a dark, gloomy novel about unhappy, tortured people, which perhaps does not adequately differentiate it from other novels by Thomas Hardy. As I plowed through it, I found it hard to make it comport with the gay, charming, sexy woman whom I found so entrancing. There are actually notations in the margins of my copy, with comments like "Why is she working on this?" and "Good grief. What does she find in this?"

Cindy's parents had bought her a long silver gray Plymouth with big tail fins as a kind of advance graduation present. During my last weeks in the Army, she let me use it, so that I could come into Cambridge virtually every evening to see her. Meanwhile, I was getting ready to return to civilian life. One of my last military duties was to take a twenty-four hour turn on guard duty.

The guard detail slept on cots in a room heated with a coal stove. We would spend four hours walking up and down in the freezing December air, and four hours lying around trying to get warm. Our rifles were loaded with real bullets, and we were supposed to be ready to shoot someone who did not halt when challenged and identify himself, but nobody ever came by when I was on duty. During my middle of the night turn, I walked my route, looking at the stars and thinking, ANow you are cold and miserable, but in only a few weeks, you will be lying in a warm bed, remembering this night and feeling happy that you are not on guard duty.@ It got me through the hours.

A number of Regular Army soldiers transferred into our unit to wait out the last few months before the end of their three-year tours of duty. They were mockingly superior about our anxious desire that the last two weeks be over. They had been thinking of themselves as short-timers since before we had gone on active duty. In the end, the Army decided that it wasn=t worth their while to send us home on Christmas leave and then bring us back just to send us home again, so they lopped the last few weeks off our six month obligation, and mustered us out in late December. Step by step we retraced the process we had gone through in Reception Company. We turned in our fatigues, our dress uniforms, our rifles B everything except our boots, which we were told to take with us back to our Guard units. I was still wearing those boots twenty years later.

After spending Christmas with my parents, I returned to Cambridge to attend the annual meetings of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association, and to see Cindy. We consummated our love affair New Year=s Eve, in the Beacon Hill apartment of a friend of mine, in a bed that was said to have belonged to Edmund Wilson. As I recall, we broke the bed.

For the first time since my parents had enrolled me in the Sunnyside Progressive School, I was completely without prescribed academic goals. I had run out of grades to advance through. There *was* nothing beyond the Ph. D. I settled into an apartment at 12 Prentiss Street in Cambridge, a single family house converted to apartments on a quiet side street several blocks north of the Law School, set up a desk, unloaded my books, sharpened my pencils, and tried to figure out what to do next. I needed some sort of structure to substitute for the exams and orals and degrees that had given shape to my entire life thus far. As I first approximation, I settled on lists. My fellowship called for me to study political theory, so I made a list of every major work and a good sampling of the minor works in the history of Western political theory, and I began reading my way through them. The Army had turned me around, getting me up at the hour when I had been accustomed to go to sleep, but very quickly I fell into my old habit of working at night. This actually posed certain logistical problems. I had to set my alarm if I wanted to rise early enough to get to the bank before it closed at 2 p.m.

I still have the careful notes I took, organized in three tattered ring binders with a label pasted on the front listing in order the books summarized within. The *Defensor Pacis* of Marsilius of Padua was a great find, as was Jean Bodin's *Six Books of the Republic*. Cicero was a total waste of time B superficial and derivative B and Aquinas was something of a disappointment. Wolfson had led me to expect something better. I find, in looking through those old notebooks, that I actually read my way through volume one of Marx's *Capital*, but I was quite unprepared as yet to appreciate its greatness, and I made some disdainful and dismissive remarks about it in a letter home to my father.

Cindy and I were very happy in those early days, spending as much time together as we could while she finished up her honors thesis and took her last semester of courses. She got into

Harvard Medical School, which meant that we would be able to go on seeing each other when the term ended, although she would be ferociously busy. She engaged in endless disputes with her parents, who disapproved of her plans for medicine and of her involvement with me, as they had earlier disapproved of her decision to attend Radcliffe. Although she did not talk with them about religion, she was also in the process of drifting away from the Church. Almost from the time we first met, we talked about marriage, but there were very difficult years ahead, and it would be almost five years before we finally became man and wife.

Although I had no official position at Harvard, it was very much my turf, so I began hanging about the Square and even attending several graduate seminars. My first effort along these lines was a comic disaster, though I put it to good use in later years. Robert McClosky, a distinguished Canadian-born professor of Government was offering a seminar on the Constitution, and I decided to go round to see what it was like. The seminar was listed as meeting in Littauer, a large white building just north of Harvard Yard that was home to several social science departments. I had never set foot in it during my seven years as a student, and did not know my way around in it at all. I found what I thought was the right room, which, as I had got there early, was empty. I went in, walked to the other side of the seminar table, and took a seat. As people started to wander in, they looked very peculiarly at me, but no one said anything so I just smiled. Finally a young man walked in briskly carrying an enormous load of mimeographed copies of a very thick paper. When he handed them out, I realized that it was a computerized one hundred sector input-output analysis of the United States economy. I was obviously in the wrong room, but I was on the far side of the table, some distance from the door, and I was too embarrassed to get up and excuse myself, so I hunkered down through an hour and more of incomprehensible macroeconomics. Many years later, when I became friendly with a brilliant

young economist named Franklin Fischer, who had been there that day, I discovered that I had stumbled into a meeting of the faculty seminar of the Harvard Economics Department. They knew I didn't belong, but they were too polite to ask me to leave.

Ever since then, at the first meeting of each of my courses, I announce the title of the course and my name, I tell this story, and I then invite students to leave if they wish, turning my face toward the blackboard for a few moments so as not to embarrass them.

Living on the second floor, just above me, was Hugh Amory, who, as Demos would have said, was one of the Boston Amorys. Hugh was a graduate student in the English Department. We struck up an acquaintance, and I introduced him to Cindy. In very short order, we were taken up by Hugh's branch of the Amory clan. Hugh was the son of Buzz Amory [thanks to an aquiline nose which his college friends thought made him look like a buzzard]. When Buzz died, Hugh's mother, who was a rather flamboyant *grande dame*, married Phillips Ketchum, a rather older senior partner of a Boston law firm. They lived in an elegant apartment in town, but summered on a big estate out South Natick way, as I recall. Hugh's birthday was July 4th, and the family combined it with the nation's birthday in an annual celebration. Cindy and I were invited to join them in South Natick for the affair. Hugh was an easy-going casual man, but we knew this was our entry into old Boston aristocracy, so we dressed to the nines and brought along a magnum of champagne as a present. When we got to the estate, we discovered that it was a clambake, and we were hideously over dressed. Everyone else was wearing T-shirts and sawed off jeans.

It was a *real* clambake, the first I had ever seen. There was an enormous pit in the backyard, into which had gone a layer of hot stones, a layer of seaweed, a layer of lobsters, another layer of seaweed, and then successive layers of clams, lobsters, seaweed, corn, and more lobsters

Enough and more to feed the scores of people lounging about on the lawn. I got a plate and walked up to the buffet table to get some food. Mrs. Amory was just ahead of me, and when she came to the pile of lobsters stacked on a platter, she picked one up, tore off the tail, and threw the rest away. I was horrified, since I came from a family that squeezed every last bit of lobster meat from even the slenderest tentacles. She saw the look on my face and laughing gaily, said "Life is too short."

I loaded up my plate and looked around for someplace to sit. I settled down at the corner of a blanket on which seven or eight people were eating and chattering. Needless to say, I knew no one, but I figured that I ought to try to be sociable, so after listening to them talk for a bit about the Boston Arts Festival, I turned to the young man sitting next to me and asked, politely, "Are you associated with the Boston Arts Festival?" He looked at me with the very slightest show of disdain and said quietly, "I run it." It was that kind of day.

As the Spring wore on, I started to worry about what I was going to do when the grant ran out, in the middle of the following year. My first thought was to get a half year extension, but despite the best efforts of McClosky, whom I had finally managed to meet, the SSRC said no. I had also been sitting in on a Political Theory seminar taught by a grand old man named William Yandell Elliott. Elliott was actually a rather distinguished character, having been Staff Director of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House and Vice-Chairman of the War Production Board, but he was a godawful windbag who regularly got panned by students in the semi-annual totally unofficial *Crimson Confidential Guide to Courses*. Elliott had a go at arranging a joint Instructorship or Assistant Professorship for me in Government and General Education, which would have been marvelous, but nothing came of it.

In the end, I was saved by the desires and aversions of the Harvard senior philosophy

professors. Harvard had for a long time been offering group tutorial to Sophomores and Juniors who elected to try for an honors degree, and individual senior tutorial for those writing honors theses. In practice, this meant that about a third of undergraduates received tutorial. But with the ever more selective admissions procedures made possible by the dramatic increase in the applicant pool each year, classes were getting academically stronger. Finally, the Harvard faculty decided that its undergraduates were *all* honors material, and it voted to require every Harvard and Radcliffe Sophomore and Junior to take tutorial in his or her major field.

One obvious and immediate consequence of this decision was that unless something were done quickly, senior members of the Harvard Philosophy Department were going to have to come into regular personal contact with undergraduates, something that had not by and large been a part of their lives to that point. The Department requested and was granted permission to hire an Instructor who would handle all of the additional tutorial chores. They calculated that this would absorb roughly three-fifths of the energies of the Instructor. The other two-fifths could be devoted to teaching in the General Education Program. Morton White, who was faithfully looking out for me, suggested that I be appointed. The Department agreed, so now all that was needed was to find a two-fifths slot in General Education.

For readers who are not *au courant* with Harvard's rather odd way of calculating faculty responsibilities, I should explain the repeated reference to fifths. In the eyes of the Harvard Administration, each member of the faculty was responsible for five-fifths of academic duties of some sort. Senior faculty were required to teach three courses per year B perhaps two in the Fall and one in the Spring. That was three fifths. Each professor was then given one-fifth teaching credit for the research that he [or, in rare cases, she] was doing, and a fifth fifth of credit for administrative duties. Junior faculty were required to teach four courses a year, despite the fact

that they were under tremendous pressure to publish and usually had the most onerous administrative tasks dumped on them.

White looked around for somewhere to locate me in General Education, and discovered that there was a group of young Assistant Professors of History putting together Social Sciences 5, a new General Education course covering the history of Western Europe from Caesar to Napoleon. It was intended as an ideas-oriented alternative to the straight historical Soc. Sci. 1, and apparently they thought it would be great fun to have a philosopher teaching with them. So it was fixed up. I was offered a three year Instructorship in General Education and Philosophy. The salary was \$5,500 a year. I was beside myself with happiness.

There *was* one small problem, though I made no mention of it to White. I had never taken so much as a single course on European history, either as an undergraduate or as a graduate student. Indeed, my last organized encounter with the subject had been Mr. Wepner's Modern European History course my Junior year in high school. To be sure, I had enjoyed the course. When I lay in bed at night, before going to sleep, I would for the fun of it choose a year in the seventeenth or eighteenth century and then see whether I could remember what was happening in each major European country in that year. But somehow I thought that might not quite suffice as preparation for teaching History at Harvard.

My future colleagues were a collection of hotshots destined for greatness. James Billington, a tall, aristocratic and very serious Christian, is currently the Librarian of Congress. Hanna Holborn Gray, daughter of the famous Yale historian Hajo Holborn, went on to become Provost of Yale and President of the University of Chicago. She currently sits on the seven-member Harvard Corporation. Arno Mayer has had an enormously distinguished career as a Professor of History at Princeton. George Nadel founded the journal *History and Theory* two

years after we started teaching the course. I was going to have to tap dance pretty fast to keep up with them.

There was nothing for it but to learn some European history, so I made another list. Over the next three months, I plowed through twenty thousand pages of history, starting with the ancient world and working my way right through the Roman Republic, the early Roman Empire, the Conversion of the Empire to Christianity under Constantine, the barbarian invasions, the Merovingians, the Carolingians, the low Middle Ages, the high Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the rise of the modern state, the rise of capitalism, the English Revolution, the French Revolution, and finally, the Napoleonic Wars. I was as ready as I was ever going to be.