

Chapter One Growing Up

My entire life having been spent in association with one educational institution or another, it is perhaps appropriate that my very earliest memories are of the nursery school in which my parents enrolled me when I was two. When my mother was about to have her first child in 1930, which turned out to be my sister Barbara, the family moved from Greenwich Village to Queens, where they rented the first floor of a house at 3974 48th Street, just north of Skillman Avenue, in the neighborhood called then, and still called today, Sunnyside. I was born three years later, in December, 1933.

This was during the Great Depression, and the Sunnyside Progressive School, as the name suggests, was a red diaper operation. My parents had come out of a socialist background B my father=s father having been a leader of the Socialist Party in New York during the first decades of the twentieth century B but by the time I was born, their connection with radical politics was limited to reading P.M. every day and voting the straight Democratic Party ticket. I know from family stories that the nursery school was a hotbed of radicalism, and David Horowitz, the leftie turned right-winger who went there somewhat later than did I, claims in his autobiography that the school was designed to turn out committed socialists, but I am afraid my most intense pre-school memory is of an early foot fetish that I focused on one of my teachers.

In May, 1937, Celia Esterowitz, who seems to have been the director of the school, sent to my parents a six page typed report on my activities during the year. I am pleased to be able to state that my use of the jungle-jim was Aresourceful and skillful and showed emotional growth in ideas and ability.@ But the frequent injections my father had to give me for severe childhood asthma seem to have triggered some sort of emotional difficulty. Here is the rather detailed

account in the school report:

At the beginning of the year, Robert=s security seemed to have suffered a severe jolt. This was expressed in his relationship with the teacher. He seemed to have a great need for attention and affection. Following the teacher=s feet around the roof by himself or with a truck, stroking them, trying to remove the shoes, and even trying to masturbate against them ... all these were almost an obsession with Robert. In the midst of the most engrossing activity, he would drop everything to pursue the teacher. When all efforts at such times to make Robert return to his activity failed and the more drastic procedure of removing him until he was ready to work, only created strong antagonism in him, the teacher decided to try to lead him to more accepted forms of expression of affection. This she did do by lifting him up and embracing him or letting him sit on her lap while she talked to him. Although his embarrassed Robert at first, he soon began to express himself more frequently by a big hug and there was a lessening of concentration on the teacher=s feet.

Thus it was, I suppose, that I avoided some of the problems that later afflicted Bill Clinton=s politics guru, Dick Morris.

I was a pupil at the Sunnyside Progressive School until June, 1940, when my parents took the enormous, terrifying risk of buying a house in Kew Garden Hills, a newly developing community several miles to the East. Educationally speaking, it was a good time to leave, for shortly after we moved, Stalin ordered Trotsky to be killed in Mexico, and the school split into two irreconcilable factions. My grandfather having sided with the Mensheviks and Norman Thomas in 1917, my father grew up as a fanatic anti-communist, so had we stayed in Sunnyside, he probably would have hurled imprecations at both sides.

Aside from the image of my teacher=s feet, I have a variety of memories of the six years that we lived in Sunnyside. I recall walking toward Skillman Avenue and kissing a pretty little blond girl on the cheek [it would be six years before my next kiss.] I **think** I remember a little boy named Phil Green, though perhaps I have only been told that we used to ride together in a baby carriage. Later on, Phil and I went to the same summer camp, and thirty-five years later still,

when I moved to Northampton, Massachusetts to take up a professorship at the University of Massachusetts, Phil was teaching political science at Smith College. We discovered that in the interim we had both become radical critics of American society, and reconnected.

I can recall sitting propped up in a bed by a back window and eating vanilla ice cream after a tonsils operation. And I can still see myself taking my first bicycle ride down a back driveway, crashing into some bushes as I reached the street. I can also recall being quarantined at home for scarlet fever. My father and sister were forced to move out, but each day, when my mother returned from work, she was permitted to look in on me. I would ask her whether she had brought me any presents.

Quite the most traumatic event of those years occurred only weeks after my birth, but I have no recollection of it B only two ugly abdominal scars that grew as I grew, and are with me still. At the age of three or four weeks, I developed what has always been described to me as a A strangulated hernia. @ A portion of the colon knotted up on itself, so that I could not excrete anything. This was a genuinely life-threatening condition, and I underwent a complicated operation to correct it, even receiving a pint of blood donated by my parents= good friend, Vera Proper. This was January 1934, when operations on newborn babies were not commonplace. I was lucky to survive.

At this time, my father was teaching biology at De Witt Clinton High School in the Bronx. My mother was working B first as a free lance secretary, then as an office worker at the Child Study Association, a progressive organization devoted to advanced methods of child-rearing. My older sister, Barbara, and I were looked after by Lizzie B Elizabeth Vaughn B a kind-hearted, snaggle-toothed woman with a husband, Fred, and a daughter, Honey, who would arrive at our home before breakfast and stay until the dinner dishes were washed. She was simply a part of our

household, and I never once gave the slightest thought to what it was like for her to spend so much of her life caring for us, and so little with her own husband and child. Lizzie was extremely affectionate, and gave every sign of genuinely caring for Barbara and me.

Because he was a public school teacher, my father had the summer months of July and August off, a fact that imposed on our family life a distinctive shape and structure shared by generations of teaching families. In 1938, when I was four, the family packed up its belongings, strapped them to the running board of the family car, and set out across country to spend the summer in Colorado. My father had been an enthusiastic hiker and mountain climber as a boy and young man, spending summers in the Catskills, where he walked up Slide, Bellaire, Wittenberg, and the other jumped-up hills that passed for mountains in the country north of New York City. Now he wanted to tackle a real mountain. He chose Longs Peak, a serious challenge in Rocky Mountain National Park, some 14,256 feet high.

It was a long trip in those days, made worse not only by my interminable fights with Barbara but also by my tendency to car sickness. There was a high ridge running down the middle of the floor of the car [containing the transmission, I imagine], and Barbara and I squabbled about who would have to sit so as to straddle the ridge. We played in the petrified forest in Arizona, saw *Alexander=s Ragtime Band* from the balcony of a movie theater somewhere in the Midwest, and even stopped at one point to attend a performance of Cox and Box and Pinafore B my first experience with theater of any sort.

In Colorado, we stayed in a genuine log cabin, around which spread a broad meadow. My principal memory is of the trestle table that served both as dinner table and as my father=s work space. He was in the last stages of producing a high school biology textbook, *Adventures With Living Things*, in collaboration with Elsbeth Kroeber, who had been the chair of his Biology

Department during his early years as a teacher. Miss Kroeber, as she was always referred to even by my father, was a maiden lady, and I cannot now recall whether I ever met her.

This was to be, as it turned out, the only book my father ever wrote, and a very big fuss was made about it. Years later, Barbara and I both realized that in some way or other, it had been communicated to us that writing books was the very most prestigious and excellent thing a person could do. That and getting a doctorate in science, something my father failed to do, and which Barbara did, by way of fulfilling his unsatisfied longings.

My father spent the summer reading and correcting proof. He said that he could take a set of proofs down to the railroad station near by, and it would be in Boston at Heath and Co. within two days. Back would come another batch of proof, which would be spread out on the trestle table to be corrected.

Near the end of the summer, a forest fire broke out and we hastily packed up and headed East to avoid being trapped by it. I think my father did in fact climb Longs Peak.

Perhaps the most lasting legacy of those early days [leaving aside oedipal rages and erotic fixations] was an array of facial and bodily tics and twitches that appeared roughly when I was five. The facial tics included eye-blinking, grimaces of my mouth, and nose-twitches. The bodily twitches, although less noticeable, were in some ways more unpleasant. They were a variety of involuntary muscle contractions in my arms, legs, shoulders, and even abdomen. None of this, I am happy to say, was accompanied by explosive cursing B so it wasn't Tourette's Syndrome, whatever else might have been the diagnosis.

My parents responded by calling the family doctor. This genius decided that the best way to deal with the tics was to stand me in front of a mirror, tell me to look at myself, and point out how ugly the tics made me look. Once I realized this, he reasoned, I would stop them

forthwith.

In any event, I did *not* stop them, even though I agreed that they made me ugly, and were very uncomfortable besides. Over the years, a variety of psychiatrists and neurologists have addressed them, with no more success than the family doctor. As I write these words, sixty-nine years after the tics first appeared, I am twitching, sometimes so violently that the eye-blinking makes it difficult to focus on the computer screen. My friends insist that they very quickly become so accustomed to the tics that they are scarcely noticeable, but I don't believe a word of it. Perhaps the worst moments for me have been the handful of occasions when I have seen myself on television, or in a video. I look so grotesque to myself that I cannot bear to watch. I have never been in much danger of thinking myself handsome, but the tics are, if nothing else, a powerful antidote to vanity.

I have always experienced time spatially. The day, the week, the year appear in my imagination as structured spaces. The year, for example, begins for me in September at a relatively low level, rises steadily to the holiday period around Christmas and New Year's Day, falls away again in the second semester to another low point in late May or early June, continues at the same level through the summer, and then starts to rise again as the new academic year begins. This perception is reinforced by my pocket calendar, which is sent to me each year by the Harvard Coop in return for my one dollar membership fee. Its pages start in June and continue through the following September. The ordinary annual calendar from my insurance company or car dealer is no use to me at all, since it irrationally begins in the middle of the year, with January, and ends with December, in the middle of the next year.

The time-line of my childhood has a spatial shape as well, punctuated by two major

breaks: the move to the new house, when I was six and a half, and the move away from that house to college when I was sixteen and a half. My entire childhood is divided sharply into the six years before the move and the ten years after the move. My body seems to have understood the importance of the move, for as soon as we left Sunnyside and settled into our tiny row house in the new community of Kew Garden Hills, my asthma disappeared, never to return.

With the move, I was enrolled in the nearest elementary school, P.S. 117 in Jamaica, and I then set out on a desperate race to catch up with my older sister, a race that came to an end seventeen years later, when I finally managed not merely to make up the three and a half years between us, but to overtake her, by earning my doctorate a year before she earned hers. Some words of explanation are called for.

In New York City in those days, there were no Middle Schools, only Elementary Schools and High Schools. Children entered Elementary School either in September or in January, as soon after their sixth birthday as possible. Graduations were also held twice a year, so that children born in September through December began school in January, graduated from Elementary School in January, moved on to High School in January, and completed their education, once again, in January.

Barbara was born on August 24, 1930, so when we moved to Kew Gardens Hills, she had just turned ten. She began public school, right on schedule, in the fourth grade. I was born on December 27, 1933, and was thus six and a half when we moved. By rights, I should have gone into 1B, which is to say the second half of first grade. But Barbara had amused herself as a little girl by playing school with me as her captive pupil, and she had managed to teach me to read. So it was decided that I would skip 1B, and begin school in 2A. Several years later, I was skipped again - it was roughly in third or fourth grade, as I recall. Barbara, who was a brilliant student,

was several times offered the opportunity to skip a grade, but declined. The result was that she was graduated from P. S. 117 in June, 1944 and started Forest Hills High School the next September, graduating four years later in June, 1948. I was graduated from the same elementary school in January, 1947, and followed her to Forest Hills, two and a half years behind her. I had made up one of the three and a half years that separated us.

All of us who entered high school in mid-year faced a dilemma. If we proceeded at the normal pace, we would graduate in mid-year, and have to wait six months before going to college. The alternative was to accelerate a semester, by taking some extra courses along the way. This was actually not very difficult, since only five of the eight daily periods were devoted to academic subjects. I chose to accelerate, and so it was that I gained yet another half year, graduating in June, 1950 at the age of sixteen and a half. I was now only two years behind Barbara.

My next move in this peculiar marathon was to go through Harvard in three years instead of four. My ostensible reason was to save my parents the cost of a fourth year of college, but inasmuch as tuition during my undergraduate years was only \$400 when I began, and \$600 when I finished, saving my parents money was hardly a plausible explanation for my acceleration. Fortunately for me, Harvard was perhaps the easiest college in the country at which to complete an undergraduate degree in three rather than four years. The normal undergraduate academic load at Harvard was four courses a semester, or thirty-two courses for a four-year degree. By taking five courses a semester B something that all of my students these days at the University of Massachusetts routinely do B I was able to accumulate thirty courses in three years. It required only one summer school session of two courses for me to complete the requirements for a B. A. I was now a mere one year behind Barbara.

Both of us were aiming to earn doctorates, I in Philosophy, Barbara in Biochemistry. She completed her degree in six years, despite moving to the West Coast to follow her dissertation director when he left Harvard to take up a post at Stanford. But I finished my degree in four years. So it was that I sped across the finish line in June 1957, a year ahead of my big sister.

What on earth was this all about? I have puzzled for years over my anxious effort to overtake my sister, and after all this time, I still do not understand it. Obviously, I was fiercely competitive with Barbara; that goes without saying. But why did it take the form of a race to catch up to her, rather than a struggle to outdo her by getting higher grades? I am now only weeks away from my seventieth birthday, and I still instinctively think of Barbara as Athree and a half years@ older than I, not as three years older, or merely as older. She is in actual fact not three and a half years older, but three and a third years older, but it never crossed my mind to lay claim to that extra sixth. Obviously Athree-and-half-years@ was a way of counting school semesters, not calendar months.

Along with this long distance race went a number of more short-term efforts. As a boy, I wanted always to be taken for older than I was. The last thing I desired was to be thought of as a little prodigy. I dated girls older than I, and my proudest moments were when one of them said, for example, AOh, I didn=t realize you are only twelve. I thought you were fourteen.@ My father=s mother was a year older than her husband, and my mother was a year older than my father. My first serious love was fifteen when I first started dating her, though I was only fourteen. The effort to appear older continued into adulthood. When I first started teaching as a graduate Teaching Fellow at Harvard, I affected a hat in an effort to appear older than my twenty-one years.

Of course, a straight out competition with Barbara for grades held certain perils. She was

a spectacular student, and since I followed in the path she had blazed in elementary school and high school, I was constantly being compared to her by teachers who would say, when I showed up in their classes, AOh, you are Bobby Wolff=s little brother. @ Age so completely trumped performance in my mind that even when I actually did better than she, I could not see it.

In those days, we were given numerical grades in high school, and although the grades proceeded in steps of five points up to 90, from then on the increments were in single points. So you could get an 80 or an 85 in English, though not an 83 or 87, but if you made it beyond 90, then you could get a 91, a 92, a 92, and so on up to a perfect score of 100. Each semester the grades in our major subjects [what would, today, be called College Prep courses] were converted to an average. There was intense competition among the best students in a class for the highest average, and as much turned then on a 97.4 rather than a 96.9 as turns now on a 720 rather than a 690 on the SAT=s.

At any rate, one semester, during the two and a half years when we were simultaneously high school students, I brought home a report card with an average that was actually *higher* than hers. Yet when I looked at her card, it literally *looked better* than mine, even though I could see that the grades were slightly lower.

Even in college, this odd competition, entirely in my head, continued. Barbara earned a degree in mathematics and Zoology *summa cum laude* at Swarthmore College. The next year I got only a *magna* at Harvard. Yet what mattered to me was that I had caught up another year. The fact that she had actually done better was of no real importance to me..

A reader of even limited curiosity might wonder how all of this appeared to Barbara. Despite my having an eager and active mind, which was constantly reaching out to new ideas, this thought simply never occurred to me. Indeed, it was only thirty years or so later, when, after the

break-up of my first marriage and the death of both our parents she and I began really to talk to one another, that I discovered that my lonely race had actually had an effect on her.

Apparently, from her perspective, I was some sort of Tasmanian devil, bearing down on her with ferocious energy and insatiable appetite, gobbling up the years that separated us. Even though as a teenager I brooded about big things like philosophy and politics and the meaning of life, I was completely incapable of putting myself in her shoes even for a moment, or of wondering what our family looked like from her point of view. It is one of the triumphs of age and experience that now, as we are both septuagenarians, we have managed to talk in an open and friendly fashion about these ancient matters [or rather *I* have managed, for I think she has been much more self-aware than I for at least fifty years.]

One of the consequences of my father's choice of career was that, like many children growing up in New York in the thirties and forties, my life divided sharply into two utterly separate and unrelated segments B the period from September through June, when I went to school in the city, and the summer months of July and August, which were spent in the country. There was simply no overlap. When we were at home in the city, we were *in the city*. There were no weekend trips to the country, no carrying-over of the things we did in the country. And when we were in the country, city life completely vanished. Schoolwork, the New York City school system, Kew Gardens Hills B all were left behind.

This dichotomy in my life was merely the local and personal reflection of an ancient split between the city and the country that developed ten thousand years ago during what archeologists call the Neolithic Revolution B the more or less simultaneous appearance in the historical record of substantial, permanent cities and systematic agriculture. For all that time, until a mere two generations ago, the city and the countryside stood in antiphonal counterpoint to one another,

with poets, painters, composers, and philosophers celebrating the virtues and condemning the vices of one or the other. Dress-up pastorales at Versailles during the reign of the 17th and 18th century Louis=s; the romantic celebration of Merrie Olde England invented by nineteenth century conservative critics of capitalism; Karl Marx=s sardonic remark about the idiocy of rural life; and even Sherlock Holmes= assurance to Dr. Watson that the idyllic villages of rural England hid crimes that would appall the most hardened Londoner B all reflected the understanding that there was a deep chasm separating the life of cities from that of the rural, agricultural countryside.

In the United States, the erasure of that divide took place in my father=s lifetime, first with the invention of the automobile, then with the paving of the roads that connected farm with city, then with rural electrification, and finally with the bridging of the urban and the rural by the suburban. When I was a little boy, travel from a big city into and through the countryside was a genuine adventure, bringing one into a strikingly different world. By the time I was a young man, Howard Johnson motels, national fast food chains, and a continental culture of movies and radio had all but eliminated any genuine difference between the felt experience of city and country life.

Within New York City itself, I can trace this rapid transformation through the experiences of three generations of Wolff=s. My grandfather and grandmother, when they were courting at the turn of the century, liked to take walks northward from the lower East Side of Manhattan into the country, up around forty-second street. By the time my father was a teenager, after the First World War, he could shepherd his younger brothers and sister on outings to the countryside, in the Borough of Queens. At the time that we moved to Kew Gardens Hills in 1940, our little row house community lay at the farthest Eastward urban expansion of New York. There were hills and ponds at the end of our street, where I and my friends played an expansive form of Tag over many acres. But by the time I was fourteen, and trying to earn my First Class Boy Scout badge,

the only way I could manage the requisite fourteen mile hike was by walking seven miles East along Union Turnpike, out past Creedmore Mental Hospital, and then seven miles back along the sidewalks of the same city street.

Thus it is that as I look back on my early years, I see two lives, each with its pleasures and horrors, but unconnected one to the other. Though it may seem odd to the reader, it strikes me as perfectly sensible to tell the story of my boyhood years in two discrete narrations B one devoted to my life in Kew Gardens Hills, the other to my summers in the country. Summers first.

The year after the Colorado trip, the family spent the first of a series of summers in the little town of West Shokan, near the Ashokan Reservoir in the Catskill Mountains of New York State. This was 1939, and there was no modern multi-lane system of interstates. The trip was long enough and difficult enough to constitute a genuine transition between the two worlds. Looking at a map today, I realize just how close that part of New York State is to Manhattan. Ninety-three miles up the New York Thruway to Kingston, then west on route 28, and another five miles or so bring you to the reservoir. You can then get to West Shokan either by bearing left around the southern shore of the reservoir almost to its end, or else by taking the right hand fork and going around the reservoir to come upon West Shokan from the other direction. Today it would be a drive of two to three hours, depending on where in New York City you began.

I have written at length about this little area of the Catskills in the books I created about my grandparents and my parents from the cache of family letters and documents I inherited at my father=s death. He had spent his boyhood summers in the same area, staying with his mother and his brothers and sister in Oliveria or Big Indian. It was quite natural to him, I imagine, to return there with *his* wife and children, twenty years later. In 1985, I scattered my parents= ashes in the

Ashoken Reservoir, after reading aloud some of the many letters they exchanged in 1919, 1920, and 1921 when my mother was working in New York at the Herald Tribune and my father was hiking and climbing in the Catskills.

The family rented a renovated barn in West Shokan on the property of the Milveys. Their son, Paul, was roughly Barbara=s age, and she recalls a good deal more about those early summers than I do. I have only three discrete sensory memories of the time we spent in that barn, and as subsequent experience has taught me, they may be faulty. The first is of Barbara and me playing one of our many multi-pack card games of war on the floor of the main room, while our parents listened to a radio broadcast that was obviously upsetting them. I think it must have been the news of Hitler=s invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, which would have been just before we returned to the city.

The second is of the brook behind the barn, where Barbara and I would wade, and grind colored stones into a paste that could serve reasonably well as paint. The third is of my favorite toy, a little yellow steam shovel with a crank, so that you could actually dig up some dirt with the scoop and then raise it up as though to transfer it to a dump truck.

I think we spent the summers of 1939, 1940, 1941, and 1942 in the Milveys= barn. Then Barbara and I went off to summer camp, and I spent six of the next seven years in the Berkshires.

The war years were the heyday of the summer camp. Hordes of New York kids from middle class families gathered in Grand Central Station on the Fourth of July under the sign for this or that camp, clothing name-tagged and packed in big, cumbersome trunks, and climbed on board trains that took them to upstate New York, Connecticut, or Massachusetts for eight weeks, returning just before Labor Day to go back to school. The camps were staffed in large part by public school teachers who had the same summer vacation as their charges. It was a way for the

teachers to earn some extra money and get out of the city. The camps featured swimming, sports, crafts, horseback riding, hiking and camping, and this being the period just after the Great Depression, at least some of them had a distinctively left wing tonality.

It was a reach for my parents to come up with the money to send Barbara and me to camp, but the second summer, my father got a job as a counselor at Camp Taconic, and as part of his package, we were charged reduced rates. In fact, the third and last summer I spent at Taconic, he was Head Counselor, taking the place of Bob Kinoy, who had gone off to war. Camp Taconic [the name, I assume, is Native American, though no one ever explained it to us] was located on the shores of Lake Ashmere in the Berkshires, about six miles east of Pittsfield and no more than twenty miles from the New York border. It still is in business today, sixty years later. I have a tremendous number of fond memories of Taconic, though I have been told that I was a troubled and troublesome child.

I learned to swim, and even though a dip in Lake Ashmere might bring with it a couple of leeches [the camp kept a barrel of salt to assist in removing them], I ran down to the dock each day at swim period to jump in. Making it all the way across the lake to the far shore was one of the standard tests of swimming ability, recognized by having one's name put up on a board in the dining room. A row boat accompanied you on this daring adventure, in case you started to drown. It was said to be a quarter of a mile across B a challenge for a nine or ten year old boy. I did it one summer, and actually made it over and back the following summer.

For reasons that entirely escape me, I associate the little hut where we changed into our swim suits with the Josh White folk song, AStrange Fruit,@ which I did not realize then but know now referred to lynchings. That will give you an idea of the political complexion of the camp.

And now, a tribute to the power of the internet and a cautionary word about memory. The music counselor was a broad-chested man with a full head of curly hair and a body-builder torso, who would lead the willing in early-morning calisthenics outside the dining hall. I have remembered him all these years as being named Jack Fracht, and had a vague notion that during the year [that is, from September to June] he conducted an orchestra somewhere in the South. I tried googling for the name AJack Fracht@ and came up empty [although I did learn along the way that Afracht@ is German for cargo B i.e. freight]. But when I tried ACharleston Symphony Orchestra@ and clicked on their Ahistory@ link, up came the name AJ. Albert Frecht@ as one of its first conductors, in the thirties. I would have sworn on my life that his name was Fracht, not Frecht.

As a boy, I suffered unpredictable moments of light headedness or dizziness, which terrified me. I was taught to put my head down and breath deeply until they went away, and I have a clear visual memory of squatting down on the Taconic grounds, head between my legs, trying to get over one of the spells. Now I realize that I was having anxiety attacks, but no one then seemed to have that concept, and putting my head between my legs was the best they could come up with.

Hikes were reserved for the weekends, and they were special events. Bag lunch in hand, sweater tied at the waist, we would set out on some great trek, led by the counselors. We rarely went more than three or four miles, but to a boy of nine, that seemed a true adventure. One hike in particular stands out, though not because of its rigors. We walked to Waconah Falls, and ate lunch by the pool at the bottom of the falls. One of the college students who was a counselor to a girls= bunk stripped down to bra and panties and dove in for a swim. When she emerged, her scanty clothing was plastered to her body and completely transparent. I and the other little boys

gawked and giggled. It must have been ten years before I realized, looking back on that day, that she was deliberately teasing the male counselors.

In August of 1945, my third summer at Taconic, right at the time when some of the campers were preparing to put on the hit new musical, Oklahoma, news came that my grandfather, Barnet Wolff, had died of a stroke. The news made no impression on me at all. I knew him only as a genial mustached old man who ran the Workman=s Circle sanatorium in Liberty, New York. It would be more than half a century before I could take the full measure of that remarkable man, and come to understand the extent to which my life had been guided by the vision of his lifelong commitment to socialism.

With the end of the war and the return of the counselors who had gone off to fight, my father lost the position as head counselor. Meanwhile, I had plunged into Boy Scouts at home, and so the next summer, I went off to Boy Scout Camp. Unlike the private summer camps, Boy Scout camp was broken into two week sessions. I signed up for two sessions, but I hated the camp so much that I backed out after the first two weeks. Memories of that experience are a jumble of pitching tents and drinking a poisonous purple liquid at all meals that we called bug juice. But the stint was marked by two significant moments. The first was my first real fight. I cannot now recall what sparked it, but another little boy and I squared off in a clearing in the woods. He hit me in the stomach, I doubled over with the breath knocked out of me, he ran away terrified by what he had done, and that was the end of it.

The other event was a bit more dignified. The Boy Scout oath was then, and is now, so far as I know, AOn my honor, I promise to be trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent.@ It was taken with one=s right hand raised in a peculiar two-fingered salute. When I refused on principle to say Areverent,@ all hell

broke loose. There was a great confabulation of troop leaders, I stood my ground, and I came very close to being thrown out of the camp. I have always been very proud of that moment. There have been others, but none, perhaps, in which I was so alone and exposed.

Through the Child Study Association, my mother heard of a new camp being organized especially for teenage boys and girls B something of a novelty at that time. Although its clientele was middle class and professional, and consisted of doctors, lawyers, and teachers who had probably never engaged in manual labor for pay, the Shaker Village Work Camp, as it was called, celebrated labor, along with folklore and the arts. Founded and run by Jerry and Sybil Count, the camp charged a hefty fee so that young people could have the privilege of working with their hands. To promote the new camp through the Child Study Association, the Counts gave my mother a discount on the price, and in the summer of 1947, at the age of thirteen, I became of the founding campers.

I spent the next three summers at Shaker Village, and have a rich variety of extremely happy memories of the camp, the counselors, the other campers, and the activities. This is actually rather odd, because I was in fact so angry, troubled and disruptive much of the time that during the third summer, the Counts thought seriously about sending me home. I know this to be true from things I have been told, but I simply have no direct memory of this dark side to the experience.

Shaker Village made a half-hearted effort to offer the usual camp fare of sports, swimming, and the like, but the real aim was to give us work experience, art, music, dance, and a hands-on taste of self-governance. Many of the counselors had roots in the various progressive movements that had emerged during the depression, though whether any were actually members of the Communist Party I never knew.

The camp had been set up on the site of an old Shaker Village in Hancock, New York, no more than twenty miles from Camp Taconic. One of the buildings was called Mother Ann=s cottage, and was said actually to have been lived in by the founder of the Shaker sect, Mother Ann Lee. The building was in very bad shape, so one of our major work projects was to renovate it. This involved not only pulling old plaster and lath from the attic walls, but also making new pegs for the peg boards. One of the lovely Shaker customs was to keep a room neat by hanging their elegant ladder back chairs on pegs when they weren=t being used. The pegs were screwed into pegboards that ran along each wall at eye height. I learned how to use a wood turning lathe and spent many happy hours turning new pegs.

The entire camp was formed into a chorus, regardless of musical talent or ability, and met regularly to sing Bach chorales, Shaker songs, rounds, glees, and classical selections like *Ave verum corpus*. The chorale conductor was a dynamic young man just returned from the Army named Hal Aks. Hal was my favorite camp counselor, if one can use that term to describe him. He had studied with the great Robert Shaw, and conducted very much in Shaw=s style with enormous energy, his rounded shoulders hunched over, his already thinning hair shaking with the fervor of his musical passion. Hal made chorale singing an intensely sexual activity B I don=t know any other way to describe it. This resonated powerfully with me because music was one of the most important parts of my life, tapping erotic feelings in me that went very deep. As a teenager, I formed a passion for early music B Bach, Gregorian chant, Buxtehude. So the singing was intertwined in my mind with sex, a fact that lifted both to a higher level of feeling.

I was not alone in experiencing the musical activities in this way, I think. We used to meet for chorus in the barn, which was the camp meeting place, and I can still recall the evening that beautiful Jane Shapiro walked in a bit late, wearing a low cut peasant blouse, and caused the

entire bass section to drop a full interval.

One of the most exciting activities of Shaker Village was a series of all-camp outings to the Tanglewood Music Festival, which was then only ten years old. In 1949, the camp was quarantined because of a polio scare, and we could not go to the concerts, so Hal arranged for a string quartet of Tanglewood students to come to the camp to play for us! I sat in the hayloft of the barn, almost directly above the players, and looked straight down at them as they played one quartet after another. I have attended many concerts since by world-class string quartets, but I do not think I have ever enjoyed a concert more than I did that night.

Almost as important to me as Hal was Margot Mayo, the short, plump folklorist who introduced us to the mysteries of Child=s collection of English ballads in America and taught us folk dancing. Margo was a minor but recognized student of folk dance and song, and the author of at least one book on square dancing. It was her familiarity with the work of Alan Lomax that made us aware of the great Huddie Ledbetter B Leadbelly B just at the moment when he was first becoming known in the North.

Shaker Village was unabashedly idealistic in its celebration of manual labor, community democracy, and folk culture. During my summers there, I developed a deep moral, political, and aesthetic commitment to the progressive dreams that had guided so many men and women during the long depression years and the war years that followed. Half a century and more later, I remain convinced that this country was better for those ideals, and would do well to return to them. Recently I saw the movie *Seabiscuit*, in which the unfolding of the tale of the racehorse is interspersed with still photographs from the depression years and a voice-over narration conjuring a time when working people were honored rather than scorned, and it was accepted that the fortunate had an obligation to help those who were down on their luck. I wept unashamedly for a

better time. It was not until Black men and women risked their lives for justice and freedom in a great Civil Rights Movement that this country B all too briefly B again experienced that honest idealism.

My third summer at Shaker Village, in 1949, brought to a close the segmented country portion of my early days. The next year, I was graduated from high school and set off to college. I would not again feel my life separated into two discrete and unconnected unfoldings.

Meanwhile, of course, I was going to school. P. S. 117 was a large, brick utilitarian structure under the governance of Tamah Axel, its Principal. The education was pretty standard and unimaginative. English, Math, Science, Social Studies, and the like. I took quite naturally to school, coming as I did from an extended family of teachers. My father, as I have noted, was a High School Biology teacher and Department Chairman. The year I moved up to High School, he was appointed to the principalship of William Cullen Bryant High School in Queens, having been the youngest person ever to pass the rigorous year-long Principalship examination. One of his brothers, my uncle Bob [after whom I was named, I believe] was a Professor of Physics and Astronomy at City College. His wife, Rose, taught in elementary schools in Harlem and the Bronx for thirty-two years. My father=s youngest brother, Ben, was a teacher at secondary schools for difficult children. His wife, Fanny, taught music in the public schools. Even my aunt Rosabelle, the doctor=s wife, taught school for a time, as I recall. It would have been odd indeed had I not liked school!

To be sure, there were some bad moments. My eighth grade science teacher was an alcoholic harridan named Mrs. Seagers, whose pedagogical style seemed to draw a good deal from the nuns. When we acted up, she would hit us with whatever came to hand B a ruler, a

pointer, the big wooden pass that we had to carry when we went to the bathroom in order to show that we had permission, sometimes the back of the hand on which she wore a ring with a spherical metal ball, once even a miniature baseball bat that one of the students had brought to class. Her principal target for these undoubtedly illegal forays into corporal punishment was Robert Welch, a precocious trouble-maker who, one afternoon, introduced some of us to the dubious delights of Southern Comfort. Oddly enough, he actually liked Mrs. Seagers, despite the fact that she periodically took a swipe at him.

But far and away my worst moment in grade school came in the fourth or fifth grade, at the hands of Miss Hickman, a fat, unpleasant looking teacher who was **B** I now realize **B** rather afraid of the rambunctious little boys and girls in her charge. One day, when she was out of the room momentarily, the boys erupted into an orgy of pin-sticking, pricking the girls with straight pins. I joined in enthusiastically. [The deeper psychoerotic meaning of this event is too obvious to require comment]. When Miss Hickman came back into the room and saw what was going on, she demanded to know which boys had been involved. Anyone who confessed, she said, would not be punished. I was terrified that my goody-two-shoes reputation as class suck-up would be tarnished were I to confess, and so I kept my mouth shut.

Sure enough, someone called out, **A**Robby Wolff did it too. **@** She confronted me, and I made the fatal error of insisting that I had not been involved. Whereupon, Miss Hickman got the appalling idea of teaching the class a civics lesson about the American judicial system by putting me on trial. I was forced to stand by my desk while members of the class testified against me. I was mortified, red-faced with shame, and sick inside from being exposed as a trouble-maker, a liar, and too much of a coward to admit what I had done. I reported all this to my parents, who reacted furiously by charging into school and demanding an apology.

It was not my finest hour.

A good deal more fun was the daily recess, when we got to play in the schoolyard. At one end were several handball courts, and I got rather good at the version of the game that we played. Unlike grown-up handball players, who use a small, rock hard solid black rubber ball, we would take an ordinary tennis ball and rub it on the pavement until all of the fabric coating was worn off. What remained was a soft red very flexible ball, which did much less damage to our hands. I teamed up with Paul Pavlides and we were pretty regularly the doubles handball champions of the school. The aim was to hit the ball so low to the ground that there wasn't a big enough bounce for the opponent to return it. This was called a killer. The ultimate was to hit the ball so that it caught the precise point where the wall met the ground. The ball would then simply roll back from the wall without any bounce at all. This was a dead killer, and a sure winner. Paul's father was a waiter at the Stork Club, a famous Manhattan night club that none of us had so much as heard of before he told us about it. One day, he brought in a big glossy menu from the Stork Club and passed it around for all of us to see.

Because the area East of Kew Gardens was expanding, as more and more houses were built, the School Department carried out a redistricting, and at about the point when I was entering sixth grade, my neighborhood was reassigned to P. S. 170, a Jamaica school that had, in an early incarnation, housed the teacher training school to which my aunt Rosabelle had gone a generation earlier. I was devastated by the move, and pleaded with my parents to have me transferred back to P. S. 117. My father pulled some strings, and after a term and a half at P. S. 170, I moved back to complete my elementary schooling at P. S. 117.

This was wartime, of course, and in its own small way the schools were expected to make their contribution to the national war effort. So we carefully peeled off the tinfoil lining from our

candy wrappers and assembled large balls of gunmetal colored foil, which we brought in to school on the appointed days to add to the piles of newspapers, all of which, we were assured, would be transformed into guns and bombs for the boys overseas. Perhaps the oddest reflection of the martial spirit of the times was the quasi-military system of monitors and crossing guards that was established in the elementary schools. The alpha males, top students, and teachers= pets were recruited into the monitor corps and given blue felt armbands with military rank on them, which they wore as emblems of their authority while shepherding the little kids into class lines after recess and such like duties. There were two complete arrays of military ranks, one for the boys and the other for the girls. Each one consisted of quite a few privates, corporals, and sergeants chosen from among the younger children, a handful of middle rank officers, and a single one star, two star, three star, and four star general, positions reserved for eighth graders getting ready to move on up to high school.

Needless to say, Barbara was the four star girl general her senior year, setting a standard that I could not hope to meet. When I reached eighth grade, Paul Pavlides was the four star boy general B everyone knew that he was, as we didn=t say then but would say now, the coolest kid in the school. Rafael Villalba, one of my closest friends, was the three star, and I was the two star. This is emblematic of my entire school career. Two star was pretty good, after all. It said that I was the third coolest boy in the eighth grade. But it wasn=t four stars, and so it felt like failure.

Eighth grade was also the occasion of my first serious kiss, if we don=t count the Skillman Avenue adventure. It was actually an arranged kiss, having something of the air of an assignation in an eighteenth century French farce. Somehow B I cannot now recall B Marilyn Harris and I developed a mutual desire for a romantic encounter. Her seconds met with my

seconds, and agreed that the principals would meet in the boiler room of the school. When the time came, we approached one another, kissed *on the lips*, and parted. Nothing further came of it. The act seemed to satisfy our desires quite nicely.

I realize this will seem rather tame to a modern audience, accustomed to tales of *fellatio* in grade school and unwed Middle School mothers. However, as many writers through the ages have noted, sex is mostly in the head; since the fantasies that drive our behavior have their roots in erotic urges laid down in us when we are not yet toilet trained. Thus the flash of an ankle, the touch of a hand, or a boiler room kiss can carry with it as much excitement as *going all the way*. It is not for nothing that suspicious Iraqi men firmly believe that the wrap-around dark glasses worn by occupying U. S. soldiers have been engineered to see through women=s clothing!

Rather more adventurous than the Harris affaire was my flirtation with a full-figured little girl with the intriguing name of Petrina Rini. Her family lived along the route I took when I walked home rather than riding the bus, and I fell into the habit of carrying her books to her house. One day, as we paused outside her home before I continued on, I launched into an elaborate discourse about the structure of the Solar System, which concluded with a demonstration of the orbit of the earth around the sun, featuring Petrina as the sun, my arms as the orbit, and my head as the earth. I am not sure this can quite qualify as *Astealing a kiss,*@ since she did not seem resistant to the idea, but I thought of myself as a real devil of a fellow, and smiled all the way home.

Home, as I have indicated, was a row house in the community called Kew Gardens Hills. In the thirties, my parents had a large circle of friends who lived, for the most part, in and around Sunnyside B the Harritons, the Goldsteins, the Rosenbergs, the Simons, the Lamberts, and the Vielands [of whom, more later]. Some time in 1939 or 1940, Hy Goldstein, who was an

architect, reported that a new development was going up several miles to the east, and was, in his judgment, being very solidly built. The whole group decided to leave Sunnyside and buy into the new community. All except Joe and Fera Vieland. Joe was a violist with the New York Philharmonic, and needed to be close to the subway to get to work, so Joe and Vera moved to Rego Park, near the Independent subway stop just before Continental Avenue. It was then a quick ride on the E or F train to 53rd and 7th, and a short walk up to Carnegie Hall on 57th just off 7th.

The development consisted of brick two-story attached houses in the Tudor style, with slate roofs and unfinished attics and basements. Behind the house, in the space between our row and the row one street over, was an extended driveway that fell away from street level to the level of the basement. Along this driveway, jutting out from each house, was a little one-car garage, sized for cars of the 1940 vintage. The top of the garage doubled as a back porch or veranda with a metal railing, accessible from the first floor of the house.

My parents bought the unit at 138-37, 76th Avenue, and we moved in at the end of the summer in 1940. 76th Avenue makes a big sweeping curve just before 138-37, and heads slightly down hill, in those days to a dead end in a field. Although I remember the house as quite adequate to the needs of a family of four, the plot plan shows it to have been tiny. By my calculation, the two floors, including the walls, took up a tad more than 800 square feet.

Just inside the front door was a tiny entry way with a coat closet. This led into a living room with a fire place [extra] and then, through an arch, into a dining room, off which to the right was the kitchen. Open stairs led from the living room to the second floor hall, with, from left to right, the bathroom, my parents= room, my sister=s room [almost as big as that of my parents], and finally my room, just large enough for a bed and a desk. Eventually, my father finished the

basement, which had a toilet [also extra] into a paneled, linoleum tiled family room, where in later years we danced and had parties. He managed to insulate the attic, but never transformed it into a real room, and it remained the repository of old books and family papers until I cleaned it out in 1981, after his death.

On August 29, 1940, at the Ridgewood Savings Bank on Myrtle and Forest Avenues in Ridgewood, Walter and Charlotte Wolff closed on the house. The purchase price was \$5,400, including the fireplace and the basement toilet. [That little toilet was so small that even as a boy, I found it hard to sit down with my knees in front of me without bumping up against the opposite wall. It always seemed cold, and smelled of unfinished plaster.] The mortgage was for the entire purchase price, secured by a 4 2 % twenty-five year loan, to which was added a 2 % surcharge from the Federal Housing Authority. Principal and interest came to \$29.27 a month, a sum that my parents paid faithfully until 1965, by which time, of course, what with inflation and pay raises, it had become trivial. After my father= death, I sold the house with the help of a neighborhood attorney, Bernard Ackerman. The sale price was \$80,000. According to the Consumer Price Index calculator on the website of the Bureau Labor Statistics, the \$5400 was the equivalent of \$35,000 in the year the house was sold, so my parents actually made a pretty good investment.

The buyer showed up to the closing with a suitcase full of small bills, and paid the entire \$80,000 in cash. I wasn=t there, but Bernie Ackerman said that the lawyers were so irritated by having to count the money that the sale almost fell through. I have always assumed it was drug money. Who else carries around eighty thousand in small bills?

The little development of row houses into which we had moved filled up very quickly, mostly with Jewish families drawn from the professional and business middle classes. Teachers, lawyers, business men, a scattering of doctors, architects, and engineers. In 1940, these folks

didn't have a great deal of money, but as the war years wore on, many of them prospered. Little by little, they began to fix up their tiny houses. First, a finished basement or attic, then an awning or even a wood and metal covering over the back porch above the garage. Each house had a front lawn so small that very little could be done with it, aside from planting a tree [there wasn't room for more than one] and setting a few bushes in front of the house to conceal the basement window well.

America being the land of constant movement that it is, one might have expected the families to move out as their incomes rose, to grander unattached houses sitting on larger plots in better neighborhoods. But in Kew Gardens Hills, a strange thing happened. People grew attached to their homes, and to the life of the community. There were street fairs, block parties, and a feeling of community cohesiveness quite unusual in a city whose proudest boast was that a family could live its whole life in an apartment building and never meet the people in the other apartments. One year, the undertaker next door to us ordered masses of tulip bulbs from Holland and distributed them to the entire block. Everyone planted as many as they could squeeze into the tiny strip of dirt between the sidewalk and the street, and the next Spring, we had a tulip festival, complete with tugs-of-war, three-legged races, and dancing. Our street became known as the golden crescent, and for a long time, no one at all moved away. Only when the men started dying of heart attacks and the women started moving to Florida did houses on that street actually come on the market.

There wasn't much in the way of commercial activity in Kew Gardens Hills. Three blocks away was the principal thoroughfare, Main Street, which ran from Union Turnpike a bit to the south, all the way into Flushing, where it came to a stop at a T intersection with Roosevelt Avenue. There was a big movie theater at the Flushing end of Main Street, where I once saw

Captains Courageous with Spencer Tracy. But we all went to the Main Street Theater, the anchor of a little row of delicatessens, candy stores, cleaning establishments, and markets where locals did most of their shopping. Those were the glory days of movies, when twelve cents on Saturday afternoon would buy you two features, a string of cartoons, a News of the Week in Review, previews of coming attractions, and the latest episode of a serial. Another twelve cents afterward for a sundae with two scoops of chocolate ice cream and chocolate sauce, and I still had a penny left over from my twenty-five cent allowance.

By and large, I loved the movies, but there was one early bit of cinematic special effects that invariably terrified me. This was the transformation, before one's very eyes, of someone young into someone old. In *Lost Horizon of Shangri-La*, the great old Ronald Coleman movie, the passengers of an airplane crash in the Himalayas, and stumble on a protected valley that is warm, green, and inhabited by a peaceful, wise community of people who, it turns out, live to a tremendous, virtually biblical old age. Ronald Coleman falls in love with a beautiful woman who, we learn, is several hundred years young, and persuades her to leave the valley with him so that they may return to what he rather blindly insists on considering civilization. As the little party make their way along an ice and snow filled pathway beyond the valley, his young love begins to age, and before our very eyes, she turns into an ancient hag and dies.

That scene so frightened me that it gave me nightmares for weeks. I had the same reaction to the scene in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in which the eternally youthful Gray stabs the portrait of himself, on which have been inscribed the visible stigmata of his bestial acts, and then himself turns old and dies, as the portrait is restored to its original youthful beauty. These reactions to film were the first harbingers of what was to become a serious threat to my emotional stability not too much later.

In the days before television, social life consisted for the most part of informal visiting, and there were many evenings when my parents welcomed friends into their living room. Five or six of them would sit on the sofa and chairs with drinks and perhaps a bit of food, talking through the evening about families, children, politics, and B if the visitors were teachers B about the hated Board of Education. Until my bedtime, I would be permitted to sit quietly on the first steps of the stairs and listen. My fondest dream was some day to be permitted to take part in the conversation. The point wasn't to win an argument, or make converts, but simply to be one of the voices.

As I grew older, this childhood wish became transmuted first into the desire to be part of the conversation that constitutes the public life of the nation, and then into a larger desire to participate, at least as a subordinate voice, in the Great Conversation of Western Civilization. So it was that when I began to write books, I cared passionately that they be noticed B reviewed, read, commented upon B but not at all that they be agreed with. Since most of my books have been arguments for one philosophical or political position or another, it may seem odd that I have cared so little whether I won any converts and so much simply that my voice be heard, but inside the grown-up Professor and author there still lives the little boy who waited for the time when he could be part of the living room conversation.

At some point when I was seven or eight, I expressed a strong desire to play the violin. There was a piano in the basement, a holdover from the days when both of my parents had played, but for some reason my mind was fixed on the violin. Well, when a little Jewish boy says he wants to study the violin, his parents make sure he studies the violin. My parents [I have only now come to realize, some sixty years later] turned to Joe Vieland for advice. His daughter, Julia, was Ataking@ piano [as we used to say] from Dorothea Zacharias, the daughter of a violin

teacher in Manhattan, and it was fixed up that I would take from her mother, Mrs. Irma Zacharias. My parents bought me a violin, which I still have to this day, for about fifty-five dollars B a pittance, one might say, but still, let us recall, twice their monthly mortgage payments.

[addendum in 2009: Many, many years later, I devoted a great deal of time and effort to studying the viola, with Delores Thayer the co-principal violist of the Springfield, Massachusetts Symphony. Loree also teaches at Deerfield Academy, and at one point, I donated my old violin to the Academy, for the students. I had it appraised for tax purposes, and it turned out to be worth \$6500!]

Beverly Rosenberg, the teenage Rosenberg daughter, was taking from Dorothea also, and as the Rosenbergs lived just down the block from us at the end of the row [and therefore in a house not hemmed in on both sides, which cost a little extra], she could take me with her when she went to her lessons. In the early days, there wasn't yet a bus from Main Street to the Union Turnpike Station on the Independent subway line, so we had to walk the mile or so up the hill to Queens Boulevard. Beverly took the occasion of the walk to teach me some of the elementary rules of courtesy, such as that the man should be on the outside on a sidewalk [even though during most of the mile there weren't yet sidewalks at all.] To this day, I instinctively step to the outside when walking with a lady.

Mrs. Zacharias was a piece of work. Barely five feet tall, plump, and possessed of regal manners acquired in her native Louisiana, she terrified me. Her extended family was actually rather distinguished. Her brother, Admiral Zacharias, had been in charge of something or other in the South Pacific during World War Two. Her son, Gerald Zacharias, was an M. I. T. math professor who played a central role in the development of what came to be known as the Anew math.@ And her maiden daughter, Dorothea, the piano teacher, was rumored to have been

engaged at some point to none other than Ira Gershwin.

I had talent, it was said B the curse of countless little Jewish boys B but since I rarely practiced, there was really no way of telling. As a child, I had the odd notion that playing in tune was like having naturally curly hair B something you were born with and couldn=t do much to acquire. Nevertheless, I persevered, and eventually became concertmaster of my high school orchestra, an accomplishment that tells you more about the inadequacies of the orchestra than about my accomplishments as a violinist. Mrs. Zacharias [to this day, I cannot possibly think of her as Irma] had two really good pupils B Murray Wilk and Beverly Sumac. One year, at the annual student recital held in the parlor of the grand old pre-war apartment, I played the Bach double with Beverly. It was as though someone had yoked a stallion and a donkey to a war chariot.

When I got a bit older, my parents let me go to my lesson alone. The Zacharias apartment was on 71st street, just off Broadway, at the point where Broadway and Amsterdam intersect to form a small triangular park. To get there, I took the E train on the IND line from Union Turnpike to 53rd and 7th Avenue. Then I changed to the uptown line, and went past 59th and 66th to 72nd street. [Old trick question among New York math students: in the numerical sequence 42, 49, 59, 66, 72, what is the next number. Answer, 79. The stops on the Broadway line]. When I got out of the subway, in the late afternoon, I would have dinner at the Automat before going to my lesson. For those too young to remember, the Automats were a wonderful depression-era New York fixture, embodying simultaneously the impulse for modern technology and a concern for the needs of the working class. Automats were restaurants in which there were no waitresses. Instead, on one wall, there were columns of class-enclosed compartments in which sat the various dishes, ready to eat. To get one, you inserted the appropriate number of nickels in a slot [this was

the 1940's, remember], turned a crank, and opened the window. No sooner had you taken out your food than the whole column would rotate, and workers behind the wall would refill the empty compartments.

You got your nickels from a woman who sat behind a high counter and, with a practiced flick of the wrist, would toss just the right number of nickels as change for your quarter, half dollar, or dollar. Each week, I would give her my violin to hold, get my nickels, and buy a little pot of baked beans, a chocolate glaze cake, and a glass of milk.

Quite the best part of the lesson was the subway ride there and back. If you stood at the front of the very first car, you could look out the wire-mesh-and glass front window and watch the tunnel rush past, waiting to see whether the red lights would turn to amber and green in time to let the train continue. There was only one problem. Horizontally across the middle of the window was a metal reinforcing bar. When I began taking lessons, I was just too tall to look under the bar, and not quite tall enough to look over. For several years, I would scrunch down and stand, transfixed, day-dreaming until my station came up. I recall how proud I was when I finally grew tall enough to peer over the top of the bar, my face pressed against the window and my violin case resting on end under my hand.

As I approached my twelfth birthday, it became clear that all the other little Jewish boys were going to go to Hebrew School and prepare to be *bar mitzvah*=d. This, as my parents explained to me, meant that they would have a big party and receive lots of presents. Religion had until then played no role at all in my life B my mother once said to me, ARobby, you are the product of a mixed marriage B your father is an agnostic and I am an atheist@ B but my parents did not want to deprive me of the party and the presents, if that was what I desired. So they offered me a choice. I could go to Hebrew School and have a *bar mitzvah*, or they would give

me a hundred dollars and I could buy myself some presents. Unhesitatingly, I took the hundred bucks. I had for some time coveted Natie Gold=s model electric train set, and with the hundred, I bought it from him.

Natie was a fascinating kid. He was smart B a 169 I. Q., according to the test we were given at school B but a somewhat quirky intelligence. He once took a standard issue water pistol, rigged up the front of the barrel with a cigarette lighter, filled it with lighter fluid, and produced a quite serviceable little flame thrower. Natie=s father worked for the I. R. S., and would get free movie passes from the owners of the theaters he audited in Jamaica. From time to time he would pass them on to Natie, who would then take us all to the movies for free. Rummaging around in the top of a closet, Natie came upon some grainy porno films which we all watched one day when his parents weren=t home. Up to then, all that had been available to me had been nudist magazines, and it was, to say the least, a revelation. Needless to say, this experience gave a considerable boost to my fantasy life.

A word about daydreaming, an activity that came to play a significant role in my intellectual work. All my life, I have been an inveterate daydreamer. Rather like Walter Mitty in the famous James Thurber story, my daydreams can be triggered by the slightest stimulus, or indeed by nothing at all. A good deal of the time, I amuse myself with daydreams about sexual conquests and magical powers. I cannot count the number of ways I have saved the world with powers miraculously bestowed on me, nor the number of beautiful women to whom I have made love in my imagination. The shape of my subjective utility curve is such [if I may put it this way] that I get more pleasure from the fantasy than I suffer pain from the inevitable realization that it is not real. Hence, it is always a net gain for me to engage in daydreaming.

But over and above mere fantasied gratification of erotic yens, daydreaming is the way in

which I work. All through the day, I am endlessly explaining things to an imaginary audience. By the structure of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, the pros and cons of universal health care, how an airplane stays up, why it makes you cooler to have a breeze blow across your skin, especially when you are wet. I experience abstract arguments as stories, rather like Jack and the Beanstalk. I tell the stories over and over in my mind until I get them right. The audience I conjure up is unforgiving and insistent on clarity. Just as little children will not let you get away with telling the story of Jack without explaining where he got the beanstalk from, so my imaginary audience will not let me slide over a rough patch in the explication of a text with a "You know" or a "Sort of." I also speak, in my daydreams, in complete, well-shaped sentences.

The result of this endless, obsessive inner talk is that when I come to set down my thoughts, they flow from me as quickly as I can write or type, and rarely need or undergo revision. I have on more than one occasion written a book straight off, from first to last page, and then sent it to the publisher without so much as showing it to a friend for comments. The corollary to this peculiar fact is that I cannot write at all until the story is clear in my mind. Hence, although I have published a good many books over the course of the past forty years, I actually spend very little time at the typewriter or computer composing.

Someone once pointed out to me that there are styles in the activity of composing music. Beethoven's scores are a chaotic overlay of corrections, rewritings, and editings. Mozart's look like copies made from an already completed score [as Salieri marvels in *Amadeus*]. I imagine, though I do not know, that the same is true of poets. Were someone to look at the first draft of one of my books, she would see what looks like a clean revised copy.

The daydreaming began when I was a boy, and has continued unabated up to the present day. As I write this memoir, I find myself, in the shower, in bed, while swimming or driving,

rehearsing passages yet to be written, working out in these imaginary conversations what I will say next. So it is that when I actually sit down at the computer to compose, the physical process of writing is merely a continuation of an activity I have been engaged in without cessation.

But all of this is getting ahead of my story, for I am now graduating from elementary school and about to enter high school.

When I entered Forest Hills High School, it was barely ten years old B a brand new facility with marble floors, well-equipped labs, and a faculty too good for its student body. This last was not an unusual state of affairs. One of the secondary consequences of the Great Depression was that many highly qualified teachers, who in better times would have found positions in colleges or universities, were forced to spend their careers teaching in high schools. We had a number of teachers with doctorates who gave us some taste of what a college education might be.

Forest Hills was, by New York standards, a mid-sized high school, with three thousand pupils organized into three Aschools.@ It was headed by Acting Principal Leo Ryan, a mediocre mesomorph of no particular intellectual distinction. But he was now my father=s colleague, for at the same time, my father took over Bryant High.

I attended Forest Hills from the time I was just thirteen until I was sixteen and a half, and in those three and a half years, I grew from a little boy into a budding young philosopher. Though that sounds pretentious and self-important B I was, after all, only in my very early teens B it captures accurately the way the transition felt to me, and looking back on those years from the perspective of more than half a century, it does seem that a major intellectual transformation took place in me a good deal earlier than one might have expected, even in someone frantically trying to act older than he was.

Needless to say, high school was a complete change from elementary school. Thirty-nine

years later, I sat in the Belmont Middle School at the Moving up@ ceremony of my older son's ninth grade class, and heard the Principal warn, in an ominous voice, that everything the boys and girls had done thus far was of no significance, whereas from the moment they entered Belmont High School, their performance would be shaping the rest of their lives. This was 1982, and he was talking portentously about the desperate effort to get into an Ivy League college, but it really is true, developmentally speaking, that the move from elementary school to high school is a transition fully as freighted with significance as the culturally more celebrated move to college.

The first big change was that each pupil in Forest Hills had his or her own individual program of courses throughout the eight period day. This meant that each time the bell rang, instead of lining up and marching in a group to the next teacher, we scattered through the halls and found our own way to the next class. What was even more exciting, we actually had some measure of choice, a fact that made scheduling three thousand students each term a nightmare for the school administration. Especially favored students, of whom I made myself one as fast as possible, were accorded the special opportunity of helping with the programming. We would go to an empty classroom with the teachers who had been stuck with this onerous duty, and rather like the enlisted personnel seconded to headquarters in those WW II war movies [one thinks of Dana Wynter in *Sink the Bismarck*], would put numbers up on the blackboard until all the sections of Sophomore English or French 1 were evened up and had roughly the same number of students.

Almost immediately, I encountered teachers in whose classes Barbara had excelled, as well as a few who knew my father. One in particular, Dr. Paul Brandwein, stands out, and in fact, just a month ago, I learned that his old students were trying to contact one another to share stories about him. Considering the fact that almost sixty years have passed since my sister and I studied

with him, this is an extraordinary tribute to his impact as a teacher.

Brandwein was Chair of the Biology Department [hence my father=s acquaintance with him]. He was one of those over-qualified high school teachers who gave us such an outstanding education. The best high school teachers then, as now, treated their profession as a calling, and gave of themselves in ways that went far beyond any plausible job description. My father, Paul Brandwein, and many other science teachers regularly took students on weekend nature walks, to Botanical Gardens and country fields and streams. I recall one marvelous Brandwein outing in Manhattan that ended with a visit to a little oriental restaurant, where we were introduced to foods we never imagined to exist. This was a simpler time, and without television, air travel, or summer trips much beyond the Catskills and Berkshires, even those of us from educated families were quite naive and inexperienced. Teachers like Brandwein took it as a part of the job to open our eyes to a larger world.

Two years before Barbara entered Forest Hills, an organization called Science Service Inc. had instituted a nationwide science competition for high school seniors. Sponsored by the Westinghouse Corporation, it quickly became known as the Westinghouse Science Talent Search. Each year, seniors all over the country were invited to take a written examination, testing their general knowledge of science, and then to submit a report of an independent science research project. Forty finalists were selected for a grand trip to Washington D. C., where each boy and girl made a presentation of the project before judges. Finalists and semi-finalists were selected, with the top boy and top girl each receiving a \$2,400 college scholarship as first prize.

Brandwein decided to have Forest Hills make a run at the Westinghouse, and quickly turned the science departments into forcing rooms for youthful projects. By the time Barbara reached her senior year in 1947 B six months after I entered my Freshman year B Forest Hills had

already won a Westinghouse, and Brandwein was on a roll. That year, I took Freshman General Science with him, and when he discovered that I was Bobby Wolff's brother and Walter Wolff's son, he pulled me out of the class and sent me to the laboratory, where I watched yeast buds reproduce under a microscope and read my way through a college genetics text. [All these years later, I can still remember sitting on the toilet at home, reading about alleles and mutations and such. Was the author named Snyder?]

Barbara was set to work studying fruit flies. To be more precise, she was studying phenocopies in *Drosophila Melanogaster*. A phenocopy, if I may quote my Webster's Collegiate, is Aa phenotypic variation due to modifying environmental influences that mimics the expression of a genotype other than its own. @ Which is a pretty accurate description of exactly what Barbara was doing. Fruit flies are of course the geneticist's favorite organism, because they have enormous chromosomes and are easily studied. It seems that if you shone ultraviolet light on a bunch of fruit flies, you could get them to develop unusual eyes, a change that *looked* like a mutation but in fact was not transmissible from generation to generation. Barbara undertook to demonstrate this phenomenon. She carried out her work in our basement, where my father had his old microscope and sets of slides dating back to his days as a graduate Biology student at Columbia.

What this meant for the rest of the family was that each evening, when we sat down to dinner around the blondwood dining table that dominated the tiny dining room, clouds of fruit flies hovered over our food. Despite Barbara's best efforts, it just wasn't possible to keep all of the little critters in their cages downstairs, and a steady stream would migrate upward in search of food.

That year, an unprecedented four students from Forest Hills were Westinghouse finalists B

more even than had ever been achieved by Stuyvesant, Bronx Science, or Brooklyn Tech, the elite science high schools of the New York system, admission to which was by special examination only. Brandwein was triumphant, and of course, Barbara was one of the four. Off she went to Washington, where she promptly was named the grand national female winner. The papers were full of the news, and she was instantly famous. You can perhaps see why a straight out academic competition with my older sister did not look like such a good idea!

By an odd happenstance, I actually got in on a piece of the glory. Barbara was invited to make a presentation of her research at the annual New York High School Science Fair, but the date coincided with her on-campus interview at Swarthmore College, so I was recruited to take her place. I was then a first semester Sophomore, barely fourteen years old, but I dutifully swatted up the info on *drosophila* and phenocopies and gave her report, even responding to questions from the floor.

This event is as good an occasion as any to comment on an odd fact that has characterized my sense of myself during my entire life. Looked at from the outside, it is a bit remarkable that a kid my age was able without much trouble to make a public presentation of a technical scientific subject. But from the inside, it seemed perfectly ordinary. I had no doubt that I could do it. The same sort of bifurcation between the way things felt from the inside, and the way they appeared to others from the outside, characterized my undergraduate experiences at Harvard, and indeed continues even up to the present day. Despite my ability to recognize this split and write about it, the fact is that I have only the dimmest sense of how I am perceived by others.

I was, as I have observed, a troubled youth, rebellious in the face of authority, angry, almost constantly aroused sexually, and deeply absorbed in my studies and inner thoughts. At roughly this time, during 1948, two things took place in my life that changed it profoundly.

The first was the onset, or rather the intensification, of obsessive, terrifying fears of death. I would lie in bed at night, unable to stop myself from thinking about the fact that some day I would cease to exist. I wasn't afraid of pain, or old age, simply of non-being. As I brooded over my eventual non-being, the time I had left seemed to shrink, so that my death, instead of being comfortably far off at the end of the twentieth century or beyond, closed in on me until it seemed to be immediately imminent. This had nothing at all to do with real world events, like the death of a family member. At that point, no one in my family had died save my grandfather, and though he was only 65 at his death, he seemed to me so ancient that he might as well have been a hundred.

Could the fears have been triggered by my sister's brilliant success and sudden public fame? I have often wondered, but to this day I do not know. The best clue I have ever found to the cause of the fears is the peculiar fact that when I was in the grip of the terror, the one thought that would reassure me was, *Maybe I will die before I get there.* What was I really afraid of? What was the fear of death conveniently covering over?

I was very soon to have a chance to try to find out, because my parents, alarmed by my manifestly troubled condition, put me into psychotherapy. Once again, it was my mother's job at Child Study that provided the connection. Bertram Schaffner, a young psychoanalyst just back from the war, had set up a practice in Manhattan, and was interested in trying something that was then quite experimental B standard adult analytic techniques with a teen-age patient. He relayed this to the folks at Child Study, and my mother heard about him. Because he was eager to make the experiment, he gave my parents a break on the price. So once again, I was off to Manhattan by subway, twice and then three times a week. My schedule was rearranged at school so that I had the last period free, and I would take the E train to 53rd and 7th avenue, walk up to Central

Park South, turn right half a block, and enter one of the handsome apartment buildings that lined the southern end of the park between 7th and 8th avenues.

I remained in therapy for two and a half years, only taking breaks for the summers at Shaker Village. I have virtually no memory of the sessions, which is odd, since there must have been as many as two hundred of them or more. We talked about my facial twitches, which Schaffner thought might be some sort of compulsive looking away from something I did not want to see [my father=s heavy drinking, perhaps]. But neither that suggestion, nor later thoughts by other therapists [of whom there would be many], had any effect on the twitching. The fears abated, however, either because of the content or the mere fact of the therapy. And something perhaps even more important began to take place. In those sessions, and in many others with other psychiatrists intermittently over forty years, I gained a measure of insight into my own mind, and the minds of others, that has deepened and strengthened my understanding of the world.

The other big thing that occurred while I was fourteen was that I fell in love.

My wife and I have just seen an amusing light romantic comedy called *Love Actually*. At one point in the movie, Liam Neeson, who has recently lost his wife, is talking to his young step-son, who seems troubled. Neeson assumes he is upset at the death of his mother, but the boy confesses that he has fallen deeply, hopelessly in love. Since the lad is only about twelve, Neeson=s first response is to suggest that he is a bit young for such emotions, but the boy responds with dead seriousness that he is not, and Neeson has the grace and wit to accept this statement at face value and help his young step-son to get the object of his affections actually to take notice of him. When I saw that movie, the thought crossed my mind that I would have liked to have a dad like Liam Neeson when I fell in love with Susie.

Susie Shaeffer was a very pretty girl of fifteen with a great figure and dark shoulder length

hair worn in a page boy. She sat in the seat in front of me in home room my sophomore year. Her father, Sam, was an executive with Hearn's Department Store in Manhattan, and they were, by my standards, quite affluent. It turned out that in addition to their Forest Hills apartment, they had a summer home in Westport, Connecticut and belonged to the Country Club. Indeed, in an early preview of the ideological struggles I would engage in my entire life, I tried to convince her that her father's salary of \$25,000 a year made the Shaeffer family upper class, but Susie insisted that they were just ordinary folks.

When I mentioned to my wife that I was writing my memoirs, and had reached the point where I was going to talk about falling in love at the age of fourteen, she said, "You will probably claim that I sat in front of you in home room, but I didn't. I sat behind you." This is an argument we have been having now ever since we got married seventeen years ago. But that is a long story, and will have to wait the telling.

It took a long time and a good deal of spine-stiffening for me to ask Susie for a date. I can still see myself sitting in the dining room at the little corner telephone table, made from the same godawful blondwood, trying to get up the courage to call her. I went over and over in my mind an exit strategy to get me out of the phone call gracefully if she said no. Finally, after a half hour of hesitation, I made the call.

I asked her to accompany me to a showing at a Manhattan art film theater of a revival of the Marcel Pagnol movie, *César*, the third in the pre-war trilogy of life among the fishermen in Marseilles that was later made into the movie, *Most Happy Fella*. She said yes, and off we went on our first date. The movie was what you might expect: black and white, English subtitles, bad sound track. As I recall, we sat in the balcony; after a bit, I eased my right arm around her shoulder and spent the next hour and a half trying unsuccessfully to cop a feel.

Almost immediately, we fell deeply in love. For my part, I had no doubt that some day we would be married. Aside from the physical attraction, which was very powerful for me, and I think perhaps for her as well, we shared a love of classical music, especially the music of Bach. I would walk her home from school sometimes, and come upstairs to her apartment, where there was an old-fashioned 78 rpm victrola near the front door. We would take out the album of the great Collegiate Chorale recording of the B Minor Mass, with Robert Shaw conducting, and listen to it together. Later on, we bought season tickets to the performances at the 92nd Street Y of the Bach Aria Group, with Julius Baker playing flute, Robert Bloom playing oboe, and the young Bernard Greenhouse, later an integral part of the Beaux Arts Trio, on cello. We even went to the Davenport Free Theater, which, as the name suggests, was a theatrical operation put on in an old unused space in downtown Manhattan by an aging thespian named Davenport. The acting was perfectly atrocious, but it *was* free, and a great way to spend an evening.

Susie and I went steady, as we used to say in those days, virtually from the moment of our first date. I did not date another girl for the next four and a half years, by which time I was quite committed to our getting married once I finished my education and could support her. At that point, alas, she dumped me for another man, and it took me thirty-four years to convince her that we should marry. Despite my brave talk about being sexually on fire, and the fantasizing I do in my constant daydreaming, I am, it seems, a thoroughly uxorious type. As I have often observed to friends since Susie and I finally married, I have been in love with only three women in my life, and two of them are Susie.

By now it may have occurred to the reader that we did a good deal of traveling around New York by public transportation when we were still only teenagers, and not in the company of adults. New York in those days was a wonderful place to explore. I do not think we ever

thought to worry that the subway at night might be unsafe. My parents may have been a bit *avant garde* in sending a boy of ten or eleven alone into the city with a violin in the late afternoon, but we felt as though the entire city was ours for the taking. In 1964, when I moved back to New York to take up a senior position in the Columbia Philosophy Department, I discovered that the little triangular space just next to Mrs. Zacharias= apartment building was now known as Aneedle park,@ and had become a favorite hangout of drug addicts. I did not feel safe even as an adult wandering about Manhattan in the evenings, and I would certainly never have allowed my young son to do so.

Even so, my parents= example must have had some effect on me, for in 1980, when my family moved to Belmont so that my first wife could accept a professorship at M. I. T., we allowed our older son, Patrick, then twelve, to explore Boston alone by riding the MTA and getting out at each stop to look around [kids rode for a dime in those days.]

Nineteen forty-eight was also the first year in which I first paid serious attention to national politics. As a little boy, I had been aware of the progress of the war, and can still recall the precise moment when I heard of the death of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. But it was not until 1948 that I really took an interest in politics. It was an exciting year. Harry Truman was running for re-election, having ascended to the presidency on the death of the great FDR. He was opposed by Thomas Dewey, Governor of New York. Also running on minor party tickets were Henry Wallace on the left, candidate of the Progressive Party, and Strom Thurmond [now, at long last, deceased], the standard bearer of the viciously racist States Rights Party. My parents were supporting Truman, but I was sympathetic to Wallace.

I come now to one of those mysteries of memory that bedevil historians and the writers of memoirs. There is a story about Wallace and my involvement in politics that I have been telling

for fifty years. It goes like this: One day in the late summer of >48, Johnny Brown and I set out from Kew Gardens Hills to attend a Wallace rally at Yankee Stadium. When we got there, it was raining, and we decided that our politics were not serious enough to get us to stand in the rain just to hear political speeches. As we left the stadium, the rain let up, and it occurred to us that right across the river the Dodgers were playing the Giants at the Polo Grounds. Since we were both avid Dodgers fans, we walked across the bridge, paid our way into the cheap seats, sneaked down in the nearly empty ball park to the expensive seats, and, after the rain finally let up, watched Rex Barney pitch a no-hitter. It is the only no-hitter I ever saw, and it is forever associated in my mind with progressive politics.

Well, that is the story, and I have, or think I have, visual memories of each element of it B the rally at Yankee Stadium, the walk to the Polo grounds, and the no-hitter. As I prepared to write this bit of my memoir, I went on line to check the component parts of the story. Sure enough, I found an account of Rex Barney=s no-hitter against the Giants, which mentioned a one hour rain delay and showers in the sixth, eighth, and ninth innings. September 9, 1948. I also found an account of the Wallace rally at Yankee Stadium. It turns out Pete Seegar was on the program, which may in fact have been the real inducement, for me at least. *But the rally was held on September 10, 1948, not September 9!* So regardless of what I think I remember, I could not have walked with Johnny Brown from the rally to the game. Did I really go to the rally at all? Did I go to the game one night, and the rally the next?

A month or so after writing that paragraph, I was having lunch with a group of friends in Amherst, all of them professors at the University of Massachusetts, where I was teaching. I told the story as a humorous example of the fallibility of memory, but one of the group, a marvelous old left-wing emeritus Professor of English named Jules Chametzky, said “But I have been telling

that story for fifty years. I was there.” “What do you mean,” I asked, mystified, “you were there?” “Yes,” he said, “I was one of Vito Marcantonio’s lieutenants. [Marcantonio was a Congressman and a left-wing member of the American Labor Party.] My story is that fifty thousand people showed up for the rally, and when it was rained out, all fifty thousand came back the next night!”

So my memory is correct! The rally and the ball game *were* the same night, and it *did* rain on the rally.

Love, politics, and psychotherapy combined with an intense inner life of the mind to transform me very rapidly from a precocious little boy into a young intellectual, even though I was still at an age more appropriate to sports enthusiasms and schoolyard crushes. This evolution was helped along both by the example of my brilliantly successful older sister and by my home life, which encouraged intellectual curiosity. My father was the official intellect of the family B a high school principal, the author of a textbook, a gifted teacher who also became more and more ponderous and pontifical, perhaps as a consequence of his heavier and heavier drinking. My mother adopted a very deferential attitude toward him in all matters intellectual, and *qvelled* about the accomplishments of her children [she actually had a pair of earrings made from the Phi Beta Kappa keys that my sister and I earned in college!] But Barbara and I knew, though we did not openly acknowledge it until her funeral many years later, that she was in fact the brains of the couple. Though she had been forced to go to work without finishing high school because of her father=s debilitating stroke, she had an extraordinarily keen mind, and a love of words that made her an ideal editor and a ferocious leave-no-prisoners Scrabble player. My father simply refused to play with her, and when my sister and I did, she trounced us unmercifully. It was from her that I learned to do DoubleCrostics and crossword puzzles.

One of the father=s favorite books was *Language in Thought and Action* by the student of Korzybskian General Semantics S. I. Hayakawa. It would take too long and be too boring actually to explain General Semantics. Suffice it to say that Hayakawa had written a quite readable and interesting book about the way in which language shapes our thoughts [as opposed to the older view, which was that our thoughts shape our language.] My father instituted the custom of leading a discussion group at his school each semester for ten or fifteen Bryant students, using Hayakawa=s book as a text. When my sister reached sophomore or junior year, she persuaded him to run a semantics group, as it was called, in our home for herself and her friends. [Truth to tell, it took very little persuading. My father loved to teach, and I think missed it a good deal once he ascended into the firmament of school administration.] I sat in on the sessions, and eventually, after Barbara was graduated and went off to college, I and my friends had our own Semantics Group. AHayakawa@ was for us nothing more than a name on a book, and it saddened me greatly, twenty-five years later, to see the very same S. I. Hayakawa serve as a Republican senator from California. To this day, I cannot see any integral ideological link between General Semantics and conservative politics, but a little voice inside me whispers that it is *Ano accident@* that my father, despite his putatively progressive politics, would be so attracted to the intellectual production of a man who turned out to be right-wing. It is the same link, I am convinced, that accounts for the rightward turn of neo-conservatives who in their earlier days exhibited an apparently progressive sympathy for certain intellectual movements in the humanities and social sciences.

Formal schooling did make some contribution to my intellectual unfolding, although less, I think, than one might imagine. I was an earnest student, however mixed up my inner emotional life might have been. Save for an embarrassing 85 in Freshman English from Miss Doran, I

scored high grades, and actually finished up with the third highest average in my graduating class, though I could not quite catch up to Sara Lee Moltz, a tall bespectacled girl with a four-year grade average of something like 97.8.

Three teachers stand out in my mind, aside from Brandwein, who was in a league by himself. The first, whose name I have now lost, was a gorgeous young French teacher whom we all adored, though she never showed the slightest awareness of our lustful looks. I studied French for three years, achieving so little mastery that even now, when Susie and I visit Paris, I live in terror of having to make a dinner reservation or call a cab over the phone. Like many marginal French speakers, I can compose a linguistically acceptable question, but cannot for the life of me understand the answer that comes back rapid fire. Even so, years later as a graduate student and young Instructor, I did succeed in reading entire books of history and philosophy in French. If memory serves, I even once read a Camus novel in French, but if so, I have lost the copy, and with it any physical evidence of this notable accomplishment.

My memory of Milton Zissowitz is a good deal livelier. Milton and his brother Sam Cantor [who changed his name in a completely unsuccessful effort to appear less obviously Jewish] taught English, and one semester I took his journalism course. In those days teachers seated pupils alphabetically, with the result that I was always at the back of the room. Zissowitz, for obvious reasons, chose to seat students in reverse alphabetical order, so for the first and last time, I got to sit in front. The bit of instruction that sticks in my mind from that class was an exercise Mr. Zissowitz had us perform on the New York dailies. In those days there were quite a few newspapers in New York: the *Times*, the *Herald Tribune*, the *Daily News*, the *World-Telegram*, the *Daily Mirror*, *PM*, among others. We brought copies of these papers into class one day, and Zissowitz had us measure the percentage of column inches in each paper devoted to

advertisements. The *Daily News* led the pack with something like 85% of the entire paper taken up by ads. He then had us calculate the revenue from a page of advertisements of different sorts, and it became quite clear that the classifieds were far and away the biggest money producers of all the varieties of advertisements. This simple lesson has stayed with me to the present day.

A teacher of a very different sort was balding, cerebral Dr. Frank, the Chairman of the Math Department. I was fascinated by math, and pretty good at it. **B** one year, I skipped Trig, learning it well enough in a few days to get a good grade on the state Regents examination and get credit for it. [This is an example of what described earlier as my inability to see myself as others saw me. Looking back, from the perspective of a teacher, I realize that it must have seemed quite remarkable to the adults in my world that I could learn a subject like Trigonometry in next to no time. But to me, it was just a good way to continue my effort to catch up with my sister by accumulating another one of the credits I would need to graduate in three and a half years.]

Dr. Frank decided that some of us needed to know some math not ordinarily taught in high school in those days. **B** at least not at ordinary high schools; Stuyvesant and Bronx Science were another matter. So he organized a little class before the start of the school day my senior year, and taught us what was then called Analytic Geometry. At the time, it seemed terribly daring and advanced, a taste of real college. These days, I rather think such things are routinely introduced to students in grade school!

It was of course a foregone conclusion that when my time came, I would try out for the Westinghouse. Brandwein never again could repeat the *annus mirabilis* of 1948, but Forest Hills students continued to win, and I might as well have had a great big W painted on my forehead. Preparation for the written exam meant cramming as much science into my head as I could, but

the exam by itself simply sorted out the several hundred Honorable Mentions from the mass of applicants nation-wide. What really mattered was the research project.

My first idea was to do an anthropometric study of first and second generation Chinese-Americans in New York=s Chinatown, to see whether environmental factors had changed their skull measurements. I had long been fascinated by fossil man, and frequently spent Saturdays at the Museum of Natural History on Central Park West, peering at the display cases of brain pans and lower jaws of Neanderthal Man and Cro-Magnon Man. Thanks to a *Handbook of Physical Anthropometry* co-authored by the museum=s curator, Harry Shapiro, I was easily conversant with gnathions and nasions, bizygomatic widths, ascending ramuses, and sigmoid notches. Even the fanciful recreation of primitive men and women featured in the floor to ceiling glassed in panoramas in the main exhibit halls, now considered hopelessly old-fashioned and inaccurate, were mesmerizing to me.

I actually went so far as to take metal working shop one semester, choosing as my class project the construction of a metallic sliding caliper. It was an ugly, clumsy thing with which it would have been impossible to take accurate measurements, even if I had been able to get residents of Chinatown to stand still for it. But that project fell by the wayside, and I have long since lost the calipers.

My next idea B or, more precisely, Brandwein=s next idea for me B was an ecological study of a pond in the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens. [This will give you some idea of how unimpressive our science projects were in those days. In the Intel Science Talent Search, as the Westinghouse was renamed when its sponsor changed, students do molecular biological research that would have won them a Nobel Prize in the forties.] I actually went to the Gardens and collected some little bottles of water, but my heart wasn=t in it.

Finally, I fixed on a math project B a three-dimensional graphical representation of certain polynomials, as I recall. I took the exam, and waited anxiously for the results.

Well, I didn=t win. I did get Honorable Mention, but my project simply wasn=t in the running. I can still recall the day I found out. Susie and I walked home, and I talked with her about my disappointment at not being one of the forty who would make the trip to Washington. Always supportive, and rather proud of her brainy boyfriend, she assured me that it was a big deal to have won an Honorable Mention in a national competition, but I knew better. She was an only child, and didn=t understand what it was like to play second banana to a star.

It was in my senior year in high school that I first started to read formal philosophy. I had been brooding for some time about questions that, I later learned, were standard subjects of philosophical debate. The most pressing issue, about which I worried a good deal, was whether it was immoral simply to think bad thoughts, or whether it only counted if you acted on them.

The origin of this concern was not my sexual urges. I was quite comfortable them. My only worry was how to get them satisfied. What turned me anxiously inward in self-examination was the *frisson* of excitement I felt at reading of torture and other acts of deliberate, sensual cruelty. Even today, fifty years and more later, having long since acquainted myself with the notions of *thanatos* and *eros* and the existence [if not the writings] of the Marquis de Sade, I find it difficult to acknowledge these feelings. They seem to me to be genuinely evil, and no amount of psychoanalytic theory or philosophical reflection can relieve me of the dreadful sense that their existence in me marks me as someone truly bad. I finally made some sort of peace with myself by concluding that only actions were morally condemnable. So long as I didn=t actually hurt anyone B and I felt no real force drawing me in that direction B I decided that I needn=t feel guilty.

My philosophical curiosity actually took me in quite a different direction. The first book I

ever read by an actual philosopher was Irwin Edman's memoir, *Philosopher's Quest*, and its sequel, *Philosopher's Journey*. Edman was a Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University B not a powerful or important thinker, but a graceful writer with a talent for recreating the people he had met and the places he had traveled during his academic career. Indeed, come to think of it, his book was not too different from what this will become, if I can ever get out of my teenage years.

From there I moved on to Bertrand Russell's big, fat *History of Western Philosophy*. Russell was a truly important philosopher of the first part of the Twentieth century, an English Lord who had made a name for himself with a monumental groundbreaking work of mathematical logic co-authored with the great American metaphysician Alfred North Whitehead. He went on to write fifty or more books on logic, the theory of knowledge, metaphysics, ethics, and politics, actually winning the Nobel prize for literature late in his immensely long life. He had been jailed as a conscientious objector during the First World War and later on, when he was in his eighties, he led sitdown strikes and mass demonstrations against nuclear weapons.

The *History*, if the truth be told, is something of a potboiler, filled with cranky and idiosyncratic opinions about the great philosophers that is more useful as a guide to Russell's own views than as an historical overview of Western Philosophy. But after plowing through it [it was all complete news to me, of course], I then moved on to a quite serious work, his *Philosophy of Mathematics*. I did not understand a good deal of what I was reading, but I immediately recognized that this was real thinking, of a sort I had not yet encountered. I was fascinated and challenged, and decided that when I got to college, I would study mathematics and philosophy.

Four authors especially enchanted me during these high school years: Mark Twain, e. e. cummings, George Bernard Shaw, and Charles Erskine Scott Wood. In our attic, I found an old

green set of the complete works of Twain. I liked his novels and short stories B who could not? B but it was the non-fiction that especially spoke to me. The ironic, unillusioned, skeptical voice struck a chord in me, and I read gleefully through his send up of Mary Baker Eddy and Christian Science and his devastating exposé of the literary errors of James Fenimore Cooper. It was a little known essay, *An Defense of Harriet Shelley*,@ that came back to me, many years later, when I was searching for a title for what would become my most widely read and translated book.

Shaw too was a revelation. What drew me to him, aside from his obvious intelligence and wit, was the strong socialist moral conscience that suffused his writing. Although I would eventually go on to study the works of Karl Marx closely, and write several books about *Capital*, I have never been completely comfortable with the intense, sectarian, paranoid style of continental radical thought. Although I did not realize it at the time, Shaw gave me the politics without the *angst*. I read my way through *Major Barbara*, *Saint Joan*, *Captain Brassbound=s Conversion*, and *Man and Superman*, including the great *Don Juan in Hell* section. Years later, I was to have the extraordinary pleasure of seeing *Don Juan in Hell* in a staged reading, with Charles Boyer as Don Juan, Cedric Hardwick as the General, Agnes Moorehead as Dona Ana, and Charles Laughton as the Devil. I think I can safely say that theater doesn=t get any better than that!

Susie and I would read cummings together, sharing the erotic love poetry as though it had been written especially for us. Along with Sandburg, he was my favorite poet. In anticipation, perhaps, of my eventual college experience, I especially loved his amusing picture of a Radcliffe girl, *AGay is the captivating cognomen of a young lady from Cambridge, Mass.*@

These were all pretty standard enthusiasms for a fifteen year old with intellectual pretensions. The reader may be forgiven for drawing a blank on Wood. CES Wood, whose ninety-two years spanned the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, from 1852 to 1944, was, the

internet tells me, Aa writer, poet, soldier, corporate lawyer, and a lover of books. He was a founder of Portland's Public Library and the Portland Art Museum. A self-proclaimed anarchist, he was a regular contributor to radical journals of the day.@

In our attic, I found a little volume by him entitled *Heavenly Discourses*. The book consisted of a series of chapters based on the conceit that the great thinkers of Western Civilization would eventually meet one another in heaven and carry on extended debates about things political and philosophical. This was, of course, the very Platonic ideal of the living room conversations I had longed to enter as a little boy. I was so taken by Wood=s book that I used it as the model for the very first paper I ever wrote in college.

As late Summer turned into Fall in 1949, I and my fellow seniors turned our attention to college. Where would I go? You must not suppose that this was a question fraught with great anxiety and productive of great stress. This was well before the explosion of higher education in the late >50s and early >60s that produced the modern college admissions rat race. Barbara was going to Swarthmore, and so I decided that that was where I wanted to go as well. I spent several days visiting the campus, and following her around to some of her classes. It was then, as it is now, a quiet, beautiful, graceful campus peopled by some very smart and attractive young students. I was ready to enrol.

I also applied to Harvard. I am not sure why, but it might have been that a friend of mine from Forest Hills, Herb Winston, had gone there the year before, and reported back that it was a great place. I spent a weekend there as well, hosted by one of Barbara=s fellow Westinghouse finalists, Paul Martin [who later became a Dean of Sciences at Harvard]. It was Halloween, and we all put on big rubber masks and ran around the campus writing naughty messages on sidewalks and steps with chalk.

But Harvard had two enormous drawbacks that served as powerful disincentives. First, and most important, you were in those days required to wear a tie and jacket to every meal, including breakfast. I did not own a tie and jacket, and was afraid I might starve before I adjusted. The other problem was that Harvard was all male [I didn't know about Radcliffe], and though my heart belonged to Susie, I was a firm believer in co-education. My last choice was Queens College, a campus of the City College system, and my back-up school, urged on me by a cautious college advisor.

But I had made the serious tactical error of mentioning in my application to Swarthmore that I was in regular psychotherapy, and in those days, that was a definite deal breaker. Because I had applied to only one other elite school, the Admissions Office at Swarthmore offered me a compromise. If I did not get into Harvard, they would admit me, but if I was admitted to Harvard, they would turn me down and I could go to Cambridge.

The modern reader will of course conclude that I was either insanely arrogant or very badly advised by my high school teachers, but things were different in those days. I once looked up the figures for my year. Two thousand five hundred and ninety-seven men applied to Harvard for admission to the class of 1950, sixteen hundred fifty-one were admitted, and eleven hundred seventy three actually enrolled. So I had a 63.5% chance of getting in. These days, an applicant to the University of Massachusetts faces worse odds.

There was still the matter of a tie and jacket. The summer after my high school graduation, I worked as a waiter at a camp run by the Chair of my father's Phys Ed department. With salary and tips, I came home with almost two hundred dollars. I bought a typewriter, and in Klein's on the Square, got myself a gray flannel suit and an overcoat. I was ready to go to college.