Lehigh University

Even though I can still remember many details of those years, I haven't the vaguest recollection of how I wound up going to Lehigh University, which was located in the then-thriving steel town of Bethlehem, Pa. No doubt my mother talked to engineers and business executives who had known my father, and in all likelihood one or more of them had suggested Lehigh after she reported my strong dislike of RPI. The conversation with me probably went along the following lines:

She: "Here. I want you to look over these folders."

I: "What are they about.

She: "A university that is supposed to be very good."

I: "I don't want to go to a good university."

She: "I want you to look over these folders. Mr. — [friend of my father's] says it is an outstanding engineering school."

I: "Fuck engineering."

She: "Oh, if your father could listen to you... *I will not allow you to use language like that!* Do you think you are just going to keep on living here and not getting a degree?"

I: "Fuck the degree."

She: "I insist you stop using that language. Here are the folders."

And eventually, knowing that argument was futile, and that I could think of nothing better to do with my life, I applied and was accepted.

6 E. 4th St.

In the fall of 1957, I rented a room on the third floor of 6 East 4th Street, in Bethlehem, just off New Street a few blocks down from the University. Across the street was the Lehigh Tavern, a narrow bar frequented by locals as well as students, owned by a friendly guy named Bob Czopoth and featuring (that is the right word) one of the world's great bartenders.

There were three students on the third floor: two in the room diagonally opposite mine, one of whom was named Bill Clarke, and one in the room in the corner adjacent to mine. My room had faded blue walls, a nondescript desk, chair, and bed. It looked down on the Lehigh Tavern, across the street. The wooden floors in all the rooms and in the hall were a grimy, dull, gray, probably from years of steel-mill dust having been ground in by the shoes of countless students. A single bulb hung from a cord over the hallway. To the left of the stairwell as you came up was an ancient refrigerator, not plugged in. Bill and I kidded about how, sooner or later, it would have to be opened. But we put it off as long as possible. Eventually, we had to do it, because we had no way of keeping food otherwise. We took our places, said one, two, three, and he opened it. We were immediately overwhelmed by a smell so strong we had to cover our noses. Creeping back, we saw that someone had left a fish in the rectangular glass plate that collected water from the freezing compartment during defrosting. The fish must have been in there all summer. On the other shelves were a few bags, no doubt containing various forgotten lunches, circa June, and some ossified oranges. We closed the door, both of us still holding our noses with one hand, waving the fumes away with the other.

Bill, with a laugh, in that voice which expressed the pure hopelessness of all things in this life, said, "Well, welcome to your new home, John."

The remains of the fish swam in their lethal green soup (there turned out to be other dead things in the warm freezer compartment). I suppose that, using the social skills I had already

developed by then, mainly from years in the music business, I offered to clean up the mess and then cleverly didn't get around to it right away. Bill couldn't wait. I seem to remember him putting on rubber gloves and carefully drawing the tray from its shelf, then carrying it around the corner to the gray bathroom room at the head of the stairs. How he got the slimy mush to go down the sink drain I don't know. Maybe he put it in a plastic bag, but I am not sure they had them in those days. Maybe he wrapped it in wax paper. But he kept at it, removed the other putrefying meat and the oranges, gave the shelves a wipedown, and, for all I know, after leaving the door open for a few days, put the plug back into the wall, and had himself a place to store his sandwiches.

Bob Czopoth, who owned the Lehigh Tavern, was a friendly guy in his forties with a crewcut and a receding hairline. The star of the place, however, was the regular bartender, one of the best entertainers I ever met in person. On a busy night he could keep the entire bar laughing and, of course, buying drinks, as he reeled off dirty jokes and scurrilous anecdotes. And, like all good bartenders, he remembered enough about each customer so that they always felt they mattered to him. One thing I learned from talking to him was that there were alcoholics who waited for the bars to open (I no longer remember the earliest legal hour) so they could get their first drink of the day. He said he knew of cases in which the drinker's hands shook so much that he wrapped one end of his necktie around his wrist, passed the other end around behind his neck, then grasped the glass and hoisted it to his mouth by pulling down on the free end of his tie with the other hand.

Around five or so in the afternoon, several days a week, a tall old guy with rimless glasses would come to pick up the numbers bets and pay off the winners. He was very quiet — I sometimes wondered if he might not be a fallen math professor. As far as I could tell, he carried all the numbers which his customers had bet on, in his head, because I never saw him write anything down. On several occasions, an off-duty policeman was having a drink at the end of the bar. He didn't bother the guy, who came in, went about his business, and left.

Since there were no cooking facilities in the rooms, I always ate in restaurants. I tended to go to three: one in the next block of 4th named The Blue Anchor, where for around $.85, you could get a hot lunch — meat, potatoes, vegetables, rice pudding, and a cup of coffee. The second was in the New Merchants' Hotel, right next door to 6 E. 4th, at the corner of E. 4th St. and New St., a flea-bag of a place run by a Greek family. The only thing recommending it was the fact that Angie was the waitress. She was the daughter of the owner, was probably in her thirties, had a short haircut like Liza Minelli, and an Elizabeth Taylor voice. She was a bit heavy, tended to wear dark blue a lot, but I was strongly attracted to her. She seemed to have an eye for young men, and we knew it. We did a lot of joking with her. The three of us from the third floor of 6 E. 4th would come in on a cold fall or winter day and sit in the little dining room and watch TV, which was on a high shelf in a corner, as she served us vegetable soup and the hot-plate dinner. The tiny, dingy bar in the front was where the steelworkers came each morning and evening for their boilermakers. They stood there, with their heavy gloves on the counter, and ordered a stein of beer and a shot of whiskey, downed the whiskey first, then the beer, did this a couple of times, then went off to work in the flaming hell of the mills. The same routine was repeated at a more leisurely pace in the evening.

When I needed a change in food, I would go to a restaurant a few doors down 4th on the opposite side of the street, a block or two from the Blue Anchor, because this place had good spaghetti and meatballs, and a red wine I liked, something called Zinfandel. The place was always dark. I ate sitting at the polished, black wood bar, which was a little too high, especially with the heavy rounded moulding along the edge. I had to rest my elbows on that, sitting on the too-low

stool. But the mix of spaghetti sauce and overcooked meat and that dark red wine was worth it. As throughout my life, if I ate alone, I always had a book with me.

Bill Clarke

Bill Clarke was from Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He had a brush cut, dark-rimmed glasses, and the dogged expression of a graduate student who is perennially short of money, which he was, and whose academic advisor had gone slightly mad, which he had. He played drums, not well, and I think he was envious that I could play jazz with a band and travel to gigs, as I soon began to do. He was clinging to life via a teaching assistant's stipend. He had a comically sad expression, a way of shaking his head and saying, "Jesus..." with a kind of desperate smile: "Is there no end?" whenever he heard yet another tale of misfortune of some student. He had lost his father at an early age. Perhaps that was the reason for this resigned pessimism. He would say, eyebrows raised, palms open, "John, there's nothing you can do, John. These bastards have got you where they want you." He was getting his master's in Psychology, and part of his job was to find stray cats in Bethlehem which his professor was using in his research: the professor anesthetized them, cut off the tops of their skulls, and then applied various stimuli — light in their eyes, sound, perhaps smell, I'm not sure — as he ran an electrical probe along parts of their brain to see which part of the brain responded. Bill felt that the old fellow had gone slightly mad because he seemed to have an unlimited capacity and *need* to carry out these experiments. More data was all that mattered.

One day Bill informed us, with an especially Droopy Dog look, that someone had stolen his wallet, which contained his month's paycheck. We all offered to make him a loan, but he turned us down. He said he had enough in savings to get him through two weeks, and maybe he could stretch it to four. He was a proud man in his defeat. He got Angie to extend him a little credit at the restaurant so he could have a bowl of vegetable soup and a piece of bread each evening. The days wore on. His look grew ever more haunted. We would invite him to come with us to the Blue Anchor and at least share a slice of bread with us. No, that would only make the ordeal worse. He made jokes: maybe we could let him have a gum wrapper once in a while, when we were finished, so that he could at least smell the flavor. He had been taking vitamin pills, and so when the rest of us came back from a meal, he would joke about how he had had a good dinner in the room, namely, his vitamin pill washed down with a glass of water. Finally we hit on a way to give him some companionship while we ate at the restaurant, namely, we would put the menus up in front of our plates so that he couldn't see the food. Then, he could have his glass of water and vitamin pill — the pills were always black, it seems in memory, and big enough to keep a starving horse alive — and the menus would not only prevent him from seeing the delicious mashed potatoes and pot roast and beets and coffee and bread pudding we were eating, but would also force the aromas to rise straight up and not spill out across the table to his nostrils. And so we had dinner together that way, menus propped up, and Bill, all alone, with his black vitamin pill on the white formica table top, alongside his glass of water.

One night, I think after a big game, there was a large gathering outside the Lehigh Tavern. Everyone was trying to crowd in the place. Drunkenness was in the air. Bill and I looked down and thought, what the hell, why not join in the revelry? In the ceiling of the hall there was a trapdoor to the roof. Somehow we moved a dresser and chair, opened the trapdoor, and climbed up onto the steeply sloping roof. I asked Bill to hand me my horn. Then we passed up his snare drum and its stand. With one foot braced against the frame around the opening, we began play-

ing. "Line for Lyons", "Bernie's Tune", "I Can't Get Enough of You", and other Mulligan tunes. The revelers below turned, cheered us on. Bill shook his head in that way he had: "This is crazy. It's come to this. I'm sitting on a steep roof playing drums. This is the only gig I can get."

Later, when I told Heim about our rooftop performance, he got a kick out of it, and quoted Whitman's line, "I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world".

The Physics Student

The ordeal of getting an advanced degree in physics was brought home to me again in the person of a graduate student I met. He was earning a pittance as a TA (teaching assistant) and apparently, as with Bill Clarke, it was just barely enough to keep him alive. To me, he seemed like something out of a previous century: one of those poverty-stricken students we read about in 18th- and 19th-century authors (Samuel Johnson, Thomas DeQuincey). It was clear that often he did not know where his next meal was coming from. He always seemed to be hoping that you just might have a spare piece of pizza on you that you could lend him for a couple of days until he could pay it back. He always seemed to have a dirty face and never to have had sufficient sleep. His academic masters were apparently determined to work him into the ground. He had graduated from Reed College, which he described as another place that was determined to make or break the minds and souls of students. He told of all-but-impossible reading lists and assignments.

He lived in a hole-in-the-wall rental house on the other side of the river, with other equally impoverished grad students. I went there once — I remember mattresses, clothing strewn all over the floor.

To keep going as he was, to keep slogging it out in order to be allowed, eventually, one day, to enter the ranks of professional physicists — I was amazed at his courage, and had enormous respect for him.

Beginning of the Journal

At Lehigh I carried around a little black book during the day so I could write down my thoughts before I forgot them. All were bleak, sarcastic, full of rage and fury at the school and my hopeless existence and, most of all, at the fact that what I was putting in that book was rubbish.

I think, but I am not sure, that I first began keeping a journal early in my Lehigh years — in other words, when I was about twenty. I remember the kind of notebook I used — it had a hard, cardboard cover with an ink-blot pattern and, in the center, a place for your name and address. The pages were light green with blue lines and I remember writing, in a big, careful hand, the date and then the opening words: something along the lines of, "On this date I begin this personal journal..." or "I have decided to keep a journal." My purpose was the same as that of virtually every other person who has ever kept a journal: I wanted to leave a record that would be remembered by posterity. But I also felt (even if I didn't put it into these words until later): *I know a great deal about something!* Unfortunately, I had no idea what that something was.

I never called it a diary. Girls kept diaries. I made a point of calling it "The Journal", not even "My Journal", because that sounded effeminate. I had no doubt that guys would universally regard it as a sissy activity, and so it was years before I admitted it to anyone. But I needed to communicate with posterity, or, rather, I needed to show posterity how dreadful my life was in hopes that, perhaps, in just this case, it would say that, despite the fact he had no talent, we will make an exception and remember him because his life was more miserable than anyone else's in the 20th century.

"Should you wish to make sure that your birthday will be celebrated three hundred years hence, your best course is undoubtedly to keep a diary." — Woolf, Virginia, "Rambling Around Evelyn".

The Courses

Prerequisites

At Lehigh I realized how deep my hatred of the idea of course *prerequisites* was. I no longer remember (I probably never knew) how the school determined what courses a student who was transferring to the school from another was required to take, but I do remember, during my years there, having to go to the registrar's office to see if I would be allowed to take a required math or engineering course. The middle-aged bitch behind the counter would open the catalog and parrot the course description and reply, in no uncertain terms, that if I had not taken the prerequisites listed, I would not be allowed to take the course. Period. I could imagine all too clearly the pleasure of having my hands around her throat and pressing my thumbs into her windpipe, or sticking a knife into her fat belly. In some cases I had already taken an equivalent of the prerequisite at RPI but they wouldn't give me credit because I hadn't taken the course at Lehigh; in other cases, I had studied the material in several different courses, at RPI and Lehigh, but these weren't the courses listed. There was no use even mentioning the idea of teaching myself the material, say, over the summer, or for that matter, during the course.

Prerequisites seemed to me yet another example of the hypocrisy that characterized the university, because the truth was that I and most other students usually forgot everything we had learned in a course within a month or two after the final unless the same material came up in courses the next semester. Yet the prerequisite policy pretended that at least the *good* students remembered what they had learned, even after a year. It was a lie and it was used to keep students buying as much of the university product as possible.

And the professors never even confronted the problem of rapid recovery of what students had learned if the students had forgotten it — a problem that seemed of overwhelming importance to me. Textbook indexes were often all but useless — last-minute additions so that the publisher could say that the book had an index. I assumed the professors imagined that if you forgot something in a course you had taken, and couldn't find it via a linear search, front to back, of the textbook and your notes, why, that could only mean you should take the course again. I considered this a shameful fraud perpetrated on students and the parents who were paying for their sons' and daughters' educations. My hatred eventually led to a new type of textbook which was *designed* for rapid retrieval of information. But despite my contempt, I made extraordinary — heroic — attempts to please the professors. I took notes in lectures and in classes, read the textbook assignments, did the homework, tried to make myself *be* like the professors. Whatever changes I may ultimately bring about in education, let it never be forgotten how hard I tried to give the benefit of the doubt to the old ways.

Calculus

Needless to say, I had to take more calculus. The professor of the first course I took at Lehigh seemed to me the very essence of a math professor: he had pale skin (they never go out in the sun), wore black-rimmed glasses and was bald, but had thick black hair on the sides and back of his head. I sat in the rear of the room. I couldn't hear him much of the time, but that was only appropriate since I felt so utterly out of place. I used to wonder, as he went his busy way through

each lecture, paying little attention to his class: *what made him a mathematician?* My answer was that a mathematician is someone who calculates very quickly and *as a result of this speed*, discovers things that the rest of us are incapable of seeing. In other words, it is simply calculating speed that separates us from mathematicians. They solve problems so fast that they see new things.

As at RPI, I hated the students who seemed to be at home doing calculus problems. I had an image of them bending over their homework each evening, doing all the problems, never being bothered with the kind of questions that bothered me, destined for productive lives as engineers. I was filled with fear and hopelessness when I read about a famous scientist or mathematician who had gone through his undergraduate education in three years. It seemed impossible. I was outraged that someone could do that. I would have to invent a way for people like me to do it. I thought, without the slightest idea of how I was going to accomplish this, "Someday I am going to put you sons-of-bitches (meaning, the professors) out of business."

Academic Contempt for the Scientific Theories of the Past

One thing I remember with sadness and anger is the attitude that teachers and professors had toward the mistaken theories of the past. Perhaps as early as General Science in ninth grade, the old phlogiston theory was always mentioned with derision if not outright scorn. Yet this theory was accepted as the explanation of the cause of fire by scientists until the late 1700s: phlogiston was present in all combustible materials, and fire was simply the escape of this material into the air. I tried to join everyone else in looking down on the fools who could have entertained such an idea, but I remember having pangs of conscience over this: the theory seemed to me to be a perfectly natural explanation prior to the discovery of oxygen (in 1774), and I couldn't help thinking that those early scientists were not all the fools we were taught they were. At RPI and Lehigh the engineering students never failed to smirk, if not laugh outright, at the belief, held by all the world's leading physicists until the early 20th century, that electromagnetic waves traveled through a medium called the "ether". Here, too, I couldn't help feeling the idea was not complete nonsense, because it developed, again, perfectly naturally, out of the fact that all other known waves required a medium (water, air) to be waves *in*. (The first suspicions that the ether might not exist came from the famous Michelson-Morley experiments in the 1880s, in which it was discovered that the speed of light was unaffected by the speed or direction of a light source traveling through the ether, whereas the relative speed of, say, a boat to the water in a stream, is greater if the boat is traveling upstream than if it is traveling downstream.

Then as now, as far as I know, the history of science and mathematics was never considered important enough to be a required course. (I am not sure that RPI or Lehigh even had such a course in the curriculum.) Engineers and mathematicians and scientists with a future asked no questions about the past. Anyone with an interest in that subject marked himself as a loser. I was middle-aged before I realized that this is an attitude that flourishes in the careerist atmosphere of the university and industry: winners are rewarded for solving problems that the hierarchy deems important; winners go for the prizes. It is only when we work alone on very difficult problems that we might not be able to solve, that we develop an interest in, and a sympathy for, the struggles of others in past ages who did the same.

Statics

All engineers had to take a course in statics. It was taught in a big room, like a drafting room. We had to solve problems about the stresses in the structural members of truss bridges. The professor would, in effect, read us the rules for computing these, which involved extensive vector

calculations, then assign us problems. I detested this approach, this merely being read the rules and then being told to apply them. I wanted to begin at the beginning, learn when all this had been discovered, and why, and what the reasons were for taking this particular approach to building bridges. If these bridges were stronger than other bridges, then I wanted a proof of that. *Now*, of course, from the vantage point of all these years, I can state quite clearly what I was looking for: it was simply a genetic, *mathematical* approach to the subject, which wasn't so outlandish a desire, since, after all, the subject involved a good deal of calculation. In particular, I wanted a rigorous definition of the term *load*. It may have been the most commonly used of all engineering terms. I had come across it in my ham days — "You have to have a load on the ouput or..." — and in the dc machine lab I took later on, and in this statics course. I didn't want it to be something "you just understood if you were engineering material", I wanted a rigorous definition, preferably one that covered the use of the term in all the subjects it was used in, and if no such general definition was possible, I wanted to know why.

Engineering Drawing Again

They made me take another course in engineering drawing — why, I don't know, except for the obvious reason that the bastards could make you retake as many courses as they wanted: if professor X didn't think much of another university's course (perhaps he had failed to get tenure there), he could insist that students repeat the work.

I will say this: the professor at Lehigh was a kinder man than the faceless tyrant who ran the engineering drawing course at RPI. There were far fewer students. We sat at our desks in a large classroom, with sun coming in through the large windows. We spent most of our time drawing curved sheet-metal air ducts in perspective, orthogonal, isometric views. The only good thing I got out of the ordeal of my engineering drawing courses was the ability to print tolerably well.

Metallurgy

A course I utterly hated was metallurgy. It was taught by an insufferably precise, quick, authoritarian young son-of-a-bitch with dark-rimmed glasses. No nonsense in this course. You read the chapters, studied the figures (plates), which showed things having to do with the eutectic temperature, you learned the temperature graphs, and by God you proved that you knew this stuff on exams. I couldn't believe I was forcing myself through such agony over such an inherently dull subject.

The professor arranged a class trip to the Bethlehem Steel plant. From an upstairs gallery we watched guys in brown, shapeless coveralls and welder's masks standing on flat cement islands between running rivulets of molten steel. The place was filled with gray brown smoke. The roar of the furnaces filled the air. The guys stood there with puddling hooks or whatever they were, waiting for the right time to change the flows by moving some baffle or something. I thought, "This is what hell is like." As we walked along on the tour, the guide told us many things which I have long since forgotten, but one thing he told us that I remember was in response to the inevitable question, and it was that, yes, several years ago a worker fell into an open vat of molten steel. Out of respect, the entire vat was sacrificed, i.e., poured onto the slag heap. Needless to say, not a trace of him remained. But a student told me then or later that the real reason they threw out the batch was that the carbon in his body was enough to destroy the proper carbon proportion in the mix, and so the steel was worthless anyway. For several days thereafter I tried to imagine what goes through a man's mind in the second or two when he is falling into molten steel. Just how "instantaneous" is such an instantaneous death?

After that tour, I understood why, every morning, the workers would stop at the bar at the New Merchants Hotel and have their boiler-makers.

A student told me that a friend of his had worked in the mills one summer, and even in that brief time had felt his brain starting to be affected by the heat. The friend said that the brains of the workers who had tended the furnaces for years were "fried", that these men had become sub-human, good for one thing and one thing only, namely, the work they did.

I thought of the young professor, with his pale skin and dark-rimmed glasses, and white shirts, and no-nonsense manner, as nothing more than an exploiter of those poor bastards down there in the heat and smoke.

A Good Professor

The one course I remember with anything other than dread was, surprisingly enough, an electrical engineering course taught by Joe Teno. He was a square, barrel-chested man in his thirties with a sense of humor, always seeming to be speaking to the class as though it were an assembly of human beings. I felt none of the usual intimidation I felt in engineering courses. He sometimes talked about a research contract he was working on, which involved using the computer to solve problems connected with power distribution in power lines.

Write Your Own Textbooks!

As a result of the hopeless difficulty of the courses, the idea of writing my own textbooks occurred to me. I would write them the way I wished the ones we used were written. They would be paperbacks, and I would sell them at the campus bookstores. Why couldn't I study alone? Why couldn't we make the books so good that we didn't need professors? I was outraged at others *presuming* to tell me how to learn, to tell me what the questions were that I should be asking about a subject, and, worst of all, to tell me how fast I needed to learn the material. The Lehigh engineering courses were the beginning of a lifelong determination to show that all this agony was not necessary, though in those years I hadn't the slightest idea how such a monumental task would be accomplished. But the gloom that surrounded the project in my mind, the loser's atmosphere — he couldn't cut it with normal textbooks, he needed to make easier ones — not to mention the recognition of how difficult it would be to make money from such an enterprise, kept me from taking any steps toward implementing the idea for many years. In the meantime, all I had was my rage.

A student — I think an engineering student — at RPI or Lehigh once remarked that the hierarchy of prestige (and difficulty) went like this: first mathematics, second physics, third engineering. He said it with the laugh of a person who knows he has been beaten and will never really be up there with the exceptional ones. The remark plunged me into even deeper despair than usual, because I found engineering so hard.

"A good scientist is a person with original ideas. A good engineer is a person who makes a design that works with as few original ideas as possible." — Dyson, Freeman, *Disturbing the Universe*, Harper & Row, N.Y., 1979, p. 114.

Unfortunately, I came across no such encouraging words in those years.

I am not sure what I would have replied if someone had asked me what, exactly, it was that I hated about engineering. Almost certainly I would have complained about the lockstep learning, the need to memorize material you had no interest in memorizing, the quantity-is-quality attitude toward doing problem sets. Engineering talent seemed to me to consist largely in the ability to do what one was told, eat whatever was put on one's plate, and, above all, not to ask questions, or at

least, not to ask the wrong kind of questions. But in addition to all that, I hated the company of engineers. To this day, after a lifetime of working in industry, I think engineers are jerks — "the rubes of science" — uneducated except in their narrow speciality; not in the least curious about the vast majority of intellectual and artistic disciplines; unimaginative, uninteresting — and the great exceptions — Leonardo, Thomas Edison, Buckminster Fuller — only prove the rule. The one class of human being I have felt most at home with has always been musicians. Here and only here do I feel that others have something in common with me.

Winter of '57

I was in no mood to endure my mother for the weeks of Christmas vacation. I may have gone home for Christmas, but I made up some excuse, probably the need to study, for having to go back to school, or else we simply had a fight and I left. As always, I was short of money, so I got a job selling storm windows — or, more correctly, canvassing for storm window sales. I was to go from door to door, asking the residents if they would like a salesman from the company to come and demonstrate the latest windows. Far more than the factory jobs, this was one in which I had to force myself through each moment, and that made it hard work indeed. The winter streets were icy, white snow covered the black earth, and, for some reason, this reminded me of the trappers and bush pilots I had read about in junior high, and how they always had a cup of strong brown tea for their breaks, brewed over an orange fire in the white snow with the deep blue sky overhead, with the dark green pines all around. So, I would keep going by promising myself a cup of tea at the end of each hour or two's ordeal: "Finish this block, just do those houses, then we can go out to New St. and have a cup of tea." For some reason, possibly because I had been told to do so, I wound up knocking on doors in the poorest parts of town. I remember one hovel: a guy opened the door, clearly not wanting to be bothered by me or by the kids behind him, or, I sensed, by his wife, or by life itself. He listened while I went through my pitch, the cold wind meanwhile filling his house. The kids looked on. I soon came to the conclusion that the last thing this family needed was storm windows, and soon I was giving them ample reason to put off any such purchase. "But if you'd like to wait till later, that would be perfectly all right. The company will be around. No need to rush into anything right now. Thank you very much for your time."

Why I gave up the room at 6 E. 4th I no longer remember, but for the spring '58 semester, I rented a room at 618 Muschlitz Street, a few blocks from the University. The landlady was Mrs. Mann: gray-haired, short, a widow. She said once that she would never rent to Japanese students — she pronounced it "Japanee" — because the Japanese had wounded her son in WWII. The little house was on the side of a barren, dirt hill along the top of which ran an avenue. I remember the view from the window in winter: the earth black, tomato sticks sticking up, the seedy buildings on the other side of Muschlitz as it climbed the hill.

Down the hall was another renter, Ray Haas, who was working toward a PhD in Marketing. He was from an Italian family somewhere in New Jersey, was a devout Catholic, and for a while we discussed Catholicism, I asking him the usual questions: how he could believe the pope was infallible, and, most of all, how the Catholics could be against birth control for the poor. His reply to the latter question was always that children's suffering didn't count if it was God's will, which infuriated me, although I never showed it. Another thing that infuriated me about him was his blasted freedom from torment, his accursed *contentment*. He was always well groomed, his room was neat, and when he answered one of your questions, he would smile a wide, toothy smile that

said, "It is understandable that you, one of those don't understand in the way those of us who know the truth do, should ask such questions, but we do not lose our tempers, we always listen and answer patiently." In the evenings, he was always at his little desk, working away at his Marketing homework. I asked him what he was studying, what were the grounds for believing what they told him, and he always smiled and gave the textbook explanation. He worked doggedly, did all the assignments, and like the engineers I hated, did it with no questions asked.

Summer of '58

For the summer of '58 I decided to live and work in New York City — why, I can no longer remember, unless it was because it was a way of being far from my mother and yet close to jazz. I rented a room near Broadway and 101st St. It was actually just a room in an apartment that was occupied by an old Jewish couple, a Mrs. Stearns and her husband. I think the rent was $8.50 a week. From the entrance, a long hallway ran to the end of the apartment, with the rooms leading off of it. At the far end was the kitchen, where the couple spent most of their time. A good third of the space in the kitchen was occupied by old, yellowing copies of the *New York Daily News* stacked almost to the ceiling. My room was wedge-shaped, the end near the window so narrow that I could touch both walls with outstretched arms. There was just enough room at the wide end for a bed, an old dresser, and a wardrobe. In the morning, I sometimes had to shake cockroaches out of my shoes. The only way I could practice without disturbing Mrs. Stearns or the renters in the other rooms was by opening the wardrobe door, sitting on the edge of my bed with the music book on my knee, and playing with the bell of the horn pressed into the sleeves of my coats and shirts.

On my first evening, I heard someone playing jazz trumpet outside. I went out into the street, saw a guy on the roof of the building across Broadway. I went into the building, which was a large, dilapidated hotel, but the guy at the desk knew nothing and wouldn't let me go upstairs (nor did I want to).

That week Mrs. Stearns informed me that a guy on our block had been murdered.

I got a job at an electronics factory on 16th Street. It was a crude little sweat shop down in a basement; the company manufactured tape devices for teaching languages. Above was a lunch counter serving Mexican food — or rather, Cuban, Mexican, and other Latin American food. I sat at a workbench with two or three other guys. We were given a finished unit to copy from, plus a wiring diagram. At first I worked as rapidly as I could, but soon the guy next to me let me know, in the nicest possible way, that whereas it was fine to want to do a good job, I didn't want to do *too good* of a job, because then the managers would start expecting more from the workers. The number 15 sticks in my mind as the number of units we were supposed to produce in a day. I asked a few questions about what the equipment was for, how it worked, but the guys at my bench didn't know any more than I did.

Most of the workers were immigrants, mainly Cubans and other Latin Americans living in Spanish Harlem. They did their job, kept the chatter going — the main source of humor for the Cubans was what would happen to them if they were forced to return to their island — and put in not one extra minute that they didn't have to. There was also a tall guy from Holland who wanted to become a helicopter pilot.

The work was so boring that each morning I couldn't believe I would be able to force myself through another day. What made the ordeal endurable was the fact that there was a Coke machine. The walk to it, the dropping the coins in the slot, the delicious sweet, prickly taste of

that cold, brown, liquid made it possible to get through the next quarter hour. There were fifteen-minute breaks in the morning and afternoon, plus lunch. Hand over hand I dragged myself through the interminable hours. Upstairs, at the lunch counter, Cuban and Mexican music blared down at you as you found a stool at the lunch counter, made yourself small and ordered a greasy soup, some sort of tortilla dish, and tried to brace yourself for the hours ahead.

I took the subway to and from work. The only thing about the City that I liked, apart from jazz, was the soda fountain/restaurants, often in drug stores, where commuters grabbed breakfast. I was amazed at the skill, the ability to do several things at the same time, which some of the counterpersons had. I remember one woman, I'm sure she was Jewish, who would keep up a running conversation with several of her customers — "So, Solly, how's the wife, she hasn't been in, don't tell me she's sick", "Mr. —, what can I get for you, the usual?", "Well, well, look who's back, don't tell me..." — all the while cutting sandwiches precisely on the diagonal, grabbing plates, hollering orders to the short order cook who was sweating over the grill.

The days were hot, and coming home by subway in the evening was a kind of daily experience of the outer regions of hell. I had to change stations in mid-town. The platforms and passages stank of sweat and the electrical grime from the trains. The noise was deafening. We crammed ourselves into the cars, hung on to the straps, tried to seclude ourselves in anonymity as the rattling, swaying cars hurtled up Manhattan. The greasy faces of the lower class were on all sides. I was wary about standing too close to the edge of the platform because I didn't put it past some crazy black or Puerto Rican to give me a push just to see what would happen. In fact, one evening one of the subway lines was held up because a guy had in fact been pushed, or had fallen, onto the tracks and been killed. They held the crowd back from the platform, so we couldn't see anything.

One evening, a guy started up a conversation with me. He was blond, with thinning hair, and looked to be in his thirties. I immediately suspected he was queer, then immediately panicked because I realized that having that suspicion meant *I* was queer. He asked me if I were planning to be around the 52nd Street area later that evening, maybe we could have a drink. In order not to be queer, I accepted his invitation. He gave me the address of a bar in the 50s. I went home, took a shower, and got back on the subway. Since it was toward eight o'clock, the train wasn't as crowded as it had been during rush hour. At one stop, a boy got on holding a big model airplane with a gas motor. From the protective way he held it and looked down at it every now and then, I gathered he had just finished building it and was on his way to fly it at some park. Instead of sitting, he stood and held on to an overhead strap, no doubt in order to prevent anyone from brushing against the wings, as might have happened if he had sat in one of the seats. I could see from his serious expression that this evening, this first test flight, was an important occasion for him. As the train moved down the length of Manhattan, more people got on than got off. He kept his eyes lowered, maneuvered the wings out of the way of those lurching aboard. Then, at one stop, there was a sudden burst of people through the open door. I saw him try to protect his creation, try to turn away from the door, but the little mob swirled around him. I heard the sound of breaking wood, heard a shout, then the train resumed its way. Some of the other passengers realized what had happened. There were low moans of consolation. Someone near me said, "He shouldn't have taken it on the subway." The boy stood there, holding on to his strap, looking down at the plane, which was now hanging in fragments in front of him. That incident confirmed me, once and for all, in my hatred of New Yorkers and of New York City.

I walked into the place at the address the guy had given me. The bar ran the length of the room on the right. There was the usual mirror, shelves full of glass bottles, the brown yellow light from old-fashioned overhead lights — a respectable bar for successful New York professionals. I

walked past the stools and realized that all the patrons were men. "You see, Franklin?" said the voice of mental health which had permanent residence in my brain. "You look for homosexuality everywhere. Why shouldn't it be possible for a perfectly normal New York bar to happen to have no women sitting at it for a few minutes?" The guy was at the far end, talking to another guy. He turned, seemed glad to see me, introduced me to the guy he had been talking to. Conversation began. Then I realized that something was happening at the front of my sports jacket. I looked down and saw with horror that the second guy was undoing the buttons. He looked up at me and said, "You know, you are a very attractive man." Without a word, as though a switch had been thrown, I turned and marched down the bar and out into the street, filled with revulsion and rage at the fact that, even though I had faced my anxieties, done what the psychological community wanted me to do, still I had come out a loser. But equally strong in my mind was the thought that the experts may have been right all along, in that my fear of showing myself to be queer by not going had not been a real fear but only a way of announcing to the world that I didn't really want to be queer. I had fought it, but the guy in the subway, and later his friend, had recognized all along that I really was. So my running away in disgust only increased the odds that I was queer after all.

That wasn't my only experience with New York homosexuals. Living in the room at the other end of the hall from me was a thin little Puerto Rican who worked at one of the airports. He always seemed friendly when we passed in the hallway. One evening he suggested we go out for a drink. In order to prove to myself that I wasn't prejudiced against Puerto Ricans, and because not to go out of fear that he was queer would only be further evidence that I was queer, I accepted his invitation. We went to some place on one of the avenues which I remember as having a long bar (they all did), with a mirror, and brown-yellow light, and lots of glassware, and that atmosphere of busy, on-the-go New Yorkers coming down after a hard day at *business*. I did my best to be a good conversationalist with the guy, who seemed eager for my friendship. It was hard, boring work. When I felt I had done my duty, I suggested we return home, saying I had a busy day the next day. The door to his room was across the hallway from the door to the apartment. I thanked him for the drink he had bought, said I had enjoyed talking to him. He nodded, smiled. Then, after a few moments, he said, quietly, "Would you be my bed partner?" I turned immediately and marched down the corridor to my room, raging as much against the entire psychiatric community as against myself: "You fucking sons-of-bitches! I do what I am supposed to, I fight my instinctive suspicions, I confront what I most fear, and my instincts turn out to have been right after all! You fucking sons-of-bitches." But this rage was soon dampened by what I knew they would say next: "Perhaps you accepted his invitation because you sensed he was queer — because you wanted him to proposition you, but then, in the very last minute, you couldn't face it, and ran down the hall to your room."

On as many evenings as I could force myself to, I would write short stories, an agony that seldom lasted more than an hour or so before I gave up and wrote in my journal, which I usually did sitting in the windowsill, looking down on the street a story below. I knew that this was taking the easy way out. To produce anything that mattered — anything that would have any chance of being published — you had to produce it for a public, you had to write in an accepted form, you had to struggle and suffer and work over every word and hate everything you did. But the truth is, the anguish of writing a story, with all those shaking heads looking down at me, all those stern professors, was simply more than I could endure for more than an hour at a time. And I was a man who first and foremost had *thoughts*.

I hated the professors for leaving out half of the truth: it wasn't that the great authors of the past had believed in themselves, it was that they had believed in themselves *and* produced work that the professors had decided was immortal. Those who had believed in themselves and *not* pleased the professors no one ever heard of.

I had no quotations to encourage me:

"The physical handicap, the public humiliation, the brooding sensibility, the sense of grievance, the contempt for convention, the desire for self-justification, and the appeal to higher authority — these are all elements of Joyce's attitude toward society and toward himself." — Levin, Harry, "The Artist", in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man: Text, Criticism, and Notes*, ed. Chester G. Anderson, The Viking Press, 1968, p. 410.

"... this want of talent, this black cavity which gaped in my mind when I ransacked it for the theme of my future writings..." — Proust, Marcel, *Swann's Way*, Modern Library, N.Y., 1928, p. 223.

"It Iwas evident to me then that I existed in the same manner as all other men, that I must grow old, that I must die like them, and that among them I was to be distinguished merely as one of those who have no aptitude for writing." — Proust, Marcel, *Swann's Way*, Modern Library, N.Y., 1928, p. 223.

So each evening, or as many evenings as I could force myself to do it, I worked on stories— or mainly one story. It was about a fictionalized incident on the black macadam of Valhalla School No. 1 playground. I would drag a phrase, a sentence, out of my screaming innards, then work it over, asking myself, "Is this a potentially immortal word or phrase? If I write it this way, will they accept it?" And since it all seemed so dreadfully weak and female, I wanted nothing to do with it, I wanted to throw it away and stab a knife into my heart. But it had to be done, or else I would have no reason to go on living. My fate hung on each word.

I submitted the story to a few small magazines. It was promptly rejected. I sent it in to *Artesian* Magazine. I waited the usual four weeks for a reply. One evening, as I was walking near Grand Central Station — I remember the wide concrete sidewalk, and that I looked in the window of a dark green restaurant, and then walked on in the middle of the sidewalk — I thought, if they don't accept the story, I will end my life.

When I got home, there was a letter waiting for me saying that the story had been accepted and would I please send a picture to go with the brief biography they published for each author. I felt no elation. I felt instead like a condemned man who had been given a temporary last minute reprieve. I wouldn't be surprised if sometime in the next life someone reveals to me that men have awaited their executions with less desperation than those days I waited for a literary magazine to publish something I had written. It was the first time any writing of mine had been accepted for publication, apart from that letter to *QST* magazine in high school. I was 21. It probably saved my life, and I hated that fact. I hated the little miracle which had occurred, so suitable for literary biographies, so certain to produce a warm glow in the hearts of aspiring female writers: "You see? Just when he had reached the end of his endurance, he was recognized. He believed in himself and he was rewarded. Oh, let us continue to believe in ourselves!"

Eventually I received my complimentary copy of the magazine (Autumn 1958 issue). It had a picture of Kenneth Rexroth on the cover. However, they got the sequence of pages wrong, so that

the reader had to figure out the correct sequence for himself. In succeeding weeks, I looked up the meaning of "artesian".

In the evening, after the hour of writing agony, I would go around the corner from the aparment building to a large bar. I cannot for the life of me remember what I drank. This was a huge, square bar with the bartenders serving from the inside. Around the edge of the bar, next to the patrons, was the usual raised edge of rounded wood. Why? I wondered. To prevent drinks from falling off? Lots of room everywhere. One time there were suddenly a lot of whispers; fingers pointing toward the door. "It's Sugar Ray!" And in walked a slim, dapper-looking black man, surrounded by an entourage of blacks, all well-dressed. Even though I have always hated boxing, for some reason, probably because people said he had become champ because he was a *skillful* boxer, I always considered Sugar Ray an exception. He was an elegant man, and it was obvious how much everyone liked and respected him.

Hatred of New York City

I hated New York City from the first day my mother dragged me there so she could go shopping at one of the expensive department stores. For me, in that summer of '57, New York City was the most depressing place in the world. I couldn't believe that I, with all my aspirations, was doing what I was doing — working in a grimy factory, living in a cockroach-infested room, having no one to talk to. I remember climbing the subway steps one evening after work and looking up at the sunlight coming through the grimy skylight windows. People were hurrying up the steps; on the other side of the railing they were hurrying down. The warm air smelled of sweat and grime. I thought, "This is the end. No one can endure hopelessness like this."

I hated New York accents. I didn't realize until years later and I heard a recording of myself speaking, what an appalling New York accent *I* had. And despite years of my attempting to get rid of it, my son also has traces of it.

I hated the tough guy culture, the fact that people accepted the rudeness of cab drivers. I hated the universal assumption that intimidation was the way to get on in life. I hated the skyscrapers, constantly reminding you of how small you were. No wonder so many people were so ruthlessly ambitious to rise higher in life. What other way out was there?

I hated the filth and poverty of Harlem. I hated the blare of Spanish music. I hated New York Jewish culture, in particular, the being-seen frenzy in the arts, the attempting, on the one hand, to be outrageously original, destroying yourself in the process, but on the other hand doing everything possible to be seen, be talked about, discussed, in the most important publications. It is not enough to have good taste, to like the best music: you must be seen having good taste and liking the best music. I detested the notion that every good artist always looks over his shoulder as he works.

I remember a blonde whom we gave a lift to (this may have been later). I think she was an acquaintance of R—'s or Heim's: Jewish, loud, talking about going into show business. And listening to her, I realized how much I hated Broadway musicals (except *My Fair Lady* and *Guys and Dolls*), which, as far as I was concerned, was a Jewish art form, in which someone was always standing on the stage with their legs apart, screaming in key in a New York accent.

Fall of '58

In the fall of '58, I was back in Bethlehem, and moved to a rented room at 526 Brodhead Ave., on a corner right across from the University.

I have described my problems with the calculus and physics in the chapter on RPI. In electrical engineering, particularly when we began studying alternating current, I was immediately bothered by the question of what was happening on the electron level. I could understand that, in a direct current, the electrons all streamed down the wire in one direction. But in alternating current, it seemed that they all rushed down the wire in one direction, then all rushed back in the opposite direction, and very quickly thereafter. How could such a thing be efficient? How much mass was being moved? How much friction was involved? Wasn't all that friction significant, in this senseless back and forth? Why didn't we ever begin with just an isolated electron, one in that crowd, and look at the effect upon it? Why was alternating current better?

But even apart from this, very little made sense to me. What was voltage, really? And power? Who decided that just these aspects of electricity were important, and not some others? I could quote Ohm's Law, of course, and draw the triangle showing, for alternating currents, resistance, reactance, inductance but it all seemed to come out of nowhere.

Once in a while I would hear about some student having been elected to Phi Beta Kappa, and I would be beside myself with envy and puzzlement as to how one could know how to *please* that well. How could anyone possibly be that good at guessing what so many teachers wanted? Intelligence seemed to have very little to do with what was in the mind, because I couldn't conceive of a truly intelligent person not disagreeing mightily with another's opinions, and with someone else's dictates as to how to learn.

DC Machine Lab

By the fall of 1958, I was near the breaking point. One of the courses I had to take that semester was DC Machine Lab. Even at that late stage of my electrical engineering education, I had no idea how a machine could run on direct current (DC), since all I could remember was that the current had to keep changing directions in order to keep the rotor turning. So even before I began, I knew I was beaten. We were divided into lab teams of three or four students each. On my team was a guy with wrinkly Gladstone Gander hair. He seemed born for DC Machine Lab — he had a quick manner, seemed to understand everything. The machines — big, black, old-fashioned looking — were bolted to the polished wooden floor at intervals of a few feet. Why the administration had spent so much money on the floors I don't know, but this only added to the intimidation of the place, because it was something else that didn't make any sense. When the students streamed in for each lab session, their voices echoed from the bare walls and polished floors.

For the experiments, we had to plug cords into various holes on a board in front of us next to each machine. I let Gladstone do all the work. He suspected how little I understood, I could tell, but I hung on by the skin of my teeth, pretending to reason through the day's project with the others, despite the fact that every cell in my body was crying out for me to get out of there.

Bessel Functions

The course that did, in fact, break me was one in advanced calculus , which opened with the subject of Bessel functions. We sat in a sea of desks. In the distance, the professor, whom I didn't know and who didn't know us, spoke incomprehensibly. I looked at the text. Incomprehensible. The name "Bessel" was German, so that was trouble to begin with. I knew the end was near. I doubt if I even made a serious attempt at doing the homework, it was so beyond me. One day, sitting in class, filled with shame and humiliation, my face burning, I knew that not even I could force myself through more of this. The only choice was to switch to English literature. It was the

only way out, since I knew that without a degree of some kind, there would be no reason for me to go on living.

I Become An English Major

As an English major I at least could get a B.A. degree. (I had always identified with Dostoevsky in his hatred of the Military Engineering school he was sent to at 16.) A B.A. degree was better than falling off the edge of the earth. I knew this made me more female than if I had somehow stayed with engineering. I was disgusted by the safety of it, the anticipated ease, compared with the misery of studying engineering.

The transfer was accomplished by a visit to my advisor in which I signed up for the prescribed English courses in the spring semester — or perhaps the switch occurred that semester, I am not sure.

Poetry Courses and Poets

One of the courses, inevitably, was on the Romantic poets. But try as I would, I couldn't get the emotional charge which they clearly gave to professors and literary women. By then I had some idea of the effect, the "buzz", that poetry was capable of producing, through hearing the poetry of Chaucer and Dylan Thomas read aloud. God knows how many times I read and re-read Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey", "Expostulation and Reply", and "Michael". But the only feeling I got from these poems was the hot feeling in my stomach which always occurred when I was trying to force myself to love something I didn't like, or, at least, that bored me stiff. I wondered how in God's name these poets ever figured out such complexities of language, how they ever figured out how to force language into the meters and rhyme scheme they used. How did they decide that their poem would be best expressed in this meter and rhyme scheme rather than another one? Did they write the poem in several different ones and then choose the one they felt best expressed what they wanted to say? What made them want to constrain themselves that way, when they could have had so much more freedom with prose? Coleridge had said that prose was words in the best order, and poetry was the best words in the best order. I couldn't understand how he could have said that. Why wasn't it the other way around, since the poet is certainly more limited in his choice of words by the requirements of meter and rhyme? For me, poetry was merely exercises in the formal language, the elevated language, that writers in the past used to write classics, in a sense no different from the language used in law. Again and again I asked myself why poetry was always regarded as better than prose. Wasn't poetry simply an artificial kind of prose, made special by the fact that it was divided up into lines, each containing a certain number of iambs, or other kinds of feet, e.g., trochees, spondees? What made poets want to sit around thinking about such things? Who (other, perhaps, than teachers and professors) could get excited over the concept of a long syllable followed by a short syllable? Or a short syllable followed by a long syllable? Or two long syllables?[1] How did poets decide how many of these feet should go into a line that was to be part of an immortal poem? How did they decide which verse forms would become immortal: Spenzerian stanzas, blank verse, heroic verse, *terza rima*? I had

1. In old age, I became certain that these questions arose because poetry was not taught as primarily a spoken art. We were in the position that a music student would be in in classes — in a world — in which music was never heard, only read in scores. A skilled reader or reciter of poetry could have made obvious why the different types of feet mattered, the difference, however subtle, in the effect of each foot, just as the basic rules of music -- time signatures, the varying length of notes, the varying pitches -- so unutterably dry when merely read, become alive when they are illustrated on a musical instrument.

no trouble believing that poets where gifted human beings, because clearly it required a special kind of brain to have the slightest interest in such things.These questions occurred to me long before my English literature courses at Lehigh: they were already on my mind in Mrs. Spettel's classes in White Plains High. The only answer I could come up with was that if you wanted to be remembered, and, in particular, remembered by professors, you had to write poetry. Prose was more likely to be forgotten, because it was easier, more natural.

From the start I liked, and had no trouble memorizing, Robert Herrick's poem:

"Whenas in silks my Julia goes
Then, then (methinks) how sweetly flows
That liquefaction of her clothes.

"Next, when I cast mine eyes and see
That brave vibration each way free; *5*
Oh how that glittering taketh me!"

The only lines of Keats that had any meaning for me were:

"When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain,
Before high-pilèd books, in charact'ry,
Hold like rich garners the full-ripened grain..."
— "When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be"

From the first time I read it, I liked Shelley's "Ozymandias":

"I met a traveler from an antique land
Who said: two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal these words appear:
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings,
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away."

I immediately attempted to memorize it, but for some reason I have never been able to commit it permanently to memory, despite repeated attempts at various times over the years.

Most of the prose was as heavy as most of the poetry. I tried to like Hazlitt, but his essays bored me stiff. Despite the fact that I identified with his sufferings, I couldn't stop feeling that he used way too many words to say what amounted to platitudes[1]. About Tennyson's "In Memoriam" I kept wondering if it were possible that someone could possibly have written such a long poem on the death of a friend if he and the friend hadn't been queer. I felt that William Morris was a man I should take for a model, but for some reason it never worked. He was too morally good, too idealistic. His poetry never meant anything to me, which bothered me, because I felt that the poetry of such a man *should* mean something to me. I liked Browning's dramatic monologues, admired his courage to portray a scurrilous monk in "The Spanish Cloister" and a murderer in "My Last Duchess". I felt Browning was more of a "regular guy" than the others because he wrote about unpoetic things. I repeated the lines from "Prospice" over and over in my mind to get through the unbearable days: "One fight more, the best and the last..." I used Henley's "Invictus" for the same purpose:

"It matters not how strait the gate,
    How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
    I am the captain of my soul."

(Years later, in a film biography of Franklin Roosevelt, the President would get his aide, Harry Hopkins, to recite the lines so that the two of them could laugh over them. I thought this utterly heartless, considering the circumstances under which the poem had been written: Henley had undergone repeated operations, culminating in the amputation of a leg.)

I liked Hopkins' poetry immediately because it was so radical, so wrong, and I tried to memorize several of his poems, including "Pied Beauty":

"Glory be to God for dappled things —
For skies of couple-color as a brinded cow...
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim,
All things counter, original, spare, strange,...
He fathers forth whose beauty is past change:
                Praise him."

And "God's Grandeur":

"The world is charged with the grandeur of God,
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil,
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed...
...the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and ah! bright wings."

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1. "Hazlitt...had perhaps the most uninteresting mind of all our distinguished critics..." — Eliot, T.S., "John Dryden"

Who couldn't be taken with lines like that? *They* weren't written to please professors.

In those years, Dylan Thomas was all the rage. Many students, particularly the English majors (including me), had some of his Caedmon recordings. The lines of some of his poems were taken, by both professors and students, as part of the script that explained the age.

"Light breaks where no sun shines;
Where no sea runs, the waters of the heart
Push in their tides;
And, broken ghosts with glowworms in their heads,
The things of light
File through the flesh where no flesh decks the bones,..."

— "Light Breaks Where No Sun Shines"

I tried to memorize the whole of "Fern Hill", and used to recite lines to the business agent of our band, Big Al Waldron (who, along with the band, will be introduced later in this chapter), sometimes imitating Thomas's booming voice from the records:

"Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,
The night above the dingle starry
Time let me hail and climb
Golden in the heydays of his eyes, ..."

The English professors loved things like "happy as the grass was green" in Thomas's poetry. I wondered what a dingle was, and never looked up the meaning. The last two lines of the poem had a particular effect on me:

" Time held me green and dying
Though I sang in my chains like the sea."

One of the main reasons that Thomas's poetry lived for us, and Shakespeare's didn't, was that we could hear it read aloud by a masterful reader of poetry. Another reason was his reputation as a hard-drinking womanizer who wrote books like *Adventures in the Skin Trade*. Now here was a real poet, and not some darling of the professors whose whole lives seemed to be devoted to providing dull, proper stuff to put in textbooks, and whose lives, no matter how scandalous they might have been in their own lifetimes, were now seen to have been merely side effects of their genius. Everything was forgiven, everything became Good if it was done by a great poet.

Equally important to us was the poetry of T. S. Eliot. He knew what a place like the city of Bethlehem was like, I thought:

"The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window panes
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,

Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep."

— "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

"The winter evening settles down
With smell of steaks in passageways.
Six o'clock.
The burnt-out ends of smoky days.
And now a gusty shower wraps
The grimy scraps
Of withered leaves about your feet
And newspapers from vacant lots:
The showers beat
On broken blinds and chimney pots,..."

— "Preludes", I

"The morning comes to consciousness
Of faint stale smells of beer
From the sawdust-trampled street
With all its muddy feet that press
To early coffee stands.
With the other masquerades
That time resumes,
One thinks of all the hands
That are raising dingy shades
In a thousand furnished rooms."

— "Preludes", II

"You tossed a blanket from the bed,
You lay upon your back, and waited;
You dozed, and watched the night revealing
The thousand sordid images
Of which your soul was constituted;
They flickered against the ceiling.
And when all the world came back
And the light crept up between the shutters
And you heard the sparrows in the gutters,
You had such a vision of the street
As the street hardly understands;
Sitting along the bed's edge, where
You curled the papers from your hair,
Or clasped the yellow soles of feet
In the palms of both soiled hands."

— "Preludes", III

"Wipe your hand across your mouth, and laugh;
The worlds revolve like ancient women
Gathering fuel in vacant lots."

— "Preludes", IV

"I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter."

— "The Waste Land"

I would repeat some of the lines to Waldron, and we would both laugh at how wonderfully depressing they were:

"...clasped the yellow soles of feet
In the palms of both soiled hands,"

— "Preludes", III

"The thousand sordid images
Of which your soul is constituted;"

— "Preludes", III

I couldn't get over the perfection of the lines, how absolutely right they were (and I still can't). In most free verse, I was, and am, baffled why it is the way it is, why the lines are as they are, and not divided some other way. But with Eliot, it made perfect sense. The occasional rhymes were, and are, to me more more interesting and effective than a regular rhyme pattern. This was Doing the Right Thing carried to an entirely new level.

But I must hasten to add that it was hearing the Caedmon recording of his readings of his own poems that opened them up to me, his resigned, old, Oxford don voice (almost the voice of a little old lady) was perfectly suited to the poems. Previous to that, I couldn't understand them. After, they made sense. And yet, years later, I thought that the plays, and much of "Four Quartets", sounded like a satire of himself. To know that his great poetry was so near the ridiculous...

Eliot had endured unimaginable suffering, I had no doubt about that, but he had made it pay off by writing poetry that everyone thought was important. I was also self-aware enough to know that this gloom was unhealthy, that I should fight against it (by this time I had begun reading Shaw). Yet I knew that raising that much tonnage with my back alone was beyond me. Not even *my* will power and ability to endure pain was capable of an effort like that. And even if I succeeded, the effort would be entirely without value unless it was also approved by the English professors.

Most of Pound's poetry left me cold, except for the chuckle everyone got from "Winter Is Icumen In" and except for the truly overwhelming effect on me of his "In a Station of the Metro":

"The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
Petals on a wet black bough."

I tried to convince Big Al what extraordinary poetry this was. He smiled approvingly at my enthusiasm.

Heim's Influence

Heim was studying at the Manhattan School of Music, but he had strong opinions about books, based not on any kind of literary analysis, but purely on the emotional impact they had on him at the time. I don't remember if he was as enthusiastic about Dostoevsky as R— was (R—, who will be introduced later, was the one who turned me onto that author). But I remember one day during a vacation break calling Heim on the phone in the hallway of the house at 14 Elm, and telling him how much I was enjoying reading Byron. He replied that I should be careful about trying to convince myself that I liked stuff which I didn't really like. And he was right.

The books he recommended — *insisted* — I read were *Catcher in the Rye* and *Of Human Bondage*. He loved the character of Stradlater in the former, and the fact that he was a "secret slob"[1]; he laughed aloud over Holden's telling the old lady on the train that he was going home from college because he had a brain tumor, but fortunately it was only "a very tiny one. They can take it out in about two minutes"[2]. Maugham's book he felt was a message for us from the past that we shouldn't give up in our aspirations.

Heim kept picking up odds and ends from, I assume, literature majors he knew: that Milton was really on the side of Satan in *Paradise Lost*, that e.e.cummings felt that capital letters should only be used for the word "God", that Shaw had said "Those who can, do, those who can't, teach." He delighted in quoting Eliot's lines,

> "I should have been a pair of ragged claws
> Scuttling across the floors of silent seas."[3]

I visualized the image clearly, the lobster-like claws on their urgent, frightened journey over the barren sea bottom, the gloom and utter loneliness of the ocean depths.

Readings

But, as an aspiring writer, I wasn't just waiting for others to tell me what to read. I devoured whatever I felt had some chance of making me a writer. Fairly regularly I read *New Directions*, a series of paperbacks featuring what was then called "the new writing". It was there that I came across the essay whose title I have always remembered, "The Pornography of Death"[4]. The essay brought back memories of the horror comics we read as kids, with their cutting off of heads and limbs, and pointed pieces of wood driven through the chests of screaming captives, and blood everywhere. I yearned to be able to write like those *New Directions* authors, who knew exactly what to say and said it in exactly the way that pleased editors. I ached to know their secret. I looked on that prose as I looked on the hairlines of men who were not going to go bald, or like a a horribly scarred man looking at pictures of handsome men. *If only...!* I read and re-read Mary Roberts Rinehart's *Writing Is Work*; I never bothered to read her other books. It didn't matter what you wrote so long as it got published and made you famous. Her writing was all so sensible, straightforward, clear, and it never strayed from the subject. Her mind was made for publication.

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1. Salinger, J. D., *The Catcher in the Rye*, Bantam Books, N.Y., 1981, p. 27.
2. ibid., p. 58.
3. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"
4. "The article was by an Englishman named Geoffrey Gorer and appeared in *Encounter*, October 1955. His point was that the mention of death had become almost as shameful and embarrassing to people of his generation as the mention of sex had been to Victorians. I think you may be getting a different connotation from this phrase—that death had the same fascination for you that porno has for others." — J.S., 9/1/05

Why wasn't she tormented by questions she couldn't answer? Why did all the the thoughts of these successful writers came out in such plain, Ango-Saxon ordinary language, like the *Reader's Diges*t and *Saturday Evening Post*?

The how-to books for writers often warned against reading too much. They all talked about the importance of writing on a daily basis and not giving up and continuing to submit to the magazines.

Needless to say, early on I bought a copy of Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*. Every aspiring writer did. I had read E. B. White's story *Stuart Little* as a kid and liked it. It seemed different from all the other children's books. I probably read some of his essays in *The New Yorker.* But there was something about him I couldn't stand. I had the impression that everything he did, every thought he had, every step he took, had but one goal in mind, and that was, to make him the perfect American author. The staff position with *The New Yorker*; the apartment in New York City; the loving, literary wife; the house in Maine; the proper *New Yorker* thoughts and sense of humor and imagination at all times — nothing bizarre; nothing controversial; nothing that the upper middle-class reader could find fault with; the prose faultless and always using the right Anglo-Saxon word whenever possible; and, as if that weren't enough, a perennially popular book on how to write as he did — this was a man who lived according to the rule, Always Do the Right Thing, and I despised him for it.

I read Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Raod*, tantalized by the fact that he had guessed this long sequence of words that would become a best seller. All over the South were writers who had tried to guess the sequence — maybe they had succeeded for the first five, ten, twenty, hundred words, then the next word was not one in the winning sequence and so their novel never got published.

And then, every once in a while, a piece of writing would stop me in my tracks: Conrad's "Typhoon" was one. It was difficult going, I at times feeling I was on the verge of drowning in the heavy prose just as Capt. MacWhirr and his crew were on the verge of drowning in the seas raging around his ship. But I felt the Captain was a man I knew, perhaps because of certain resemblences to my father that I sensed in him. I have read the story several times throughout my life, each time thinking it greater than before.

Professors

The New Criticism was still the rage in those days. Professors and students alike held their breaths, walked on eggshells, awaiting the next pronouncement from the tyrants in charge. I detested the way that English professors seemed to like nothing more than to subject themselves to a prestigious form of slavery. I knew that Eliot was behind it all, but I forgave him because he, at least, was a great poet.

A graduate student told me, I think during a discussion of Eliot, about a professor he had had who firmly maintained that the last English poet was Browning. I immediately thought: it is hopeless to succeed in a field which allows such looniness to gain positions of absolute power. I become like one of these officials? Impossible!

One day as I was getting into the Acitos' big black car on the way to a job, I remarked how much I hated professors and Heim, who was sitting in the front seat, immediately quoted (slightly misquoted) Shaw's saying: "Those who can, do, those who can't, teach." He followed it with that little chuckle he had, and said that Shaw was a neat guy. After that, I began reading about Shaw, and then read some of his works — we read *Man and Superman* in one of my English classes. The course was taught by Prof. Dilworth, a short, slim, white-haired man who repeated several times that for all his robust energy, Shaw was a vegetarian, and that in his late old age, his

housekeeper was instructed by his doctors to sneak some beef or chicken broth into his soup. Dilworth made clear to us that just about the worst thing a writer could be was a Romantic, and that Romantic traits could be discovered even in authors who at first sight seemed to be anything but. (After this, there was no doubt in my mind but that being Romantic was as bad as being queer, and that Romantic tendencies were equivalent to homosexual tendencies.)

What attracted me to Shaw most of all, apart from his humor, was that he had still been a virgin at an even later age than I was and hadn't turned out to be queer. I felt I had found someone like me among the great authors.

One fall, there was a buzz about a new English professor, Calvin Israel, a "wise-cracking, chain-smoking New York type" as one of his students put it. He was considered a radical addition to the English Dept. because not only did he have some new ideas about teaching but he also had gotten a poem published which contained a line about a girl's *incandescent thighs*. In other words he was, or at least had recently been, *one of us*.

Knowing Whom, and What, to Look Down Upon

One thing that the English professors made clear was the importance of looking down upon certain writers, and literary devices. For example, every writer was fated to wind up in one of two mutually exclusive categories: Important or Unimportant. In the latter category belonged the Minor Poets. Far better never to have written a line than to wind up being a Minor Poet. The phrase was spoken with a tone of voice and a look off toward the windows that communicated to us better than words that there really couldn't be any excuse for someone not being a great writer, or, I should say, for someone trying to write when they weren't *destined* to be a great writer. (How they could possibly know in advance was never explained.) Not being great was something on the order of having bad manners, of not speaking the language well, of having the effrontery to write without knowing what posterity would judge to be great. There was to be no pity for such people. The one thing you above all didn't want to do was to be caught liking the wrong figures from the past. *We do not waste our time on losers*. However, if someone wrote a book on a Minor Poet, and then went on to become an Important Professor or Leading Critic, then, and only then, could the Minor Poet have any hope of being forgiven and, possibly, be raised to the ranks of the great or near-great. In this attitude toward literature, there wasn't the slightest hint or suggestion that students ought to develop their own understanding, their own sense of language, their own literary instincts, their own *taste*, so that they could evaluate a poem on its own merits, see it and appreciate it for what it really was.[1] The one reason for reading and studying minor figures from the past was to try to raise them to major figures, to give yourself a life's work (so much the better, of course, if the minor figure suffered from neglect or the scorn of critics in his time). In other words, the number one rule was: never ever do anything for its own sake, or because you are merely curious about something, or interested in it. The only justifiable reason for doing anything was to earn attention and prestige by it.

A similar attitude prevailed against the outmoded literary manners of the past. It was made clear that we should look down on writers of previous centuries in their misuse of quotes, for example, when they wrote, "he asked 'whether he should be allowed to visit her again later.'"

1. "...[Alfred Kazin] spoke mercilessly about presumptuous professors 'riding herd on students who are so unused to general reading that they have little taste of their own and are glad to be told how to read, especially what to discount'" — Delbanco, Andrew, "On Alfred Kazin (1915-1988)", *The New York Review of Books*, July 16, 1998, p. 22.

Those poor, benighted fools didn't know that quotes were supposed to surround only what was actually said.

Writing Papers

Like the vast majority of students, I always put off any writing project to the last minute, at the same time making the procrastination as painful for myself as I possibly could. I would set a time when I would spend an hour — just an hour, no more, just do that much! — and then helplessly watch the time be stolen away by other things: writing letters to members of the band, reading books that hadn't been assigned, talking to Big Al about jobs. Although I wouldn't have dared to give myself credit for it at the time, the truth is that for one who is completely unsure how to go about the task and what the final product should be, postponing it to the last minute is one way of mitigating one's shame over the bad grade that might result: "If I had had more time, I could have done much better." The task of writing I saw as the task of guessing the sequence of words that would please a professor who considered the *New Yorker* the acme of literary publications. I would write a phrase, and before the pencil had left the paper, or before I had finished typing the words, I would know it was wrong. I could see the smirks on the faces of the *New Yorker* editors. Try again, vary the tone. No, no, too juvenile! Oh, God, I should be much farther than the first paragraph by now. Well, work on a later part. Oh, no, now the tone doesn't match anything I have written for the first part. And it's all juvenile and pimply-faced and dumb. Start again: write the title, then "by John Franklin, then the course title. OK, OK, first paragraph: "One of the most important ..." I was reading Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*, thinking that comedy, like jazz, might be my salvation, so I decided to do one of the assignments on the subject of comedy. Somehow I heard that the philosopher Henri Bergson had a theory of the subject. I went to the library, got the book, sat at one of the massive tables, and attempted to write. The book was, at least in memory, completely without humor, as grim a piece of work as any we read in school. (I was not sophisticated enough then to realize that a good but humorless book about comedy is perfectly possible.) In those intimidating surroundings, I worked away at the essay, turned it in. I can no longer remember anything about it, or the grade I got.

Mustard and Cheese

In desperation to save myself, I joined Mustard and Cheese, the dramatic society. Where they got the name, I don't know, and I didn't have the courage to ask. I assumed it was something that anyone who had any business being there already knew. It was run by Prof. Baker, an old guy with gray hair, moustache, who looked somewhat like Soames Forsythe (Eric Porter) in the PBS version of the *The Forsythe Saga* in the late sixties. He wasn't a bad guy for an English professor. He had a sense of humor, seemed to enjoy doing something for students.

In order to be accepted as a member, you had to audition. We sat in a classroom in the English Dept. one afternoon, each with a copy of Shakespeare's complete works. Prof. Baker would call out a passage and have each of us read it (or maybe it was a different passage for each candidate, I don't remember). I hadn't the slightest idea of how to read Shakespeare out loud, so I assumed that, since it was written in iambic pentameter — be-*dum*, be-*dum* be-*dum* be-*dum* be-*dum* — that was how you were supposed to read it. I don't remember what passage he selected for me, but within a few moments I could hear the suppressed laughter of the others. I blushed beet red, mumbled something like "...that's how I thought... I'll be glad to read it differently if..." Probably because they couldn't bring themselves to reject a candidate who was so ashamed at his ineptness, they accepted me.

I got the part of the bartender in O'Neill's *Ah Wilderness*, which, like all of Mustard and Cheese's performances, was given at Broughal School across the street from campus. I was able to control my blushing and sweating most of the time — after all, being an actor in school plays was being rather feminine to begin with — but when it came to the line, "I'll blow you to a drink", I came very close to losing control completely, because I didn't know if it referred to a homosexual act or something else. Whom could I ask? The question itself would reveal my anxiety, which in turn would mean that I was queer. The audience must have seen how shinier and redder my face got after that line.

Prof. Baker took us to see someone important act Shakespeare in New York City. I can't remember a single thing about the trip or the play except that the students who were aiming at careers as English professors were all discussing heatedly the performance of this actor and whether it was as good as so-and-so's.

We performed several of Shakespeare's plays. The guy who got all the lead roles was the envy of all the rest of us. There was certainly nothing effeminate about him. He seemed always to be confident, he always delivered his lines as though he actually meant them, he knew how to rant and rave at the appropriate points, and, most of all, he knew how to speak the lines so they didn't sound like iambic pentameter, which to most of us was the mark of a person with acting talent.

In *Richard II*, I had the part of Green, one of the king's servants. In Act II, Sc. II, I was to enter and say, to the Queen and to Bushy and Bagot, two other servants:

"God save your majesty! and well met, gentlemen:
"I hope the king is not yet shipp'd for Ireland."

The audience burst out laughing, perhaps at the way I said the line, perhaps at how ridiculous I looked in the servant's costume. I was ready to run off the stage. But I kept going. In reply to the Queen's asking why I hoped the king was not yet shipp'd for Ireland I said,

"That he, our hope, might have retired his power,
And driven into despair an enemy's hope,
Who strongly hath set foot in this land;
The banish'd Bolingbroke repeals himself,
And with uplifted arm is safe arrived
At Ravenspurgh."

Probably as a result of persistent coaching by Prof. Baker, I remembered to make sure that "our hope" was surrounded by auditory commas, namely, by lowering my voice, so it sounded almost parenthetical. I went through the lines as though they were sentences in the tax code, having only the vaguest idea of the plot, much less of the historical importance of what we were dramatising.

We had several performances to give, and after having been laughed at, I felt it was impossible to go through that again. I remember waiting on a little balcony at the back of theater, which was in a high school auditorium. Every atom of my body was screaming at me to run away. I remember thinking over and over, "No one can endure agony like this. No one. This is impossible." But I went through all the performances.

The fundamental problem was that I didn't like Shakespeare. From the very start I felt that he used too many words. (It would be many years before I found someone important — first Nietzsche, then Voltaire, then Dr. Johnson— who had the same views about Shakespeare as I did. The best that Voltaire could do was admire "'the amiable barbarian's' eloquence, 'pearls' of sublimity or tenderness in an 'enormous dunghill' of farces and vulgarities." — Durant, Will and Ariel, *The Age of Voltaire*, Simon and Schuster, N.Y., 1965, p. 246.) (I wish that what the Emporer said to Mozart had been said to him instead: "Too many words, my dear Shakespeare.") I detested the fact that women were always gushing over him. What good was trying to accomplish anything with giants like this towering over you? Who wanted to spend his whole life worshipping at the foot of a mountain no one could climb? I hated the footnotes, hated the lifetime jobs it gave to play-it-safe professors. (Once I asked Prof. Frank Hook, the Shakespeare expert in the English Dept. from whom I took a course, if you could write plays without having been an actor. His reply was a cautious yes. He might have cited Chekov, Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller as examples, I don't recall. So maybe there was some hope for me as a playwright.) And then there was the fact that the sonnets revealed he might have been queer. This suspicion about an author made it impossible for me to appreciate his works. It was true in high school with Plato, and it was true later on when I read Walt Whitman. I would rack my brains trying to figure a way out. Maybe the scholars were all wrong. Maybe love between men in earlier times wasn't remotely what it was in our time.

In one of the English classes, or possibly in Mustard and Cheese, we were shown Olivier's *Hamlet*. The film quality was terrible, but that, added to the black and white, made the play more believable for me. And of course Olivier's acting. After so many weeks or months of seeing Shakespeare for what he is for most student and amateur actors — an excuse for speaking effeminately — I saw that there was something worthwhile underneath it all. At least in Olivier's case, the speaking effeminately did not mean speaking about frivilous stuff.

Since I was an English major, I spent a lot of time in the the gray-green building that housed the English department. It was in a declivity near the center of campus. I still have occasional depressing dreams about it. It is the middle of winter, there is a cold green mist wetting the gray-green walls of the old building. I am in a state of utter hopelessness because I have been given one last chance to finish a paper, or pass an exam, or reapply for admission.

I was overwhelmed by the schoolwork. Not only did I hate it in itself, but it was always too difficult for me. I never had the slightest idea why I was studying the courses they forced us to take. I remember sitting in the — Restaurant on 4th St., getting ready for an exam in colonial American economics or history. I had hardly opened the book that semester. Why bother, since it was clear the professor made a practice of assigning more pages than most students could possibly read, much less understand and master? That kind of cruelty was considered simply a teaching technique. The professors knew things we didn't. There lay the book before me on the counter. All around was the crush and noise of the lunch crowd. Two columns per page of dry, intimidating scholarly prose. I sat there as though they had decided to withdraw all the air from the room, from the city, and only I knew it, and only by superhuman acts of breathing which I knew nothing about, could I hope to stay alive. (Now, in old age, although I have far fewer brain cells than I did then, I have no doubt that I could master the material in a matter of a few hours, simply because of what I now know about learning.)

I didn't hate all the professors. One of the English professors, Ray Armstrong, seemed to take a liking to me, and, of course, I responded. He had jowls and short-cropped white hair and pronounced certain words with a kind of watery lisp. He wore jackets with leather patches on the

elbows, I often filling idle moments in class wondering if it was really possible that he worked so hard at his desk, leaned on his elbows for so many hours holding papers or cradling his head in his hands, that he actually wore through the elbows of his jacket. He had a country squire way about him, and clearly considered *The New Yorker* to be the model that every young writer should aspire to imitate.

I said in the file, "White Plains High School", that already in Mrs. Spettel's class I felt that I was meant to write essays. And yet, at Lehigh, and for years thereafter, for me a successful essay had to be written in *The New Yorker* style — the tut-tut-tut college professor style that produced essays with beginnings like, "The other day, as we were contemplating the prospect of emerging from our winter seclusion to enjoy a brief perambulation through a birch wood we have always favored for moments of introspection..." Every word, every phrase a proof of the author's upper class status, his having studied English literature at one of the best universities, his having met with the glowing approval of his professors all along the way. His knowing, above all, how to do the Right Thing. The prospect of spending my life writing this way was stifling and filled me with hopelessness. It was only years later, when I came across a paperback edition of Montaigne's essays, that the sun came out, I breathed fresh air, and knew what the task of writing a good really was, and must be.

Once, for Prof. Armstrong's class, I wrote an essay which began by stating that something "precludes" something else, thinking the word meant "assumes in advance" ("pre-concludes"). When the essay came back with his comments and criticisms, there, on the first page, was something like "precludes: makes impossible by necessary consequence; I think you mean 'presumes'". It wasn't a sarcastic, typical English professor remark about the importance of looking up words in the dictionary but was simply a statement of the truth. I blushed as I read it. I think he had mumbled something about "good paper" as he handed it out to me, which only made me blush the more on seeing the error. He saw my embarrassment, I'm sure. I didn't see how he could continue to like me after that.

He was the first professor, I think, whom I heard use the word "unhappy" in phrases like "an unhappy choice of words", "not an unhappy effort". I thought it rather affected. He was also the first professor whom I heard use the expression, "the great unwashed" to refer to the masses. But I think that it was from Armstrong that I picked up the word "broadcast" as in "the seed is scattered broadcast", and I thought it such an important-sounding word, because of its difference from the everyday meaning of the word (radio, television broadcast) that I tried to find occasions to use it in essays. I thought that using that word in itself put you in the class of those who might dare to hope their lives might have some meaning.

One of the students was an epileptic, although we didn't know this until one day, suddenly, there was a commotion in the center of the front row of chairs, some kind of strange guttural sound, then a lot of students crowding around. Prof. Armstrong immediately took charge, had someone get the school nurse, told us to clear a space so the guy could lie down and get some air. I think he had one student try to grab the guy's tongue so he wouldn't swallow it. (How do you grab a tongue, I wondered?) But in any case, I was impressed by his calm.

Mental Blocks

I had strange blocks about certain words we came across in our reading. As with my difficulties with the calculus, I took these as a sign I was not meant to study the subject. For example, I thought "divers" in 17th-century texts had some profound connection with deep-sea divers; there was no doubt in my mind that if you were really meant to study English literature, you would

understand what a diving suit had to do with the literature of the 17th century[1]. Similarly with the word "satyr". It seemed not for me to know the reason for this emphasis, in the literature of that time, on half-man, half-goat creatures. There was a possibility that it was an old spelling for "satire", I knew that, but then why did they choose an old spelling that also signified a mythological creature? To walk into a professor's office and just ask what the words meant would have revealed not only my ignorance but, even worse, would have proved that I was not destined for the literary life, and I couldn't face that possibility. As with IQ tests, those who were destined for greatness *simply knew.*

"You seem to confuse the words *satire* and *satyr* in your paper, Miss Lennox. A satire is a species of poem; a satyr is a lecherous creature, half man, half goat, who spends his time chasing nymphs." — Lodge, David, *Changing Places*, Penguin Books, London, 1978, p. 109.

Other words I had problems with:

"coney-catchers": a professor had remarked that a coney was a rabbit, but I couldn't understand why rabbit-catching was considered so important a literary subject. (Actually, as I found out at age 61, more or less by accident, while reading under the heading "Rogue Literature" in *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature*, it also means "innocent", so that coney-catchers were con men.)

The ubiquitous term "virtue": not once did any professor explain what it meant: did it mean "being good", "doing the right thing"? Why did the ancients, or at least the European upper class of past centuries, consider that so important, since it was what parents and teachers wanted you to have, and therefore always involved the observance of trivialities? Eugen Weber, in his outstanding 1989 television series, *The Western Tradition*, remarks in passing that it meant "manliness in the service of the state." That is as much as I know about it to this day.

The word "dissemble": it sounded like "disassemble", although I knew it meant to pretend, deceive. So why didn't they use these ordinary words? What other explanation could there be except that those in the past knew that only those who chose the bigger word would be remembered by the professors?

The word "Protestant": hard to believe though it may be, I was in my twenties, perhaps thirties, before it dawned on me that *Prot*estant, as we pronounced it, was just a variation of Pro*test*ant, one who protests, which, of course, made perfect sense, given what the word originally referred to. The fact that one could have seen the word in print since his childhood and not seen it to have something to do with protesting, is an example of the power of pronunciation over the visual in language.

"Compleat", from the title of Izaak Walton's *The Compleat Angler*: I assumed this was an inside joke understood only by English professors and perhaps graduate students, the joke being that the word didn't mean "complete", but had been written in that peculiar way to seduce ignorant students into believing that it did, so that professors would be able to separate those who were destined to accomplish something in life from the rest.

"Folio": textbooks and editions of Shakespeare's plays always said that his works were printed "in folio", or that such-and-such was a "folio edition" of the plays. To this day I don't know what the term means, although from reading over the years, I gather it has something to do with the size of the pages. A phrase I loved, and whose meaning I did understand, was the title of a passage by Richard Hooker — "carnal concupiscence". I thought, after reading the passage, that at least the ancients recognized sex for the awesome, terrible, thing it is, and discouraged it,

1. Actually, "divers" was just the 17th-century spelling of "diverse".

as they should have, instead of encouraging it, as we did. I have used the phrase over the years for comic effect, as in, "We were friends for a while, but, of course, carnal concupiscence did not take place."

I should also mention at least one problem I had in the area of memorization. In the fall of 1958, I took a course in the ancient Greek philosophers. We learned (or, rather, we were taught) that Thales believed that water was the primal substance of the universe, that Anaximander believed the primal substance was not water or any other substance we know, that Anaximines believed the primal substance was air, that Pythagoras believed that "all things are numbers", that Heraclitus believed that fire was the primal substance, and on through the other philosophers of the time. Although I managed to remember enough of this material to get a B in the course, I soon forgot it all. Over the course of my life, at one time or another, I have probably read and re-read the history of that period of philosophy a dozen or more times, and yet to this day I cannot remember any of it, except that Thales "was the water guy" and of course that Pythagoras believed number was fundamental, and that Zeno was the promulgator of the paradoxes about Achilles and the Tortoise. Otherwise, the material simply refuses to stay in my mind.

Not Becoming a Professor

I gave some thought to an academic career, but one thing I knew instinctively was that I was unfit for it. A girl in several of my classes — I think her name was Marilyn or Margaret or something else beginning with "M" — seemed, in my mind, and in the minds of several other students, to be destined for success as a professor. She had an infuriating hauteur about her — she made sure we knew that she planned to get a *Master's* in English. She had a mole on her cheek, and long, fluttering, eyelashes, and sparkling eyes. She always seemed to be wearing a silk shawl. Then, too, there was Prof. Emerson, who taught a Renaissance Literature course I took, and whom I detested more than any of the others. Once, standing on the corner of New St. and E. 4th in front of the New Merchants Hotel, on a sunny afternoon, I remarked on my contempt for him to a grad student. He laughed, understood, and quoted someone's description of someone else as "the only man I ever met who is veneer all the way through," which I thought fit this professor exactly. We heard over and over again in Emerson's course (and in others) about the importance of Castiglione's *The Courtier* (full title: *The Book of the Courtier* (1528)), though we never read it I regarded it as yet another example of an author in the distant past somehow knowing what would please the English professors in the 20th century.

But one thing I will say for Emerson, and for the other English professors, is that none of them pronounced "poetry" *pwaytree*, the way Stephen Spender and other poets (and some professors) featured on PBS documentaries many years later, always did. That pronunciation in itself came close at times to driving me permanently away from poetry.

The prospect of becoming like these pompous tyrants was simply out of the question for me. I also had a morbid fear of public speaking, despite being a bandleader who did all the announcing, and being an actor with Mustard and Cheese. But the idea of getting up in front of a classroom after having masturbated the previous night, my hand perhaps still greasy, perhaps some of the students guessing it, the girls looking up at me from the front row, crossing their legs, I trying not to look at those kissable knees while I pretended I was worth listening to on any subject — was simply impossible. A couple of hesitations at the blackboard while explaining a math problem to my students, a wrong answer, and I would be a laughing stock. And then there was the tedium of having to think up problems and ways to keep the class motivated, all the while warding off the challenges of the smart Jews who would soon recognize how weak I was. And then there was the

fact that I was constantly on the verge of blushing, even in conversations with just one or two others, and the certainty that some day in the not too distant future I would be bald. I couldn't stand the idea that learning rested on such a fragile basis as the performance of someone standing in front of a classroom: "He gave a good lecture today." "He had an off day, so we didn't learn about limits very well." I wanted no part of perpetuating this myth to students. I utterly detested the complete absence of curiosity on the part of the professors about ways of improving the effectiveness of their teaching. I can't recall evaluation sheets being handed out at the end of courses, but even if they were, I had no doubt that most of the professors ignored them. They never gave any sign in their classes that they were eager to hear from the students about ways to make the material easier to learn. Finally, I wanted no part of the dreadful business of lording it over others just because they happened to know less about a subject than I did. I didn't want to become an arrogant *knower*. I wanted learning to be the way it was in the jazz world — a project among equals. You want to know something? I will do my best to help you, but you are in charge, it's up to you to decide what you don't know, what you can get out of books on your own, and what you can't.

I think already by this time I had heard about PhD candidates working for years on a thesis, and then, on the night before they were to deliver it, learning that someone else had come up with the same idea — that they had been scooped, as the expression had it. The belief — the superstition, the academic fiction — that a good idea couldn't occur to two people at the same time, that exceptional minds always think unique thoughts, infuriated me. I regarded it as yet another means for perpetuating the university's concept of what is exceptional mental ability At that time, I had no knowledge of the history of science, or of mathematics. If I had, I would have known that simultaneous discovery had occurred often.

Athlete's Foot

Attendance at physical education classes was required for a degree, and as a result I picked up my first case of athlete's foot, which made my feet smell even worse than they normally did. But I soon got used to it — in fact thought it an entirely fitting external manifestation of the state of my soul. I sat on my bed and bent my foot around so that I could see the cheesy, stinking white threads of the fungus growing through the skin of my soles. I was decaying! What decadence! But the smell became so bad that I was worried about it seeping up from my socks during the day, so I went to the pharmacist's and bought some cream. Another regimen. Morning and night the cream had to be rubbed in between the toes, over the flat parts and into the arch of the foot. Within half an hour, my socks were also coated with the cream, which made them slick inside, and caused my foot to skate around inside my shoe. So the socks had to be changed more often, which meant more laundry.

The affliction lasted several years, and gave me another thing to be ashamed about, in addition to acne and bitten nails and a growing bald spot. Push your socks deep within your shoes whenever you take them off! Excuse yourself and go to the bathroom and wash your feet! Hide the truth about yourself!

Trying to Be an Inventor

I often thought of my father, and was appalled that I hadn't invented something important. But no matter how hard I tried, all I could do was fall back on an idea of my teens or possibly earlier, namely, a clamp that would measure the diameter of a pipe. The idea was that you could just allow it to clamp onto a piece of pipe and then read the diameter off from a scale attached to it.

The trouble was I knew right from the start that the bigger the diameter of the pipe, the greater the error, since the two sides of the V-clamp wouldn't touch at opposite ends of a diameter. Sometimes, thinking about this obvious flaw, I felt sweat break out on my forehead. I gave passing thought to the idea of using clamps that you could screw into place, but I hated that because it was too complicated. I wanted something you could just clasp the pipe with and get your answer. My shame that this was the best I could come up with by my early twenties was beyond limit.

Acne

The worst thing about winter was that it took away my other weapon in the battle against acne, namely, the sun. In the summer, I had caddying to keep my face brown. Pimples on tan didn't look half so bad as pimples on white skin. At Lehigh, as soon as the spring sun came out, and as long as the fall sun could be used for the purpose, I would, as often as I could spare the time, find a patch of grass and lie on my back and let the sun do its work. Down below the English Dept. building was a good spot. The sweat mixed with the ever-present Clearasil sulfur to create a wonderfully bad stink. Only the future can tell what problems await me in my extreme old age from those months and years of trying to bake away this problem in my youth.

My Mother

On the excuse that I couldn't afford to spend money at local laundries, my mother insisted that I send my laundry home to her. She gave me a brown, pressed-board box with black metal reinforcements on the round corners, and cloth straps to hold the cover down. I was to put my bag of stinking laundry into the box, take it to the Post Office, and send it home to her. A week or two later, back would come the box, with everything washed and ironed — she ironed undershirts, shorts, and each sock in each and every pair of socks. She also made sure that name labels were sewn into the backs of the collars of all my shirts and undershirts and, I think, my briefs or boxer shorts as well. I don't remember what I did about the hankies crusted with dried sperm. It is entirely possible I assumed she was too dumb to recognize that the crusty hard substance in some of them did not come from my nose. On the other hand, she had given every sign during my teenage years that she knew what shameful practices young boys indulged in.

If I had been forced to say one good thing about her during those days, it would have been that she had an extraordinary sense of color. The first time she came to visit (she having finally worn out my ingenuity at creating reasons why she shouldn't), she already had her facial expression of ill-concealed distaste as she climbed the stairs of Mrs. Mann's house the first time. She looked criticically around my room, shook her head, and with a laugh proclaimed how the bedspread and the curtains didn't match, or didn't match the walls, and the next time, weeks or months later, she brought a bedspread or curtains that matched each other and the wall perfectly. (She may have brought a can of paint and painted the walls to flawlessly match the bedspread and curtains.)

She continued to remind me months ahead about her birthday. She would tell me how my brother always sent her a card. The idea of shopping for a card for her made me furious. But I would force myself into the greeting card stores, and sometimes I would give up and instead write her a flowery letter, explaining that I couldn't find a card that I felt was good enough for her.

Not Keeping to a Budget

Among the many reasons I had for utterly despising myself, one was that I spent too much money each day. I had not the slightest doubt that the person I should have been, the man who would have a fighting chance to achieve great things, would be able to remember every nickel he spent, and record it later, so that posterity, looking over those pages, could only ooh and ahh at his self-discipline. The figure of $2.35 comes to mind for some reason: I think this was the maximum I was supposed to spend each day on food, coffee, and cigarettes[1]. I know we were able to get a full meal at the Blue Plate Restaurant (I think that was the name) for under $1, including rice pudding and a cup of coffee. Each time I bought something, even if it was only a pack of gum, the voice of that other, that supremely disciplined one would whisper in my ear: "Can you really say that you couldn't have done without that pack of gum?" "Can you really believe that you couldn't have waited *one more hour* to have the cheeseburger, especially when you know how valuable the discipline would have been?" The voice never criticized my cigarette consumption, however, since smoking cigarettes was the mark of a harried artist destined for immortality.

I bought a notebook to keep track of my expenses, which I still have. It has "Lehigh" printed on the cover: I apparently bought it from the student supply store ("The Supply Bureau" it says near the bottom of the cover). "Finances" is printed on it, in ink, then "Property of John Franklin, 618 Muschlitz, Bethelehem, Pa."

I should mention in passing that when a student complained of lack of money, someone else in the group would often remark, "Well, don't forget: you can always sell your body," meaning, sell it to science, whether for research or for use in medical schools. The standard figure that was quoted was $250. But then whoever was reminding us of this source of wealth that we could cash in at any time, would also remind us that, before they gave you the cash, you had to have a tattoo put on your foot, so that, when the coroner or undertaker got your body, they would see it, and not cremate or bury you. I never heard of anyone actually taking advantage of this financial opportunity.

Advantages of Having a Dentist for a Landlord

The owner of our building at 6 E. 4th was a dentist. His office was on the first floor and he offered his tenants a cut rate on their dental work. He had white hair and a dapper manner, and was something of a character. He apparently owned extensive real estate in Bethlehem. To me at least it was clear that fixing teeth was the least of his interests in life.

The main reason why we took advantage of his discount offer was that he had a beautiful hygienist. Is it only a hallucination due to sexual deprivation, or do I actually remember her somehow managing to grant me a suggestion of how her soft breasts felt by arranging to press against me as she worked on the tartar that accumulated so rapidly at my gumline? I couldn't believe that such a fantastically beautiful woman would take up, of all professions, that of a dental hygenist. We talked. I tried to flirt with her as she worked on me (a habit I have maintained with female dental help throughout my life). I tried to be brave so that maybe, perhaps, that, combined with the fact I was a jazz musician, and had a room upstairs... It never happened, of course. She was there to sweetly torment us and clean our teeth and do nothing more.

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1. A pack of Camels or Chesterfields then cost $.25. Luxury brands such as Benson and Hedges, which we rarely smoked, cost $.35.

As graduation neared, Dr. — found out that I needed to have two wisdom teeth pulled, an ordeal I had managed to put off for years. I said I couldn't afford the deductible (I had Blue Cross dental insurance from the newspaper (see next section)). He said not to worry. He knew how to fix the paperwork so that (a) my deductible would be next to nothing, and (b) he would be able to make a little more for himself out of the deal. What he would do is have me enter — Hospital as an overnight patient, then perform the extractions there.

It sounded fine to me, and so one evening I showed up at the Hospital, which was one of those private clinics in a two-story modern box of a building painted gray on the outside, white on the inside. It was on 4th St, only a few blocks from his office. I was given a room, some magazines, and told to wait.

Around 5:30 or so, Dr. — arrived, dressed in a tuxedo. He was on his way to a country club dinner and dance. His wife was waiting in the car. He had me sit on a table in a room, put on a white tunic over his clothes, took out his little bag, gave me a couple of shots of Novocaine, and then, with relatively little pain, considering the Auschwitz experience I had been anticipating (the sweat running down my forehead), he pulled the two teeth. I was surprised that I was still conscious afterward. As he was putting his tools away, he said, half over his shoulder, that maybe I should try to take a few steps, just so he could see I was all right. I got off the table, stood shakily for a moment, and collapsed. I woke up later in the sunny evening, lying on my bed; a nurse in the room was talking in understanding tones. I slept there that night and left in the morning.

Fall of '59
Working for The Bethlehem *Globe-Times*

Since I was always in need of money, and since I wanted to be a writer, what better way to solve both problems than work for a newspaper? A guy in one of my English classes was already doing that, at the Bethlehem *Globe-Times*, just a few blocks from campus. He urged me to give it a try. (During the course of the year, I found out that he was the son of one of the stable of writers who wrote the Hardy Boys books. I told him how I had loved the books when I was a kid, and that I hoped to meet his father some day.)

So in the fall of 1959 I applied and was hired as a reporter/photographer, working primarily the night shift so that I could attend classes during the day. My salary was $60 a week, up considerably from the $39 a week at the drug warehouse in Troy. I am amazed at the energy I had in those days: a full load of courses in English literature, plus leading a band, plus working full-time at a newspaper at night.

The editor was John Strohmeyer, a tall, good-looking man, despite his thinning hair, with a deep voice and a news-is-serious-business manner. I liked him immediately. His father had been injured working in the steel mills, and he had an insider's view of the goings-on at the company, as well as of local politics. He had gone to Harvard and made a name for himself at, I think, a newspaper in Massachusetts, but had now returned to take over his hometown paper.

The building that housed the editorial offices and the typesetting and printing facility was at 202 W. 4th St., at the corner of 4th St. and Brodhead Ave., just a few blocks from my room. The Tally-ho Tavern, where members of the newspaper staff went for drinks after work, was across 4th St. from the *Globe-Times* building. A flight of stairs led up from Brodhead. If you turned left at the landing, you were in the Composing Room, where the typesetting took place; beyond it was the Press Room, where the actual printing presses were. As the deadline for printing approached, the editors stood around a metal table in the Composing Room pointing where they wanted the

type to be placed on the pages. Union rules forbade them from actually moving the type themselves; a union man had to move the lines of type around in accordance with the editors' instructions.

If you turned right, you were in what was called the "City Room", which was where the editorial functions were carried out. The walls in the City Room hadn't been painted in years, and as a result the original white or cream color was now a grimy green from years of cigarette smoke. The clacking of typewriter keys filled the air. At the far end of the Room, near the windows overlooking 4th St., was the City Desk, where three or four editors sat at a big table and edited the stories (you never called them *articles*) turned in by the reporters. The editors always seemed to be pondering the story that had just been placed before them, one hand at the side of their forehead, the other holding a pencil at the ready. The reporters typed on the cheapest paper; you could see some of the wood fibers in it, just like the paper we used in first and second grade. It smelled like newspaper. To communicate with the Composing Room, the editors used old-fashioned pneumatic tubes: they put the edited copy, with scribbled instructions, in a little cylinder about the size of a large drinking glass, inserted it into an opening in the tube, did something, and *whoosh!* the little spaceship was sent on its way up to a rounded ninety-degree curve near the ceiling then back the entire length of the City Room, out the door, across the little hallway, along the ceiling of the Composing Room and down. I think the door at the other end of the tube opened automatically to signal that an important communication had arrived. The typesetters, wearing green visors, just like in the movies, would remove the copy, then, sitting on low stools before their black Mergenthaler machines, would type on huge keys, the hot molten lead flowing in to just the right place at the right time, creating the silvery bars containing the embossed words of the story. You could hear the type bars sliding down to the delivery tray, the machine preparing for the next bar, all with clicking metallic sounds, all like the ultimate in 19th-century technology. It reminded me of the Harrow in Kafka's story, "The Penal Colony". One old-timer seemed willing to answer my questions about how things worked, and when I needed a break, I would go out and talk to him. He had been working in the Composing Room so long that the newspaper ink was now permanently in the skin of his hands and wrists. I wondered what his wife thought when, after he scrubbed his hands with soap and a brush and dried them on a towel, they still looked dirty.

C. Fred Ritter

My immediate boss was C. Fred Ritter, one of the editors at the City Desk. I can't remember if he was City Editor or not. He looked like Hollywood's idea of a newspaper editor: white-haired, gravel-voiced, with a porous red nose — he kept a bottle in the bottom drawer of his desk. The staff, needless to say, made the most of that first initial in his name. If someone asked a question, and it was felt that only he could answer it, the response was always, "See Fred Ritter!" The man had an extraordinary memory. One day there were floods in several parts of Bethlehem and Allentown. The paper wanted to mention previous floods in its story. "Franklin," he said, calling me over. "Go look in the morgue — I think, let's see, '43, early part." (The morgue was a tiny room containing a microfilm viewer and rolls of microfilm photostats of every page of every edition of the paper back to the first.) And he was exactly right: there were the stories about a series of floods that struck the city then.

Like most old-timers in the business, he typed by the hunt-and-peck method, using his two index fingers, except he could do it faster than many of us could type by the orthodox ten-finger method we had learned in school. He could write a good news story *while* someone, a layman, was giving him the information over the phone. I saw him do this once when there had been an

important promotion at Bethlehem Steel. He wheeled a typewriter on a stand over next to the City Desk, cradled the phone in the crook of his shoulder, and began talking and typing: "OK...got it...now what about ... OK ... and his name is? ... OK...what's going to happen to ... How will that affect ... ? OK ...." All the while punching away at the keyboard of the ancient typewriter. A copy boy, or at least some guy from the typesetting room, stood there and took the pages as he finished them, then ran back to get them set. To me then, and now, it was an amazing performance — I with my minutes and hours to get a single sentence right.

At first they put me to work as a gofer: I remember C. Fred saying, around lunchtime, when I happened to be working at that time of day, as he reached into his pocket for money, "Here, Franklin, go down to —" and he named the little greasy burger place on 4th, right under the windows of the City Room, "and get, let's see, three cheeseburgers medium, a couple of regular burgers well, some chips, four coffees, a Coke, and ..." and I would try to write all this down on a scrap of paper without having to ask for any repeats. Then I would go down and wait for them to fill the order. I remember one time — this was in early morning, I think I was just there to get a cup of coffee for myself at the end of the night shift — a skinny older guy was sitting at the counter casually talking to the guy behind the counter. Eventually the older guy said, "Well, gotta go. Gotta get home before the wife takes that early morning piss," which I assumed meant there was some extra sexual thrill to be had from screwing a woman who had a full bladder.

From gofer I graduated to writing obits (obituaries) and taking the daily stock market reports. The obits were mostly rewrites of what the Allentown paper had published. I remember once or twice calling a number that C. Fred had given me to find out more about a recently deceased person, but I was very uncomfortable intruding into people's lives at such moments, so I did whatever I could to avoid making the calls. Once the body of an old woman had been found in her apartment, she apparently having died several weeks earlier. I asked the official on the phone — he was either with the police or the coroner's office — what a body is like after several weeks, he replied, quite casually, "Well, it's pretty much a green liquid."

Along with the obits, I had to take the stock reports each day, a task which amounted to calling an old guy in a local stockbroker's office, and filling in numbers on a prepared sheet, which was then given directly to the typesetters. I never met him, but his voice sounded like that of someone in his seventies or eighties. He whistled his *s*'s[1], and I can almost say I looked forward to hearing him say the name of this one company, which I have now forgotten, because of the number of whistles that came out of it. For a long time, his voice was for me my image of a stock broker — an old guy watching a ticker tape, reading off numbers.

I learned some of the rules of journalism: one was that you never said "the first page". It was always "page one". The editors left me no doubt that this was a serious matter after the one or two times I forgot. Another was that you didn't write "articles", you wrote "stories". To write a good story, you had to answer the six questions: Who? What? Where? When? How? and Why? A story had to have a good lead, meaning, a first paragraph that would attract readers. (I couldn't stop reading the word as the name of the metal that was used to pour type from.) A news story was structured with the most important information first, then the next-most-important, then the third-most important, and so on to the end. Someone told me, or else I read somewhere, that this structure evolved during the Civil War, when there was constant danger of the telegraph lines being cut. So instead of sending news stories in the traditional narrative form — in chronological order— reporters began sending the most important facts first. That way, if the lines were cut

1. "...no doubt from badly fitting false teeth." — J.S.

immediately after this much had been sent, at least those on the other end would have an idea of what had happened. Then the next-most-important facts would be sent, so that, if the lines were cut after this much had been sent, at least those on the other end would have a few details on the most-important-facts. Etc.

For C. Fred, a story was a story, regardless of the hour. Once he called me around 3 o'clock Sunday morning, told me to get out to — Street, where some guy had had a heart attack; the body was still in the car. I didn't have the courage to tell him that I had been playing a job that night, had barely had an hour's sleep. It wasn't the kind of thing you said at a moment like that. Even though I always went on such jobs with a camera, I was far too squeamish to get anywhere near the car, much less to take a picture[1]. I more or less circled around, acting as though I were trying to decide on how to get the best picture, while various firemen and policemen stood around talking as they waited for the ambulance. Fortunately, soon after I arrived, the paper sent someone else, possibly C. Fred himself, and I was off the hook.

I covered only one fire, this in a second-rate shopping center. Bob Cunningham, a far better photographer than I, was assigned to get the pictures, so all I had to do was gather what facts I could from the police and firemen, including the one fact that Strohmeyer seemed to consider the most important, after number of deaths and injuries, namely, the estimated damage cost. I saw him shout at a reporter once for not having the figure and for seeming to consider it as relatively unimportant. Cunningham and I stood there, talking, while the firemen went about their business, and I couldn't stop feeling what a beautiful thing a big fire at night is — a fire that is burning half a dozen one-story buildings and their contents — clothes, furniture, carpets, curtains, all the junk that you are supposed to have if you are to have any worth in this life, now converted into beautiful orange flames leaping up into the black night air.

C. Fred once had me accompany him to the State Fair near Harrisburg. It was on a Sunday, a dry day in Pennsylvania (no alcohol allowed to be sold), but as soon as we got there, he stopped at the American Legion hall, went in, and ordered a couple of whiskeys. There were slot machines along one wall, although gambling was illegal in the state. Then we went off and roamed around among the animal exhibits. I suppose they thought the story important because they had farmers among their readers.

First News Story

My first published story was about a banker who had returned from a European vacation. It was a couple of paragraphs long and I worked hours on it, thinking all the while not only that C. Fred and the entire staff of the paper would be judging me, but also of that rich, important guy I was writing about. You damn well had to please everyone or you were dead. On the afternoon it was published, I went out to the Press Room to watch the presses roll. The floor-to-ceiling machinery roared away, the newsprint spun over the rollers, and I stood there, immersed in that glorious din, thinking about the glory of Freedom of the Press, of Gutenberg, of the banker sitting at the dinner table that evening with his dutiful family, reading the story aloud to them with grudging approval, the kids squirming, asking, "Is that about us? Are we in the paper?"

I have two 3-ring binders filled with clippings of every article I wrote for the paper — except for my first story, which, unaccountably, is lost.

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1. No one ever called them "pictures". They were *pix*.

Agonizing Over Every Line

I had no doubt that every story of mine that the paper published would someday be scrutinized by posterity, and so I labored over every word. If the unanswerable question regarding literary short stories was, "What sequence of words will make an immortal story (and, incidentally, will make an editor want to publish it)?" my unanswerable question as a reporter was, "What sequence of words, particularly at the start (the lead), will make the most readers want to read the rest of the story?" It was another exquisite form of torture, because for every group of readers I could imagine liking a given lead, I could imagine another group turning away just because of that lead. I knew that I had mere fractions of a second to induce the reader to continue reading. His eye would scan the headline, then the first few words, and then bingo, he would be gone unless I had somehow guessed the formula that would make him stay. But then, once I had him hooked, I had to keep him reading, and that meant somehow guessing the right phrases for the rest of the story, while at the same time presenting the facts correctly. Should I say, "A resident of Bethlehem, the victim was an employee of ..." (that would attract Bethlehem readers) or should I say, "An employee of ..., the victim was a resident of Bethlehem..." (that would certainly attract other employees of the same company, but suppose the company was small, or even if the company was big, suppose the number was still less than the number of ordinary Bethlehem citizens who would be attracted by the other lead?) Or should I say, "The victim..." which would attract readers who liked to sympathize, but how could I possibly know what the number of such readers was compared to the other two types? I went through an analysis like this with every sentence.

My immortality was at stake. Which phrase was more likely to be immortal: "Police sources said that..." or "Sources in the Police Department said that..." or "A spokesman for the Police Dept. said that..."?

Journalism for me was entirely a literary endeavor. I had no interest in "reporting facts" and, in fact, I felt that I — we on the paper — had no business prying into people's lives the way we did. In *my* newspaper, in the upper right-hand corner of the front page, would have been the words, "We print whatever you feel we should print. Please call us when you have something." At the same time, I felt that, if one was going to write about the goings-on in a community, or state, or the nation, then virtually every story should be book length, and should discuss questions such as whether life was worth living, is there a God, what is likely to be the long-term effect of the incident in question. A flood should result in a book about water consumption in the city, the county, the state, the nation, including a review of meteorological records, and long-term forecasts. The death of a lonely old woman should produce a book-length meditation on the meaning of a woman's life in modern society, plus a complete biography of the deceased, plus profiles of each of her children, if any, and attempts at expressing what the inner life of the woman and all surviving relatives was like — the moment by moment inner dialogue that took place in their minds. Now that would be *real* journalism.

A Kind-Hearted Woman on the Staff

One of the reporters was a rather plain woman named Ruth who worked on the society page. The rumor among the men reporters was that her short, full red hair was really a wig, because she was completely bald as a result of some birth defect or disease. Hence, as far as they were concerned, she was a figure to be ridiculed behind her back. I kept looking at her to try to see if her hair really was a wig. For some reason, she seemed to go out of her way to say hello to me, to ask how I was doing — how the music was going, how I was getting along in school. I felt it was a case of one outcast instinctively recognizing another. She seemed to have resolved to do some-

thing each day, or each week, for the lost soul who sat on the other side of the City Room. After a while, she invited me to her apartment for dinner with her and her husband. I accepted. The place turned out to be one of the countless old apartments in that bleak city: plainly furnished, as the two of them had only recently married and still were saving for decent furniture. I never told her how much I appreciated her kindness, never talked at more than a superficial level with her, but to this day I remember this unique, unconditional kindness that another human being, and a woman at that, extended to me.

More Blushing

The society page editor was a gray-haired woman, probably in her fifties, named Margaret. She had an aura of having been through it all. She lived alone in an apartment, recovering from (I got the impression) too many failed love affairs. I suppose because she saw me as living with one foot on the wild side, she enjoyed talking to me. She seemed to know who was doing what in the arts, and no doubt provided with me some inside information on the life of T. S. Eliot. Naturally, we discussed music, including, among other topics, whether or not Leonard Bernstein was really a great conductor and composer. I may have said then what I believe now, namely, that no one will ever take away from him the accomplishment which *West Side Story* is, but that at times he seems just a bit too articulate, too flamboyant. (I don't think I saw his *Young People's Concerts* till later, but they only reinforced my opinion of him as a man for whom things are just a little bit too clear, too intellectually accessible.) At some point during this discussion, she said words to the effect, "I assume you know that he has relations with men." (I don't remember the exact words: she probably wouldn't have said "queer", and the word "gay" was not in common usage then.) The truth was, I had no idea, and the shock of it immediately brought on an attack of blushing so severe that I had to give some excuse about getting back to work, or, more likely, going out to the press room to check a story, since I couldn't allow her to see my face even from across the room. This may well have been the first time I ever heard of a person associated with classical music being homosexual. I felt that it was further proof that no sphere of work, no endeavor, was free of this greatest of all evils.

The Lady Typesetter

The computer was still just a distant rumor in those years, but its influence was beginning to make itself felt in odd corners of the world of work. Someone had realized that you could physically separate the Mergenthaler Linotype *keyboard* from the rest of the machine, with its vat of molten lead and all the clicking 19th-century apparatus that converted the lead into lines of type. You didn't need to have those guys in green eyeshades sitting in the grimy Press Room, typing away at the keyboards which were part of the machine. A paper tape with holes punched in it could just as well tell the machine what lines of type to make, and the paper tape could be punched in much more pleasant surroundings, relatively speaking, e.g., in the City Room. So, immediately to the left as you entered the City Room from the landing, there were three machines looking like oversize typewriters, with smooth, brick-red metal covers. They were not all used at a given time, but at these sat women who copied the reporters' stories onto paper tape which was then taken out and loaded onto one of the Mergenthaler machines.

One of these women had legs I couldn't stop looking at. She must have been in her thirties, had black hair worn in what seemed to me a kind of World War II style. She wore short dresses (short for the time), made of a flimsy material, and seemed to like to sit with her legs spread a little, as though the temperature in the room were too high, and she had to resort to this to cool off.

Or else it was merely for the delectation of male passersby. I passed by as often as I could, because I couldn't get enough of the sight of those shapely legs in stockings. I would say hello to her as I arrived for work, and sneak a look downward as we exchanged a few words. I'm sure she noticed it. I would go out to the Press Room for a break, or down the stairs to the street, and make the most of the opportunity these excursions afforded me of looking at her legs as I re-entered the City Room. Sometimes I would joke a little with her, ask her a few questions about the machines, which she seemed to take in stride as just another improvement in the world of work ("whatever they ask me to do, I do"). But she must have sensed how my heart was thumping whenever I came near her. In memory, now, she wore heels, and that of course only made her legs more sexy.

George Beezer

One of the editors at the City Desk was a guy named George Beezer, a blond kid, good-looking. I don't think he was a student. He had a devilish sense of humor which I was surprised to find I was completely at home with. Example: Two policemen from Vietnam were visiting the Bethlehem Police Dept. for a week in order to study its methods. I was assigned to interview them. The two spoke only broken English, so when I got back to the office I asked Beezer how he thought I should handle the quotes. "Quote them verbatim!" he said, with a laugh. And so I did, and there, on the front page of the city newspaper, was all this dialogue that sounded as though it had been spoken by Charlie Chan. Another example: Dorothy Kilgallen's social column was transmitted each day via the wire service. Each paper decided where to put it and then wrote a headline for it. Since George and I considered the content ridiculous, we would try to pick out the most trivial, least important item, and write a blazing headline for it. Beezer would just sit back in his chair and laugh at the absurdity of some of the headlines we produced.

Another time, a state official was scheduled to be in town to investigate the local aldermen. The word around the City Desk was that the state had no business sending its bureaucrats to snoop in our city. I was supposed to cover a meeting the guy would have with the aldermen or their representative, and Beezer and I discussed ways to have our revenge. "Get a nasty picture of him", Beezer said. So I did: I got a picture of the guy, sitting at the table with the representatives, just at the moment he was picking his nose. They ran it on the front page.

Country Copy

Sometimes, when — , a fat woman who worked at the copy desk in the evenings, wasn't there or didn't have time, I would have to edit what they called "the country copy", which was the stories sent in by the stringers — the part-time reporters in outlying districts. All or most of it was written in long-hand, apparently with thick, stubby pencils. The stories were typically reports of bake-sales and church meetings, and almost invariably the stories would begin, "A good time was had by all at the ..." Beezer and I used it as a running gag in discussions about how to begin a news story.

I remember one night when the fat copy editor had her radio on, I heard harmonica-player Toots Thielmann's recording of "You are My Sunshine". I had to stop what I was doing and just listen. I could hardly believe how great the solo was — the bop accents, the wide intervals. I have never been able to obtain the record.

Feature Stories

They let me write feature stories once in a while. On these, unlike on the ordinary news stories I wrote, my name appeared as author (I was given a "byline"). I interviewed an old lady in Hellertown, I remember, and afterward took my usual hours and hours to get every sentence right.

Once I was sent by the paper to cover a lecture and demonstration in Allentown by a Lehigh professor. It was an early example of automation. He had invented a way to control a sewing machine using punched cards. The professor had a Jewish last name and a New York accent, and I thought it appropriate that such a man should invent something related to the garment industry. Once, C. Fred assigned me to review a new opera by Jonathan Elkus, professor in the Lehigh Music Dept., from whom I had taken a couple of courses. The opera was "The Outcast of Poker Flat" and had already been reviewed by the Allentown paper. C. Fred placed the review in front of me by way of helping me get an idea of how a review should be written. I am not even sure now that I actually attended the performance. The task was among the worst writing agonies of my life. I sat at the desk, twisted around myself, trying to figure out how to find words that said what the other review said without revealing that I had read the review. C. Fred would holler across the room every fifteen minutes or so, "Hey, Franklin, when'll we have that review?" This may have been the time when one of the city editors, noticing me sitting in my usual twisted pretzel posture, legs crossed, hunched over the typewriter, remarked, so all could hear, "That's the way a girl sits", which immediately produced an attack of beet red blushing so intense that the sweat droplets ran down my face. (He may even have added that sitting like that was a sure sign a guy was queer.) In this case, I couldn't make an excuse for having to leave the room because the reason would be obvious. So I simply sat there and burned alive.

Eventually, somehow, I completed something that could be published as a review. A couple of days later, I received an envelope, addressed to me at the paper, which contained a single slip of paper: a quote of a dictionary definition of plagiarism. It had been sent by the original reviewer on the Allentown paper.

I Ask for a Raise

In December, being always short of money, I decided to ask Strohmeyer for a raise. (I can't remember why I just didn't ask C. Fred.) I presented my case: how I had learned to become a news photographer, how I had written features, how I hadn't missed any days due to sick time. He looked at me thoughtfully, pondering the matter. "How much did you want?" I: "Well, I was thinking about $5 more a week. He thought for a while, then slowly nodded. And so I was now pulling down a cool $65 a week.

Fighting Corruption

Strohmeyer was determined to be a responsible editor, and that meant, among things, fighting corruption, of which there was plenty in the local unions. One day there was a new face at the City Desk, and the word went around that although he didn't know how to write news stories, he had connections in the unions and in the local political machine. The idea was that he would hang out at meetings, pursue tips that he picked up, and then call in the information. A reporter would write up as a story what he had uncovered. Word got out about him, and on at least one occasion he was beaten up. I too was roped into Strohmeyer's crusade, and asked to attend a meeting about a forthcoming election. It was held in a grimy basement on the University side of the River, and was jam-packed with tough guys in heavy jackets. I sat there, with my usual two or three 8-½ × 11-inch sheets of foolscap folded double, and my pencil at the ready. The leader asked if I was

from the *Globe-Times*, I said yes, and he gave me a dirty look which said, "One of these days, you guys are going to push your luck too far." Then he went on to say, to his audience, that everyone was expected to deliver the votes, and God help any man who went over to the other side. (It was clear that the leadership had ways of knowing.) Among his threats were that the man would lose his job and never find another one in Bethlehem. The he turned and jabbed his index finger in my direction and said, "And I dare you to write that in your goddamn paper." I said nothing in reply, and didn't make another note for the rest of the meeting.

Looking for Communists

The late fifties were only a few years after the McCarthy era, and so the paper was always interested in any possibility of a local angle on the Communist threat. Along came a New York reporter I think named Schwartz. He was probably in his early thirties, had wavy black hair and a nervous, intense manner, as though he knew of dangers that the rest of us were sublimely ignorant of. I assumed he was Jewish. He had been hired because he claimed to have inside information about a local cell that was sending secret information, not to Russia, but to Communist China. He delivered his first story, complete with a document, written in Chinese, that he claimed was a report on details of Bethlehem Steel's plant. The paper ran the story on the front page, with a picture of the document. A few days later, there were a lot of chuckles among the other reporters, because it had been learned that the spy document was nothing more than a laundry list. As I recall, Schwartz was gone soon after that.

Other Assignments

They routinely sent me to cover the The Women's Club meetings, which were held in the evenings. Also meetings of the American Association of University Women, an organization that impressed me with its intelligent analysis of the political issues of the day. Once in a while, I had to drive somewhere near Bethlehem to cover a story. It was on one of these trips, while taking the curves along a rolling, hilly road, with trees on both sides, feeling that I could not possibly endure another day of this meaningless life, of having to struggle with math courses and engineering courses, that I got the idea of dropping out of school and writing textbooks that were designed to help students to quickly understand the concepts of a subject. I saw myself living in a rented room, laughed at by students and residents of the town, scorned by the professors, but slowly, laboriously putting together, assembling, a paperback book that would carefully explain each concept, using lots of pictures, and would provide answers to all the exercises. And, in retrospect, I have to say that this was the first clear idea of what, many years later, would lead to what I believe is a revolutionary new way of presenting technical knowledge — the Environment concept.

A Visitor from Germany

Although I was constantly on guard against the possibility of humiliation, I sometimes failed to assess the risks properly. We had a visitor from Germany — I think he was an editor of an important paper. Ritter or Strohmeyer remembered from my resume that I had taken German at Lehigh, and so they called me over, introduced me, and asked me to help them out. I was instantly unable to speak a word of the language. Perhaps I managed to say "Guten Tag", but already I felt my face getting red. The visitor looked perplexed, the editors looked impatient. I stood there grunting, "Uh...Uhm..." He tried to use as simple words as possible. I looked off into the distance, trying to figure out what he had said. The editors meantime were asking me to say various things to him. "Tell him we are honored that he has come to visit us, and that we hope he had a

good trip, and that later today we will show him a little of Bethlehem, including the steel mills, which ..." I endured it until the editors turned away impatiently, mumbling the name of someone who really *knew* German, for God's sake. I hated myself for days afterward.

In Trouble With the University

I took a course from Prof. J. Burke Severs, a nationally-known Chaucer scholar. He was bald on top, with hair combed neatly back on the sides. He looked like a man who had been handsome in his youth. His course started at eight in the morning. After a night's work, I wanted to get a few hours sleep, so I asked him if I could skip classes once in a while, or take a later class. Without a moment's hesitation, he said no: I had to be there: more than two or three absences (I forget the number) and you flunked the course. So, every morning, I had coffee and eggs in the little hole-in-the-wall below the *Times*' offices, then trudged up the hill to class, sat in the back, waited for him to call my name, responded, "Here!", and promptly fell asleep. He must have seen me sitting there in that state, chin propped on one hand, but he never woke me up, or had a student nudge me. Since I was physically present in the class, that was all that mattered. My contempt for universities and professors went up a notch.

I read Carlyle's *The French Revolution* under him, I think as a compensating task for my having missed two years of courses. I plowed through it, with its impossibly big words. But somehow I liked it. It was like studying furniture, trying to love enormously thick, heavy, wood. (Someone should do research on how the classics appear to students who are way too young for them.)

And yet one classic — albeit of criticism — did make a favorable impression on me: Lowes' *The Road to Xanadu*, about Coleridge. I had an immediate respect for it, and I still have the copy from those years. I don't remember the professor who introduced it to me.

Since there was no doubt in my mind that the only way to achieve a reason to be allowed to go on living was music, I regarded school as a means to that end, and skipped as many other classroom sessions as I could. Eventually, I received a letter from the Dean of Students.

February 21, 1959

MEMORANDUM

Subject: Warning under Attendance Regulations
From: Dean of Students
To: John Franklin, Arts J'59

You are hereby warned with regard to your application to your work in the course listed below. If you have not had a conference with your instructor on this situation, you are advised to see him forthwith...

This warning is sent to you under Section III of the Attendance Regulations:..

COMMENTS

Engl. 326 Engl. Lit of Victorian Era Prof. J. B. Severs

"Mr. Franklin's repeated absences are endangering his standing in the course."

J. D. Leith
Dean of Students

I wrote a letter to Leith ending with the statement, "As I see it, my duty is to demonstrate on examinations and research papers that I have mastered the material in a course. And as long as I do this, I see no reason why a few unavoidable absences from class should endanger my course standing."

Leith wrote back a two-page letter of which the following is part:

> The [above] opinion would have full validity if you were a student of the International Correspondence Schools at Scranton, Pennsylvania.
>
> You are, however, a candidate for a degree at Lehigh University, which operates on the basis of a different educational philosophy and consequent procedures.
>
> You have entered an institution in which the typical unit of instruction at the undergraduate level involves an instructor and twenty students in a classroom situation. There is no homogeneous grouping of these students according to any form of measurement. It is therefore contemplated that the typical class section will have students at all levels of ability, ranging from high to low. The syllabus for each course is based on this structure and the classroom activity in each course depends, in greater or lesser measure, on the normal expectation of free interaction over this range of abilities, under the chairmanship of the instructor, as one of the fundamentals in the learning situation.
>
> If John Franklin, and other men with good minds, are allowed to absent themselves systematically on the basis of such definitions of educational "duty" as you have recorded, the whole instructional process tends to sag toward a level which is below the standard which might be achieved otherwise.

On November 19 of the same year, Severs again reported me to the Dean, this time for absences from his Romantic Era course, and the Dean again sent me a warning. I detested even more these old daddies sitting in their stone buildings and eternally watching over our performance, our adherence to their rules. Become one of them? Never!

My Brother

During these years my brother David was going to Mt. Hermon, a private high school in Mass., where my mother had sent him. (In the summers she sent him to Culver Military Academy in Indiana.) He seemed to accept these demands of hers. Next to Mt. Hermon was a girls' school, Northfield, which seemed important to her. If she heard of a family whose daughter went to Northfield, she knew immediately that the family was all right to know. There are pictures of my brother during these years in her photo albums, including one with him posing with a pipe in his mouth, looking very collegiate.

My brother went out for several sports, but I think my mother refused permission for him to play football after a black student broke his neck during a tackle, his feet apparently slipping on

the grass so that his head hit the leg of the boy he was trying to tackle. (I saw all too clearly in my mind's eye the head bending at a sharp angle, imagined the sound of the bone cracking, cutting into the dark gray, wet spinal chord.) The word was that the boy would never walk again, and was condemned to spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair. My mother made sure my brother and I realized what a tragedy that was, how dreadful that a young man of seventeen should have his life for all practical purposes come to an end at that early age.

The Caryl Chessman Execution

The impending execution, in California, of Caryl Chessman was in all the papers. He was called "the Red Light Bandit" because he used a red light on his car to induce his female victims to believe he was a policeman. The case shrieked victimization of the underdog, and so aroused all my female instincts. I wrote a letter and sent a telegram to California governor Pat Brown. Then I wrote a pamphlet, "The Case Against Capital Punishment", had it printed, and left it in restaurants and on buses and anywhere else I felt people would find it and read it. It is no exaggeration to say that I was desperate that he not be executed.

Eventually, although over the years he had made himself an exceptionally capable jailhouse lawyer, he ran out of appeals, and was executed in the gas chamber at San Quentin. I read later that he had prearranged with his woman lawyer, who had also become his close friend, a signal: he would nod his head to indicate if the last moments were painful or not, and that, according to her, his signal indicated they were not.

I was an uncompromising opponent of the death penalty until, years later, I saw the film *In Cold Blood.* As a result of that film, I developed a new criterion for helping people to decide if they were for the penalty: if you could imagine looking into the killer's eyes as you pulled the lever, then you could be for it. I had no doubt I could do this when it came to the two murderers in the film.