Keeping Going with Music

As in high school, and at RPI, what held me together, what kept me going, was music. "Without music, life would be a mistake," Nietzsche said, although I didn't come across those words of his until many years later. When I see the young losers on Telegraph Ave. in Berkeley listening to their rap and rock 'n roll, or strumming away at their out-of-tune guitars, I know that they, too, are keeping going with music.

On cold, empty, fall and winter days, when things became truly unbearable, I would go to the music room in Grace Hall, and listen to LPs through headphones. The room had soft chairs, couches, and was seldom occupied by more than two or three other students. I could listen to the records I couldn't afford to buy. I listened to Renaissance music, any music that was not of the wretched time I was living in. I listened to an album containing the music of Giles Farnaby, an early 17th-century English composer. I thought that his "A Toye" was in its way a perfect composition. And a work with a haunting, descending harp part that expressed an evening in another world — I have never been able to find the title or the composer, though I will recognize the music immediately when I next hear it. And Bach's *Capriccio on the Departure of His Beloved Brother*, composed in Bach's teens. I liked the sadness, the farewell in it. And Thomas Tallis' *Lamentations of Jeremiah the Prophet*[1] ["Quomodo sedet sola civitas plena populo..." ("How the city doth sit solitary, that was full of people!")]. And the second movement of Handel's Organ Concerto Op. 7, No. 5[2], with its ground bass (a short phrase in the bass that is repeated, with different starting notes, four times, then the whole is repeated again and again throughout the movement while the organ plays variations above it).

In my dusty blue room at 6 East 4th St., I listened over and over to Toscanani's performance of Respighi's *Pines of Rome*, and would often be brought to tears by the concluding march along the Appian Way, which conveyed to me the clearest visual images of any piece of music I had ever heard, albeit most of the images were probably derived from movies, for example, *Ben Hur*[3]. I saw Caesar in his embossed, sleeveless, shiny, dark-red leather armor; saw the blue Italian sky, the dust swirling up from the chariot wheels, and from the feet of the long lines of prisoners trudging behind, their hands tied, eyes looking down at the road. I saw the soldiers, spears upraised, dark red tunics hanging over their shoulders, shiny armor covering their chests. And along the road, the pine trees, dark green against the deep blue sky. I could smell the horses, hear the creaking of harness leather. And there was Caesar in his chariot, with the soldier standing behind him, whispering in his ear, as custom required, that he was only a man, only a man. I have no idea when I first heard this work, but to this day, it has the same effect on me, brings the same images, the same overwhelming sense of triumph at the end.

And then there was the duet "Wir eilen mit schwachen doch emsigen Schritten"[4] in Bach's Cantata No. 78 as performed by Theresa Stich-Randall and Dagmar Hermann[5], another recording

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1. *Thomas Tallis: The Lamentations of Jeremiah the Prophet, and Hymns for Alternating Plainsong and Polyphony*, The Deller Consort, The Bach Guild, BG-551.
2. I tried for some 60 years to find the title of the work. The search was of course made much easier once Google and YouTube were available. I remembered the notes of the ground bass throughout this time, but not the title of the work!
3. "Your impression may indeed have derived from *Ben Hur* , or maybe *Quo Vadis*, but how about the 1953 movie version of *Julius Caesar*, which opens with such a procession (and, unlike *Ben Hur*, actually included Caesar)?... Respighi's music of course predated these movies (ca. 1924)." — J.S.
4. "We hasten with faltering but eager steps" [to Jesus]

I listened to obsessively throughout those years — and throughout my life thereafter. In the 90s, on KPFA, Berkeley's left-wing radio station, Bill Sokol hosted a Sunday morning classical music program, for which this duet was the theme music. Despite countless weeks of hearing it at the start of each program, I never grew tired of it. In my seventies, it still brought me to tears. I could never get enough of hearing Stich-Randall's soprano voice go soaring into the empyrean blue on "Es sei uns dein gnädiges Antlitz erfreulich!" ("Thy gracious countenance is joyful to us."). Heim and I were ready to marry any woman with a voice like that.

But the singer we were truly in love with was Christiane Legrand of the first Swingle Singers album. (And she was French!) Even though, in memory, we talked about her in raptures on the way to and from jobs, this could not have been, because the first album by that extraordinary group didn't come out till 1963, several years after I had left the East coast. So I can only assume we communicated our passion for her — especially as inspired by her solo on the Bach Sinfonia from Partita No. 2 in C Minor, BWV 826[1] — via phone and in letters. Incredibly, we didn't know her name, because the incompetents who designed the album cover didn't list the name of any of the singers! So it wasn't until some 40 years later that I learned who she was, thanks to a reissue on CD of the original album. The names of all the singers are listed on the CD cover. An article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* for 6/17/01, p. 27, makes clear that Christiane Legrand was the lead soprano, and that it was her glorious, bell-like, mountain-stream-clear, pitch-perfect voice with its dazzling technical virtuosity, that goes soaring through this immortal music. (Marry me!)

There are some things that are beyond dispute and one is that Christiane Legrand should be adored and loved and provided with every comfort until the day she dies. Where is she now? Has she been taken care of, given the best, *loved*, throughout what is now a long life if she is still alive?[2] Has there always been someone there to tell her what a glorious voice she has, that even though the record company executives will one day erase all remembrance of her, that she can rest assured that she brought hope and brief happiness and a reason to endure one more day to countless lost souls in this wretched age?

Lehigh hosted an annual concert series by the Bethlehem Bach Choir, the concerts taking place in late spring in the tiny chapel on campus, people who hadn't been able to get seats standing and sitting on the grassy bank outside. Yet, for reasons I have yet to understand, these concerts had no appeal for me. Possibly the reason was that they were something the university sponsored, and that therefore I wanted nothing to do with — Bach lost his power when the university had him in its clutches.

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5. Choir and Orchestra of the Bach Guild, Felix Prohaska, conductor, Vanguard LP BG 537

1. Unfortunately, the recording engineer over-miked the drums, so that on the second half of this track, and on several others, the drums are annoyingly loud. It is amazing that the blunder was not caught before the album was issued.

2. "Christiane Legrand turns out to be the sister of film composer Michel Legrand... In addition to being the co-founder of *Les Swingle Singers* in Paris in the early 1960s (with Ward Lamar Swingle, who was studying music there on a Fulbright Scholarship), Christiane did vocal work in her brother's score for 'Les parapluies de Cherbourg' ('The Umbrellas of Cherbourg'). Michel and Christiane came from a musical family, following in the footsteps of father Raymond and uncle Jacques, who were band leaders in Paris in the 1940s. Their mother was Armenian (like Charles Aznavour), so perhaps that voice had Eastern roots rather than French. Christiane was still alive and well in 2001, directing her own musical spectacle "Ah! Vous dirais-je maman" ('Ah! I would tell you, mama') in Paris. ...she was born on Aug. 22, 1930, so she's probably a lively old lady of 75 now... NOTE: You can download any of a dozen or so of her renditions as ringtones for your cell phone (//cristiane- legrand.ringtone.fm). What a wonderous age we live in." — J.S.

I must confess that there were also a few pop music performers who kept me going: Fats Domino, for one. On just about any juke box you could hear:

"Ah found mah thriull
Own Blueberrih Hiull..."

and

"Ahm walkin,
Yes indeed Ahm walkin,
You know indeed Ahm walkin..."

I had an image of the droopy dog members of his band, a few skinny, not-too-bright blacks (like Lightnin' on *Amos and Andy*) who had just barely learned a few blues phrases and who didn't even know how to create a vibrato, who stood there with knees bent, leaning forward like Zach Clements at White Plains High, wearing long beige jackets and zoot suit pants, holding these unfamiliar machines their saxes, and who played because it was the only job they could get. And out of all these limitations and the hopelessness of it all came the perfect down-and-out accompaniment to Fats's singing.

And then there were performers that drove me to exasperation, chief among them The Everly Brothers, whose records always seemed to be playing on the sound system at the Mushroom Farm, a club where we had an extended engagement, as will be described below.

"Bah bah luv,
Bah bah happihness..."

I thought of them as two brothers who were girls, and it seemed clear to me that no two human beings in the history of the human race had ever loved the sound of their own voices as much as these two.

A Music Theory Course

I was always ashamed of my complete ignorance of music theory. I could play chords and scales, I knew the symbols for chords in sheet music, but that was it. I had no idea, apart from what my ear told me, what the rules of harmony were, what chords were allowed to follow what chords. Heim knew all about this. When he first talked about a one-four-one-five chord sequence (a standard blues sequence), I had to ask him what that meant. (It meant the tonic chord, for example, C major, then a chord beginning a fourth interval up, F major, then the tonic chord again, C major, then a chord beginning a fifth interval up, G major.) If someone played a chord on the piano, I had no trouble improvising to it, even though I would have been hard pressed to state precisely what chord it was. I couldn't read bass clef (and still can't).

Since I was allowed a few elective courses, I decided to take a course in harmony, if "course" is the right term, since I was the only student. The professor was Jonathan Elkus, a performance of whose opera, "The Outcast of Poker Flat", I would later review for the *Globe-Times*, as described in the previous file. He was then probably in his early thirties. I had hoped for a set of rules to be learned, but instead he had me write short phrases. I don't remember a textbook. I was disap-

pointed that harmony was as subjective as this seemed to indicate, but, from the depths of my inferiority and despair, I brought him a few notes each week, all too conscious that I hadn't the slightest idea of what I was doing. He must have sensed how desperate I was because once he praised me for a little chromatic turn I had written — a few notes of a measure! — which sounded vaguely "modern". I thought: That's how pitiful I am: professors can't even bring themselves to give me honest criticism for fear of causing me to jump off a bridge. Fully recognizing his kindness, I at the same time was angry at him for not giving me a rigorous training. This was the art form of Bach and Beethoven! They certainly didn't work on such a subjective basis. This was certainly not what Heim was studying at the Manhattan School of Music.

I actually did write two pieces of music while I was at Lehigh. These are described below under "I as Composer".

Playing Jazz

The Christmas City Six

I don't remember who invited me to join a Dixieland band that was playing on campus. Maybe it was the then-leader, a guy from Long Island named Laddie "Sooke" Souchek ("Laddie" being a nickname for "Ladislov") (class of '60), who had started the group in the fall of 1956. Within a few weeks, it was clear to me that there was a chance it could make some money, but that Laddie was not a good leader. So, without even being conscious of it, I set out to take over. We met in fraternity basements and discussed what we wanted the band to be. I said "I'm open to suggestion!" so often, by way of covering my attempts to influence the others, that they used to make fun of me for it. But I was driven to make the band succeed, since it was my only hope. And so I took over the band, probably the only palace coup of several I have attempted throughout my life that was successful.

We wrangled over a name. At first I wanted "The Doodletown Pipers" after the tune by the same name which the Sauter-Finnegan band played, and which I was taken by. Then we settled on "The Doodletown Five", and even had business cards printed up. But someone had the bright idea that a more appropriate name would be "The Christmas City Six" because we were from Bethlehem, which liked to call itself "The Christmas City", and that name stuck. The six instruments were standard for a Dixieland band: trumpet, clarinet, trombone (the "front line), piano, bass and drums (the "rhythm section"). Sometimes, when I couldn't find a replacement in the last minute for a member of the rhythm section, we were only the Christmas City Five. The band sounded acceptable without one of these instruments, but we could not legitimately accept a job with a member of the front line missing.

Early members of the group were Laddie, ('60), trombone; Joe Ashworth, ('60), Theta Chi fraternity, clarinet; myself, ('60), trumpet; Bill Heske, ('60), Sigma Phi Epsilon, piano; and Gerry Romig, ('60), Beta Theta Pi, drums.In the *Class of 1960 50th Reunion* yearbook, Laddie wrote, "Gerry Romig's dad was a university trustee. He prevented the Dean of Students from disbanding the group." I don't remember the Dean trying to do that, but I am not surprised, considering the amount of time the band spent away from campus.

Big Al Waldron

I felt we needed a business manager, if for no other reason than that I wasn't around to answer the phone on weekends when we were traveling, and this was long before the days of answering machines. I also felt it would add a little class to our annual letters to social chairmen, and to our

business cards. Somehow or other I found a guy named Al Waldron ('60) who seemed interested in the job. He was a fraternity man — a member of Beta Theta Pi — and so even when he wasn't around, there would be fraternity brothers to take messages.

He was clearly a slick operator in the making, and was well aware of it, and as a result, since he had a good sense of humor, he didn't mind when I began calling him "Big Al". I think he was majoring in business. He was good-looking, always with a ready smile, and had no difficulty in attracting women, a talent I kidded him about. I paid him 10% of our net for a job after we subtracted cost of gas. I doubt if even this incentive produced a great deal of work on his part, but as long as we had jobs to play, I wasn't bothered too much.

Most of the musicians resented his commission, especially at three in the morning as they were trying to get warm under threadbare blankets on the beer-soaked floor of some fraternity house in New England. "How much is that business manager of yours getting for this gig?" someone would ask. I would tell them. "Shit. I don't see why you pay him that much. What does he do? Answer the phone? Shit, and we gotta freeze our asses off and travel all the way to goddamn — what's the name of this town?" "Middlebury, Vermont" " — fucking goddamn Middlebury, Vermont."

But Big Al knew how to humor me, knew how to tell me what I needed to hear about how hard he was working for the band, though we both knew he was stretching the truth. I admired him for just this skill at making believe that he was doing enough work so that I would never have a reason for wanting to fire him. He was amused at my attempts to memorize poems — "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", "Fern Hill" — and pretended to be impressed when I could reel off a dozen lines.

Getting Jobs

As soon as school started, we had to start working at getting jobs. This usually began with Lewis and Romig talking to the social chairmen at their fraternity houses and, possibly, lining up a job or two sometime during football season. Usually their friends in other fraternities would come up with other leads. But the main effort consisted of Big Al and I writing a general advertising letter to social chairmen, and then mailing it to every name on the list we had slowly accumulated from places we had played in the past. I hated this, hated the having to guess what would please, hated having to address envelopes. Here is one of the letters.

JOHN FRANKLIN
and
The Christmas City Six
c/o Beta Theta Pi Fraternity
Lehigh University
Bethlehem, Pa.

Allan J. Waldron, *manager*
University 6-7579

September 15, 1958

Dear Social Chairman:

> With the arrival of another social season at your school, you are no doubt already formulating plans to make your parties and football festivities a success. And we would like to remind you that, once again, THE CHRISTMAS CITY SIX of Lehigh University is available with its unique style of Dixieland Jazz.
>
> You are probably well aware of the fine reputation which THE CHRISTMAS CITY SIX has established in numerous appearances on college campuses from Hanover, N.H., to Charlottesville, Va. — Dartmouth, Middlebury College, Princeton, Pennsylvania State University, and the University of Virginia, among others. Aside from frequent radio performances, the band has also appeared at such famous Dixieland nightspots as The Central Plaza and Jimmy Ryan's in New York City, and was held over four months at Ye Olde Mushroom Farm, Orange, New Jersey. *On 21 September 58, The Christmas City Six will be at The Roundtable, in New York City, and on 29 September 58, the band returns to Jimmy Ryan's.*
>
> THE CHRISTMAS CITY SIX employs the "front line" of trumpet, clarinet, and trombone; with a rhythm section comprised of piano, drums, and bass.
>
> If your fraternity or I.F.C. is at all interested in obtaining a top-notch college Dixieland group for party, dance, or jazz concert, THE CHRISTMAS CITY SIX is for you!
>
> Yours very truly,
>
> Allan J. Waldron
>
> P.S. Even if you do not foresee a social event at the moment, save this letter for future reference.

Our Feb. 1, 1959 letter says that

> Of all the college jazz groups, THE CHRISTMAS CITY SIX *alone* appeared at both the Hotels Roosevelt and Biltmore in New York City over the gala Thanksgiving '58 weekend. At the Roosevelt, the band was featured at the huge Ivy Jazz Band Ball, called "The Greatest Date since '38".

In memory, at least, it was rare for a house we had played at the previous year to get in touch with us before the letters went out, one reason possibly being that new social chairmen were elected each year.

Among the Lehigh fraternities we played at were Theta Delta Chi, Chi Phi, Alpha Tau Omega, Beta Theta Pi, and Pi Lambda Phi.

We had competition, of course. The lead paragraph in the Feb. 1 letter says that, "According to statistics in *Ivy Magazine*, there are approximately 160 college groups in the Eastern United States." The best-known band in college Dixieland was Stan Rubin's Tigertown Five. Rubin was a slim, good-looking guy who was an excellent clarinetist. Purists among us considered him to be a bit too slick, a bit too close to playing swing a la Benny Goodman, but at any kind of important gathering of bands — for example, Thanksgiving Weekend at the Biltmore Hotel in New York City — his band[1] was sure to be there, along with lesser-known groups such as Eli's Chosen Six (Yale) and the Yale Bull Pups, Russ Bowman and the Finger Lake Five, the Pennsylvania Six-

1. The ad for "Stan Rubin Music" on the inside front cover of the November, 1958 issue of *Ivy Magazine* indicates that he also had a 13-piece dance band. The Five is advertised as "of Grace Kelly Wedding Fame". In addition, he offered "Other Versatile Groups of all sizes, featuring the BEST of Musicianship".

Pence, and the Cornell Stumplifters, to mention only a few. (I don't think I ever knew what university Rubin attended.)

In another world, as far as we were concerned, was Lester Lanin, who led, not one band, but a whole regiment of bands, their single, homogeneous Lester Lanin sound being designed to appeal to hotel-and-country-club-and-party audiences. The host or hostess could choose any group from, I think, a trio up to a full dance band and be sure of exactly what he or she was getting. I think that one or two musicians who played with us also had played gigs in one of these bands. The requirements were stringent: you had to have, in effect, memorized the fake book[1], and if you were a horn or reed player, you had to be able to play harmony as well. Most important, you had to be able to play in the Lester Lanin style. You wore exactly the clothes that were prescribed. On the other hand, the pay was known to be exceptionally good. Of course, we jazz musicians had nothing but contempt for such a crass commercialization of music. We usually referred to him as "Lester Lanolin", after the name of an ingredient in hair tonics of the time.

With the exception of Joe Timmer, the leader of a polka band which I will describe later, no one ever called me, personally, to play a job, although a black drummer named Jimmy Cook once invited me to sit in with his band at the Colored Voters Association in Bethlehem. I can't remember how I came to know him, but we would say hello when passing on the street (I think he worked for the Post Office): "Hey, Jimmy!" "Hey, man!" I don't think "What's happenin'?" had yet become a common greeting. This was probably still the days of "How's it goin'?", "How're ya doin'?" I remember walking down a big hall after having been invited to come up on the stage by the leader, my face sweating, my hands clutching my horn. The leader called out a standard blues tune, and I did my best to play as black as I could. But I felt thoroughly out of my depth, and ashamed for even pretending I could produce anything of interest for this audience, which was entirely black, as far as I could tell. A guy named Benny Snyder had a successful comic band in the Lehigh area, I had met him, and although I had no use for the music, my vanity was hurt that he never called me to fill in for an absent trumpet player.

I was by no means the best trumpet player at Lehigh. A blond kid with a crewcut could play high notes like Maynard, and seemed to consider it nothing to brag about. I don't think he played regularly in any jazz group. And so already in those years, especially with the endless rejections of short stories, I was resigning myself to the fact that if I wanted to do something, I would have to organize it and do it on my own — lead my own jazz group, publish what I wrote.

The Musicians

The Black Book

Being the bandleader, I had to keep track of musicians, so I bought a little black loose-leaf book measuring 3½ by 5½ inches which had tabs for each pair of letters in the alphabet: AB, CD, EF, ... It had six little rings that could be opened and closed, and came with a supply of blue-lined paper punched to match the holes. Some forty years later, I still have the book, still use it to hold names and phone numbers. The original ones are still there: Joe Ashworth ('60)(clarinet) (Ashworth was in Theta Chi fraternity); Charlie Acito (trombone); his brother Frank Acito (piano), both from Bayonne, N.J.; Tom Artin (trombone)(from Princeton); Pete Heim (piano, sax) (at Manhattan School of Music); Fred Manganelli (piano); Roger Mannell (trombone); Frank Sava-

1. This was a collection of illegally copied lead sheets, which for each tune gave the melody notes to be played by a given instrument, typically trumpet, plus chord markings.

rese (bass); Chris Smith (bass); Lou Slingerland (drums);... A few famous names are present: the trombonist Vic Dickenson, whom I spoke to on the phone once, but who was busy at the time we wanted to use him; Henry Mancini, who sent me a copy of his score for a theme from *Touch of Evil* in response to my letter; Mike Carney (piano), who was related to Art Carney, the actor and comedian; Bob Newman (sax), who was a sideman with the Woody Herman band.

Heim

Heim was not a regular member of the band, since he was in New York attending Manhattan School of Music and since he much preferred playing modern jazz. But once in a while, when Romig couldn't make a job, and we couldn't find another piano player, I would call him, and he would fake his way through the easy chord changes of Dixieland.

We were constantly arguing about music, listening to it on the car radio, recommending records to each other. He had, at least at times, a low opinion of Brubeck, and sometimes, when I mentioned his name, would start singing "Davy, Davy Brubeck..." to the tune of the theme song of the TV show which had Davy Crockett as hero ("Davy, Davy Crockett/King of the wild frontier..."). He, like many other jazz musicians, would occasionally mock Brubeck for trying to bring classical music into jazz (the best example of this that I know of is Brubeck's solo on "Give a Little Whistle"). They would say his playing was "too white".I despised this narrow, all-too-American view of what jazz should be (I sometimes couldn't help calling those who held it "a bunch of shits"). I had no doubt that Brubeck's solo on "Give a Little Whistle"was one of the greatest jazz improvisations.

But we agreed about certain things. One night, returning from a job somewhere in upstate New York, a group of us were roaring down the New York Thruway in the '49 Ford. I was tuning the radio when suddenly a piece by Bach came on. All I can remember now is that it was an instrumental work — perhaps one of the violin concertos, or the Concerto for Two Pianos in C Major. Heim shouted, "Yeah! Leave that!" He and I listened for a few moments, then started singing along with the theme. Heim started beating time on the dashboard. We conducted, we shouted, we screamed. I lowered the window on the driver's side. The freezing night air filled the car. Heim: "Bach was the greatest composer who ever lived! Bach was God, do you realize that, Franklin?" And so, at seventy miles an hour, the two of us singing, conducting, he pounding on the dashboard, we raced down the broad asphalt expanse of the Thruway. "*Yes! Yes! Yes!*..."

Since he was studying music, he couldn't help but be influenced by the academic Party line. For example, he had strong opinions about Schoenberg, which I sensed he was repeating from professors he was impressed by. He would tell me, with contempt, that many of Schoenberg's pieces could be shown to have a key after all (he mentioned E-flat as being one of them[1]). I doubt if at that time I had even heard a Schoenberg work, so I took his word for it.

He also talked about the Schillinger System of Music Composition, but he seemed ambivalent about it. Although Schillinger himself had died in 1943, his System, which was aimed at the composition of popular music, flourished until the sixties.

He was certainly a man of feeling, but he could at times be unwittingly cruel. One fall or winter day during a school break, after we had gotten together briefly, either in Briarcliff or White Plains, as we were discussing girls and the subject of acne had come up (he never had it), he said,

1. I can still remember clearly the phone conversation in which he told me these things: I was kneeling, facing the wall on the dark green cushions of the wall bench in the downstairs front hall , the phone being on the little shelf where the upper part of the backs of the benches on the two walls came together.

with a laugh, as though it were one of the amusing things that can happen to a person, "Your face has come to a slow boil, man."

I was utterly crushed. I tried to pretend that the pimples didn't bother me, but for a few moments, I could hardly breathe from the sudden hopelessness of my situation. Another time, again as we were discussing girls and what appealed to them, we got onto the subject of hairlines. He had a full head of hair, with a hairline that went across his forehead. And, with that same laugh, he pointed out that, unlike him, I had a widow's peak (it was the first time I had heard the term), and that that was a sign of impending baldness. Again I tried to pretend that it didn't bother me, that that would only happen years later anyway, but I accepted it as yet another prophecy of my ineluctable doom.

Like all students in every generation, we had a natural affinity for things that were gross. One of us: "How're you doing?" The other: "I feel like an afterbirth, man." (We spent a certain amount of time discussing what, in fact, that would actually feel like.) When I told him I had never been able to learn how to burp whenever I wanted to, he told me about a guy he knew at Columbia who had trained himself to burp the three names in succession, "Buxtehude, Bach, and Beethoven".

I doubt if anyone worried about homosexuality to the extent I did, but I do remember that once, at a party in a bohemian apartment in New York City, all of us sitting on the wooden floor, he pointed out a guy, a clarinetist he knew, and said he had recently found out the guy was queer, and, even worse, was living with an older man. He was clearly shocked even in the telling of it. Finding out the guy was suffering from leprosy would have been nothing in comparison.

One of the Manhattan School's requirements for graduation was that each student — or at least each student majoring in composition — submit a work of his own. Heim's was part of a string quartet, written for his teacher, a man named Gianini who, I gathered, had a certain minor reputation as a serious composer. Heim played some of his composition for me. It sounded right, I suppose, with lots of anger in the cello part. He told me that Gianini had said, in reply to the inevitable question, that early in your career, you have to decide if you want to spend the rest of your life creating or trying to get your stuff performed and published. It was clear that he felt the former was the better choice.

Heim went to Paris after graduation, this being a particularly troubled part of his life. He was unsure of his talent. His father wanted him to go into banking or some other equally respectable profession. Heim got heavily into drugs. Schoenberg's ideas were all the rage. I think Heim once said that one of his (Heim's) fellow students in Paris was the serialist composer Karlheinz Stockhausen. But Heim had neither the temperament nor the intellectual equipment for such abstraction, and he came back after a year or so, telling me that music was first and foremost about feeling.

David R—

R— played clarinet and alto sax. Heim had given me his name and number when I told him that our regular clarinetist couldn't make a job. I met him for the first time on the Jersey side of the George Washington Bridge, where we had agreed to pick him up on the way to a job. I noticed he had a funny way of holding a cigarette, namely, in the crook of his curled index finger. He was wearing his tan corduroy Brooks Brothers jacket, which he was clearly rather proud of, as it was the only thing from the world of the upper class which he owned.

I think Heim first met R— at Columbia before Heim went to Manhattan School of Music. R— was studying psychology or history of art. He was the most well-adjusted — perhaps I

should say, most self-confident — musician I knew. One time when the traffic light had just changed from red, I asked, out of genuine curosity, why it takes so long for stopped traffic to get moving after the light changes. He replied instantly, "Because people are stupid." He said it in a way that made clear he had no doubt that he was right. He seemed robustly free of neurosis. But his self-confidence often became arrogance, and, I sometimes thought, that arrogance protected him from having to deal with some uncomfortable issues of the day. For example, he proclaimed without hesitation that non-representational art was not art. Period. (Abstract expressionism was then advertising itself as the future of all art.) He didn't think much of Stravinsky, much less of any atonal music, because you couldn't have music "without melody": music had to have a melody, just as art has to represent something. He was skeptical about Gerry Mulligan's reputation because "he can't improvise". He considered Ornette Coleman a fraud. I remember the argument we had in his apartment. His girlfriend (soon to be his wife) Janet, was there, possibly also Heim. This was shortly after the release of Coleman's first album, *Something Else!* (Contemporary M 3551 Monophonic). Because Ornette played on a plastic sax[1], and sounded much different from any other sax player, the rumor was going around in jazz circles that he was a hoax. I argued strongly in his favor, saying that no one who listened to his solo on "Jayne" — or to Don Cherry's trumpet solo on the same tune — could possibly say Coleman and his fellow musicians didn't know how to play jazz. But R— wouldn't be budged.

One night as we were driving back from a job, we were discussing careers. I don't know what brought it up, but I asked him, "What about becoming a philosophy professor?" He eliminated that possibility immediately: "Philosophy is nothing but a perpetual cutting contest", meaning that the perpetual attempts by philosophers to one-up each other was like the competitions, typically held in the early hours of the morning after the evening's performances, in which jazz musicians tried to outplay each other. I have always thought his reply got to the essence of philosophy, although philosophers seem determined not to address this fact about their discipline. If philosophy is a kind of perpetual one-upmanship — you publish a new way of regarding the world and/or man's place in it, and I publish a criticism showing all that you have omitted, or I publish a newer way which encompasses yours (like the children's game of Scissors, Rock, and Cloth) — what is there of lasting value in it?

We eliminated jazz musician as a possible career because we didn't want to live in poverty the rest of our lives and, although we probably didn't say so, because we knew we didn't have the talent[2]. After a pause in the conversation, I repeated the question. "So what do you want to be when you grow up?" He replied, "I want to be a snob." And at this he certainly succeeded. Soon after he began studying art history, he was adept at making pronouncements, one of which, I remember was on the subject of Giotto (c. 1267-1337, considered the first of the great artists of the Italian Renaissance). It sounded as though he was reciting from a book, but there wasn't a trace of doubt in his voice as to the truth of what he said.

Because he was prematurely losing his hair, he combed it forward. I remember sitting in the back of a student dive near 125th St., possibly the West End, the place all heavy, dark wood and brownish yellow light, and crammed with students. We were, I think, talking about an upcoming

1. The story was that after playing at a jazz club in his unique style, some unappreciative members of the audience waited for him outside the club, beat him up and smashed his metal sax. He couldn't affford a new metal one, so he bought one made of plastic.

2. That judgment applies far more to me than to him: in later life, while he was director of an important art institution, he played occasional jobs, and even toured, with several well-known jazz stars, including Chico Hamilton, Donald Byrd, Leonard Garment, and the painter Larry Rivers.

job, or about personnel for the band. I sat there wondering how he could handle going bald at such a young age. It didn't seem to bother him, although no one ever broached the subject with him. I still had, maybe, ten years left before the girls would start to become harder and harder to get because of this affliction, but he was already having to face it now, at the age of 20 or thereabouts. But it didn't prevent him from having a girlfriend. Her name was Janet, and she was a musician's loyal girlfriend, coming to many of our jobs with us, and patiently sitting through the three or four hours of racket which was our playing. She had full lips, black hair, a twinkle in her eye, and a bemused attitude toward these young males all running around trying to become great musicians. Her father was a famous professor of biochemistry. One day, as we were driving back from a job, the subject of age came up. Someone asked, "What do you want to be doing when you're fifty?" and Janet replied, "God, at fifty I hope I'm dead!"

We would drop R— off at her house after a gig, full of envy that the two of them had parents that would allow such a thing. R— was rather surprised at our amazement. He said that sometimes her parents served them breakfast in bed in the morning. The rest of us were still dealing with parents who didn't want to believe their sons had ever had sexual intercourse. I thought, as I often had before, "These incredible Jews!" Despite her successful Jewish family, as far as I know she never made a career for herself in any of the important professions. She did charity work for a time after she and David were married.

I wanted above all to live with a woman in the way that I imagined David and Janet lived together after they were married: have a big bed with a shelf full of books behind it, roll over after making love, grab one, the two of us lying there reading, as comfortable with books as with having sex with each other. (Now, in old age, I sleep with books, no woman, and am happier for it.)

Because he had a normal sex life, and no lack of self-confidence, he could at best only regard with wry amusement the anxieties of a real neurotic. One time, when we had to crowd into someone's car, and I wound up sitting on his knee in the front seat, he sensed how I was doing my best to sit as lightly as possible and support as much of my weight as I could on my bent legs (for reasons the reader can guess), he didn't hesitate for a moment, and laughed that bemused laugh of his and said, "What's the matter with you, Franklin? Are you queer?" Fortunately, my head was jammed against the roof so no one could see how red my face became.

David's parents were both artists. His mother, who painted under what I assume was her maiden name, painted in a style that reminded me of Thomas Hart Benton in its whimsical realism. I always liked her painting, "Children's Games", which was a modern version of the original, done in the 16th century, by Pieter Breughel. She also did commercial illustrations, for example, the cover for Macy's Christmas catalog each year. His father, Edgar, painted in a style that seemed to me to be derivative of Picasso. His work seemed always carefully thought out, deliberate, craftsmanlike — the work of a professor of painting, which is what he was, at an important art school in New York. He seemed to me the epitome of the New York Jewish intellectual of the thirties: bald, scholarly, serious.

David's parents lived across the Hudson in rural Rockland County, which he referred to as "the County", near the mountain called "High Tor". He liked to drop the names of some of the famous artists who lived there or who had lived there: the playwright Robert Sherwood , the sculptor David Smith (I learned in the course of writing this book that Smith was his godfather), and composer John Cage, whom he used to play cards with and whom he described as "a nice old queer." David also claimed to be a friend of Alger Hiss, whom he always referred to as "Alger"("Aljuh") and who he thought was completely innocent of the charge of having been a Soviet spy.

I am quite sure that David introduced me to Dostoevsky, about whom he was clearly enthusiastic. Heim picked up this enthusiasm, and the three of us sat around, sometimes in a coffee shop near Columbia which I am reasonably confident was the West Side Cafe, talking about, among other things, the chapter "The Grand Inquisitor" in *The Brothers Karamazov.* I can remember David , who always smiled as though it was rather silly what some of these Russians, or Christians, thought up, arguing about Alyosha's saintliness, and snickering over the fact that, contrary to all expectations, Father Zossima's corpse began to stink, and that this threatened the faith of those who believed him a saint. I'm sure David introduced me to "Notes from Underground" also, which I immediately thought wonderfully profound and strange: "I am a sick man...I am a spiteful man. No, I am not a pleasant man at all. I believe there is something wrong with my liver... I am extremely superstitious, at least sufficiently so to respect medicine. (I am well-educated enough not to be superstitious, but I am superstitious for all that.) The truth is, I refuse medical treatment out of spite." No writer I had ever read, in school or out, wrote things like that!

He also introduced me to Yeats, reciting, casually, during the course of a conversation about how bad the present was, or about people we didn't like, the two lines,

"The best lack all conviction while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity."

I thought: I have to read the poet who wrote lines like that! They seemed so unlike the stuff that the teachers and professors loved.David himself had no talent as an artist, a fact that, along with premature baldness, would have destroyed me had I been in his position. But as far as I could tell, it didn't bother him at all. In fact, he went on to build an eminently successful career as a dean of an art school, then as director of a nationally-known art gallery. He had a younger brother, Joel, who later on proved to have real talent as a painter, though, as far as I know, he never made a career out of it. I heard years later that he had taken to organizing international music festivals.

After David and Janet were married, they moved into an apartment in the vicinity of Columbia University. To have gotten such an apartment was a result of his skill at a technique of apartment hunting that rent control had made a necessity in New York City. The regulations allowed only minimal rent increases each year, so that long-lived New Yorkers who held onto their apartments eventually saw their housing costs drop to phenomenally low rates. As a result, apartment seekers would try to locate elderly renters, then do whatever was necessary to get their name near the top of the landlord's queue. When the elderly renter died, and if the apartment seeker was lucky (others in the queue ahead of him having moved away, or found another apartment, or died), he or she would get the apartment. David somehow heard of a little old lady who had a large apartment in the vicinity of Columbia, right where they wanted to live, and, as luck would have it, she died right around the time they were married. I seem to remember him saying the rent was around $8 a month, but I can't believe that figure.

In memory, at least, the place was large, with a front room and several bedrooms and a kitchen and who knows what else. He and Janet had a pet rat which they named Smerdyakov, after the epileptic half-brother of the Karamazovs in Dostoevsky's novel.

I think I first heard the term "pre-Columbian art" at his apartment when he showed me some figurines he had. (I was in late middle age before I understood where the term came from.)

R— didn't have any particular love for Dixieland, but like all competent musicians, he was able to fake his way through the tunes we played. He was much more at home in modern jazz.

We played "Line for Lyons" whenever we felt that the audience would tolerate it, a tune which, in Mulligan's recording, had a distinct harmony line — perhaps I should say, an easily memorized harmony line. I played the melody, R— played the harmony line. We had an ongoing joke about our one day being successful, and that I would turn up at his door, he would open it, and say, right off the bat, "Won't you have some Scotch?", he holding a bottle of Haig & Haig Pinch.

Dave Hunt

The most reliable, the most professional musician we used was our bass player Dave Hunt, whom we affectionately called "Ichabod" because of his resemblance to Ichabod Crane in the Washington Irving's story, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow", which had been recently made into a full-length cartoon. Tall, thin, with a protruding Adam's apple, he always wore clothes that seemed too small for him. He was also the most moral musician any of us knew: a devout Catholic who went to early Mass on Sunday no matter how late we had been playing. Once, at a job at Middlebury, Vt., all of us sleeping on the floor, we heard someone moving around at the crack of dawn. It was Dave. He was getting dressed.

"Where are you going, Dave?" someone shouted in a whisper.

"Church. See you guys later." And off he went, bundled up in his long overcoat, leather gloves, and long scarf wound around his neck, walking through the snow.

He was a student at Seton Hall and worked at NBC in New York City as an usher. He seemed an oddly determined, yet happy young man. He was proud of the fact that he could play gigs with just about any band, and also sight-read music, and play in various classical orchestras. He was proud of his professionalism, proud that he was good at the exciting, special trade of being a musician. When he wanted to talk about a particular tune, he always snapped his fingers to the rhythm: "You know, 'Moonlight and Roses'", *snap*, *snap*, *snap*, *snap*, and then he would sing the first few words in tune.

He lived in a house with stone steps and a front porch in the vicinity of Orange, N.J. Sometimes we picked him up there. He was always ready, the bass always in its case, the bow sticking neatly out of its pocket on the side. Resin was in one of the other pockets, plus extra strings, plus a fake book in another.

He liked to tell inside stories about the business, like the time he was playing in a classical orchestra in New York City and they were working on a new piece with a long, complicated drum part. The musicians were asking themselves if there was any way to know when to come in, other than by counting all those measures, and someone piped up that maybe when the drummer was finished, he could just do a roll-off — the traditional *bump-bump*, *bump-bump*, *brrrrrrrump-bump* that is used by marching bands to signal the instrumentalists that it is time to start playing the next march. A laughably preposterous suggestion, of course, in the circumstances.

In my desperate ignorance of how I was going to accomplish something important in life, I once asked him, as we driving somewhere, if he would help me with the orchestration if I should one day write a musical. (He had some skills as an arranger.) I was riddled with shame, embarrassment, and a full awareness of how remote such a possibility was. He was clearly puzzled by my question, no doubt found it odd, but in his gentlemanly way said yes.

The Acito Brothers

Then there were the Acito brothers, Charlie and Frank. Charlie played trombone, Frank piano. They lived in Bayonne, N. J. Their father had been in show business, either as an agent or

stand-up comic, I can't remember. There were rumors that they had an uncle in the Mafia. We considered this a definite advantage, since we were often in trouble with the musicians' union. Charlie had black, wavy, Gladstone Gander hair. He had played Vegas one summer, and therefore in my eyes at least he was a seasoned pro. He had a sardonic view of the band. More than once, as we were standing on the stage, and I was getting ready to give the downbeat on the first tune of the evening, in my nervousness casting a quick glance over my shoulder at the rhythm section, and saying half to myself, "Is this band finally ready?" Charlie, holding his trombone at the ready, would grumble from behind the mouthpiece, half to himself but so I would hear, "Dis band oughta disband." It was only later that I found out the saying was Dizzy Gillespie's. At the end of a set, I would sometimes mumble, in a black accent, just before or after I made the announcement that we were going to take a fifteen-minute break but that we would be right back, "And now it is my pleasure to turn you over."[1]

Charlie's brother was quieter, more tolerant of our efforts. I suspect the truth is they both continued to play with us because we could be relied upon to have gigs during the fall, winter, and spring, and because I always got the arrangements and meeting places and dates and times right, and because they always got paid what I promised them and on time.

If both of them were on the same gig (sometimes we only needed Charlie, because Gerry Romig was playing piano), they would drive up in a big, black, Packard gangster car. They would wear long coats, and as they got out of the car, they looked like two guys on the verge of making a hit, and not in the entertainment sense.

Tom Artin

Our regular trombonist was a Princeton student named Tom Artin. But R — started calling him "Tah Martin", and that name stuck, at least between him and me[2]. "Hey, man, see if you can get Martin for the gig. He's good." He was remarkable in that he played almost entirely by ear. I am not sure he was even able to read music. As a result, at least to my ear, his solos always sounded like they were "hand-made" — in other words, as though each time he had to figure out what tightening of his embouchure and what movements of the slide would be necessary to express the good musical ideas he had. His solos always sounded like they were the result of hard work which had just barely succeeded in achieving the job at hand. As a result, they had a unique appeal.

R — told me that Artin was the son of one of the century's greatest algebraicists.[3]. I gathered, however, that Artin considered himself the black sheep in the family, since he apparently had no mathematical talent. (He was studying English literature, eventually getting a PhD. in Medieval Literature.)

I remember a job in Princeton, he and I standing waiting for something, I telling him how I was reading *Pickwick Papers*, and how much I liked Dickens, and he replying that Dickens was second-rate, a mere caricaturist. I was crushed, because I knew this was the academic Party line from one of the nation's most prestigious universities. I argued against his view, but could see it made no impression on him. Close to fifty years later, I found that at that very time Nabokov, at Cornell, had for five years been delivering a lecture on Dickens' *Bleak House* that began,

1. From the standard line used by masters-of-ceremonies and radio announcers: "And now it is my pleasure to turn you over to ..." following which they would give the name of the next person to speak.
2. A similar transposition of parts of a name occurs in one of the early Woody Allen films, when the Allen character assumes that the first name of the famous French author Guy de Maupassant is "Guyde".
3. Emil Artin, I believe.

"We are now ready to tackle Dickens. We are now ready to embrace Dickens. We are now ready to bask in Dickens... With Dickens we expand... Modern authors still get drunk on his vintage... We just surrender ourselves to Dickens' voice — that is all. If it were possible I would like to devote the fifty minutes of every class meeting to mute meditation, concentration, and admiration of Dickens." [1]

While reading Nabokov's lecture, I looked up the article on Dickens (written by G. K. Chesterton) in my father's 1942 Encyclopedia Britannica.

"He was buried in Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey; and new and vulgar as many critics had called his work, he was far more of a poet than many who were buried there as poets...Though his characters were often caricatures, they were not such wild caricatures as was supposed by those who had never met such characters. And the critics had never met the characters; because the critics did not live in the common life of the English people; and Dickens did...The poverty and anarchy of Dickens' early life had stuffed his memory with strange things and people never to be discovered in Tennysonian country houses or even Thackerayan drawing rooms."[2]

Perhaps I can't blame Artin. After all, you don't go to schools like Princeton and Harvard to learn to think for yourself. You go there to learn to think like other people — eminent people to be sure, but other people nonetheless. In any case, it is now clear that the Party line at Princeton differed from that at Cornell.

Artin was the only one of us who didn't smoke. For the rest, it was part of being a musician. I smoked Pall Malls and Viceroys, once in a while a brand that was a refined version of a popular pipe tobacco, Rum and Maple. I had a cheap, metal lighter which usually smelled of lighter fluid. Part of the ritual of smoking was rapping the pack against the side of your clenched fist to force the tobacco to settle tightly in the cigarette. (This affectation is still popular among students and the young working class in Berkeley. In fact, the sloppier the person's clothes — the closer he looks to being, or becoming, a street person — the more violent the rapping. With some you can hear it half a block away. "Oh, yes: you people may ignore me most of the time but by God you will not ignore me when I get ready to light up.")

Rick Lewis

Rick Lewis ('61) was our regular drummer. He was a tall, good-looking guy with a crew-cut and gleaming white teeth who always seemed to be in a good mood. He was in the same fraternity — Phi Gamma Delta — as Roger Pensky, who would later go on to become a famous racing car driver and businessman. (Eddie Sachs, the racing car driver, also lived in or near to Bethlehem.) The fraternity house was located on a winding tree-shaded street on the hill above campus. Once or twice Lewis got us jobs there.

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1. Nabokov, Vladimir, *Lectures on Literature*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, N.Y., 1980, pp. 63-64.
2. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 7, "Damascu to Educ", The Encyclopedia Britannica Company, Ltd., London, 1942, p. 335

Gerry Romig

Romig ('60) at first alternated between drums, bass, and piano, then settled down to piano. Something about his looks — short blond hair, below-average height — and manner always made me think of him as the type who goes on to live in a big house in the suburbs, has a job as a vice president of an insurance company, plays a lot of golf, is a member of the Rotary Club, makes sure that favored clients get a good bottle of Scotch at Christmas. He was in the same fraternity as Big Al, our business manager, namely, Beta Theta Pi.

He was a competent piano player and he also switched off to bass sometimes. When I wrote one of my two jazz tunes, he worked out the chords with me, I standing next to him as he sat and tried various possibilities. I envied his ability to do that, I still having only the vaguest of idea of what some of the names associated with the task even meant: "second inversion", "passing chord", "flatted fifth". I stood there like a man who doesn't speak a language, knowing exactly what he wants to say but not knowing how to say it.

I think that, like R—, he got married toward the end of college. As we drove around to gigs, he would talk to Lewis about some of his new experiences sharing living quarters, in particular, a bathroom, with a woman. He said that a guy he knew told him that, soon after he had gotten married, as he was taking a shower one morning, his wife came into the bathroom and blew a fart. "He was ready to ask for a divorce!" He said it with a laugh that we completely understood, since most of us considered it completely bizarre (practically perverted) behavior on the part of the woman.

Joe Ashworth

Our regular clarinetist was Joe Ashworth, a member of Theta Chi fraternity, and a serious electrical engineering student who hoped, so he said, to someday work for New Jersey Power and Light. But he was also a serious student of Dixieland and could be depended on to actually know the tunes. With his wavy hair, and dark rimmed glasses, he looked like a boyish professor as he concentrated on a solo. When he wasn't playing, he would hold the clarinet straight up, thumb under the silver holder in the middle. My only complaint about him was that he was overly fond of certain standard phrases, for example, the well-known phrase from Verdi's *Aida*: *dah dee dah dee dah, dah; dah dah dah dah dah,...* which he would play in a sarcastic manner. Otherwise, he was just about everything you could ask for in a band like ours.

Dick Best

Our banjo player was Dick Best, another guy who, with his precise crew-cut, looked like everyone's conception of a college student of the time. Many years later someone told me his father owned a large pencil-manufacturing company, which Dick eventually inherited and took over the management of. In any case, he was probably the least bohemian, least wild, of any of us. And he knew where his loyalties lay. Shortly before graduation, we were approached by Siegfried Bart, president of Urania Records in Belleville, N.J., who was interested in recording us. We couldn't believe our good luck. We set a time for the recording session, which was to take place in a studio in New Jersey. We practiced the tunes we wanted on our first LP, and arrived at the appointed time. Recording was harder work than we had anticipated, with many takes for each tune. Then, while we still hadn't completed our list, I heard Dick say something quietly to some of the others. I could see he was bothered about something. I asked him what it was. Well, he had to go to graduation rehearsal. He was sorry, he didn't think the session would last that

long. I said, in so many words, but more politely, Fuck the graduation rehearsal, man, we are being given a chance at immortality, no one leaves a recording session to go to a *graduation rehearsal*. Well, someone did. The Urania representatives said we could always reschedule another time, but I sensed that they weren't too eager about it. We never heard from them again, except that the tape they had made that day arrived in my mailbox. I still have it, although, since it is on a reel, as opposed to a cassette, I have no idea what if anything remains of that one and only recording of our music after forty years.[1]

The Nazi

Another guy we used was a friend of the Acito brothers. I don't even remember what instrument he played (sax, I think), but I remember he had a way of hanging back in conversation, saying very little, then doing something outrageous that would break us all up. One time in a restaurant somewhere along the New York Thruway, the waitress had just come over to take our order, and was standing there, pencil to pad, asking what we would like, when he suddenly came out with a perfect imitation of a Nazi officer. Hand thrust in coat, he leaned back in his seat and said, "Mine friends vould like —" He gave our respective orders, then continued, "...und if sis iss not done to our zetisfection, I vill hef ze trucks drive *op*, und ze becks vill be lowered, und ze machine guns vill zen *slaughter* everyone in sis restaurant, including you, mine liebchen, but not including us, zince ve are, of course, loyal members of ze *Serd Reich. Heil Hitler*!" And his arm snapped out in the Nazi salute. I remember to this day the expression on her face: shock, disbelief, fear, then quick looks at the rest of us for some confirmation as to whether it was a joke or the real thing. We were practically under the table with laughter by then.

Herbie Nichols

I don't know who first told me about him — I assume it was either Heim or R—, since Herbie lived in New York[2]. The recommendation demanded that I give him a try: "Hey, Franklin, there's this fucking great spade piano player and you have *got* to use him on a gig. He's starving, man, lives in this goddamn tenement, he'll be grateful for any work at all, man, but he's also great. He plays like Basie. Here's his number. Call him, for God's sake." He was a quiet, modest, always friendly middle-aged black who really did play like Count Basie. We always had a rhythm section, of course, and it always was capable of laying down a beat that people could dance to, but when Herbie Nichols played with us, suddenly we had a *rhythm* section. He seemed to know the chords of every tune we played, and he just sat back there, at the piano, and — what can I say? — made the changes. He always seemed surprised and touched by the effusive praise of us white guys.

It was only in November, 2007 that I learned who this remarkable musician really was. The Canadian jazz critic Mark Miller, after reading the above paragraph, told me that Herbie had made recordings with jazz stars like Art Blakey and Max Roach on the Blue Note label. In addition, in 1953 he had recorded with the famous trumpet player Rex Stewart and in 1958 had played in the band of trumpeter Joe Thomas. He was also a composer in a "post-Thelonious-Monk" style. He

1. In the summer of 2005 I took the tape to the studio of Fantasy Records in Berkeley, CA, where I had been living for many years. A recording engineer said he would be glad to see what was on the tape. After many tries at various parts, he found that all that was on it was a male voice speaking Spanish slowly, as though for instructional purposes. Nothing else.

2. I still have his address in my black book from those years: Apt. 1E, 850 Hewitt Place, Bronx 59, New York; phone Ludlow 9-4346.

wasn't exactly "middle-aged" when he played with us, being then only in his late thirties, although I remember a few strands of gray in his hair. In the early eighties, the Europeans started to play his compositions, and ever since then his posthumous fame had been growing, a fact that would have pleased him, since he was always living on the edge of poverty (Miller said that he lived with his sister to save on rent), and was always unable to figure out why he wasn't more famous. I suspect that one reason was that he was a quiet, decent, sober human being in an age when wild behavior and drug and alcohol addiction were almost prerequisites for being a jazz star. As a result of his limited success playing the jazz he wanted to play, he became adept at many different styles and schools, which explains his uncanny ability to provide such superb background in our group on tunes he never heard before. Following is the Wikipedia article on him as of November, 2007:

> **Herbie Nichols** (January 3, 1919 - April 12, 1963), was an American jazz pianist and composer. Obscure during his lifetime, he is now highly regarded by many musicians and critics.
>
> Herbie was born in New York City. During much of his life he was forced to take work as a Dixieland musician instead of playing the types of jazz he preferred. He performed originally in bop groups, but is best known today for his own highly original compositions, program music which combines bop, Dixieland, and West Indian music with harmonies derived from Erik Satie and Bela Bartok.
>
> His first known work was with the Savoy Sultans in 1937, but he did not find performing at Minton's Playhouse a few years later a very happy experience. The competitive atmosphere of that scene did not suit his personality. However, he did become friends with fellow pianist Thelonious Monk, even if his own critical neglect would be more enduring.
>
> From about 1947 he persisted in trying to persuade Blue Note Records producer to sign him up. He finally recorded for Blue Note in 1955 and 1956, which led to the issue of three albums. Other tracks from these sessions were not issued until the 1980s. His tune "Serenade" had lyrics added, and as "Lady Sings the Blues" became firmly identified with Billie Holiday. In 1957 he recorded his last album for Bethlehem Records. All of his recordings as leader have been released on CD.
>
> Nichols died from leukemia at the age of 44.
>
> In recent years his music has been most energetically promoted by Roswell Rudd, who worked with Nichols in the early 1960s. Rudd has recorded or programmed at least three albums featuring Nichols' compositions, including *The Unheard Herbie Nichols* (1996). A New York group, the Herbie Nichols Project (part of the Jazz Composers' Collective) has recorded three albums largely dedicated to unrecorded Nichols' compositions, many of which Nichols had deposited in the Library of Congress.

In August of 2009, I told David R —that I was listening to the re-release of Herbie's Blue Note recordings, and asked if he remembered him. In an email of 8/26/09, David replied:

"I do remember Herbie Nichols quite well. Went to see him play a couple of times at some joint in the Village. You may recall that he always hummed very loudly through his nose as he played -- I can see and hear him (humming) in my mind as this is written."

Bob Newman

The nearest we ever came to having someone famous play with us[1] was when we were able to hire Bob Newman, who played tenor sax in the Woody Herman band. Between tours with the

band, he often had a few weeks or even a month without work, and so he was glad to play with us if we happened to need him. (Normally, we preferred a clarinetist, and second to that, an alto saxophonist, so tenor sax was really a third choice.)

Newman looked like a guy who worked in an insurance company: he was bald, with a fringe of black hair around the sides, and had a quiet, cooperative manner that made clear how glad he was to have this little income we were providing him. He always stood slightly back from the trombonist and me in the front line, out of shyness, I assumed, or out of a conscious decision to do nothing that might outshine us. From a few things he said, we gathered that financially he was hanging on by the skin of his teeth. He never gave the slightest impression that he looked down on us because we were just a bunch of college kids whereas he was, in fact, a member of one of the world's leading jazz big bands. He lived in a little white suburban-looking house by the side of a main road in Clark, New Jersey[1], was married, had a couple of kids, I believe.

He didn't know most of the Dixieland tunes we played, but he was such a good musician that he had no trouble faking his way through them. I never heard him play a wrong note. Any of the modern tunes that we occasionally snuck in — "Blues Walk" or "Line for Lyons" or "Bernie's Tune" — he knew by heart, and could solo on effortlessly.

Mike Carney

Mike Carney, another of our piano players, was related to the comedian Art Carney, then starring in the Jackie Gleason show, "The Honeymooners". He was a close friend of Lewis's and Romig's. He was probably the best all-around pianist we ever used, and was also noted for his ability at deliberately playing hilariously wrong notes, as was Alec Gray (affectionately known as "Clank" for this ability) my childhood neighbor who was the pianist on several jobs I played in my high school years (see the chapter, "White Plains High School"). Carney would begin a ballad with grandiose arpeggios, with lush variations between loud and soft — Oh, yes, this was to be an expression of *feeling*, and not merely feeling, but *romantic* feeling — and then he would start on the melody, touching the notes with breathtaking tenderness. Female hearts were ready to melt. Another arpeggio. Still more feeling. And then, at the end of a crucial phrase, one that was meant to say, "And you, my love, are the only one", or, "But now, it is over, forever", on the note that everyone waited for because it completed the heartbreaking initial emotion, he would hit a stunningly, outrageously, unforgiveably wrong note, which was not merely wrong, but was also loud. A soft mistake at that point might have been forgiven, might even have been capable of being overlooked (tender emotion might have transferred to the piano player, who apparently wasn't as talented as his playing thus far had led the listeners to believe, or maybe just hadn't practiced as much as he should in childhood, how sad), but this loud, completely unrelated *bong!* was beyond being outrageous and cruel: it was hilarious. People, and most of all the musicians, laughed out loud.

Other Musicians

The foregoing were the musicians who most often played in the band. There were many others whom I have long since forgotten, the casual pick-up players we used when we were desperate: someone knew someone who might know a bass player who wasn't working Saturday. I knew

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1. At the time, we had no idea of the reputation of Herbie Nichols.

1. The address in my black book from those years is 902 Brant Ave., Clark, N.J., phone (Norma Carson) FUlton 1-5672. I don't recall who Norma Carson was.

we sounded worse with these and I hated our never having time to practice with them. Everything was reduced to the lowest common denominator.

We often had to drive to some of the worst parts of New York City to pick up a near-starving musician for a job. In the Bowery once, in the middle of winter, snow, ice on the sidewalks and streets, we stopped at a traffic light. A bunch of bums were huddled near a can of burning trash in a vacant lot. A white-haired guy slowly crossed the street to us. He was wearing a raincoat, and we noticed his feet were bare. In perfectly articulate speech, he quietly asked us if we could spare any money. His manner was that of someone upon whom a terrible affliction has descended, but, being a decent sort, he was doing what he could to make the best of it. I don't remember what we did. I do remember that as he walked away, someone said, "I'll bet he was a doctor."

Letters to the Musicians

In order to keep this mob together, and to save on phone calls, I wrote letters, giving times and dates of forthcoming jobs, asking if the musician would be available. Always aware that we weren't playing the most exciting kind of music, or offering the highest pay, I felt I had to resort to humor, and so I wrote in various styles to keep my readers amused: gangster, cool jazz musician, Mr. Micawber in Dickens's *David Copperfield*, which I had read recently. Micawber was probably the first literary character I could honestly say I *loved*. I strongly identified with him: a born loser with an unquenchable optimism and a sense of humor, although at that age, I couldn't even approach him in vocabulary, much less in style:

"My dear Copperfield,

"You may possibly not be unprepared to receive the intimation that something has turned up. I may have mentioned to you on a former occasion that I was in expectation of such an event.

"I am about to establish myself in one of the provincial towns of our favoured island (where the society may be described as a happy admixture of the agricultural and the clerical), in immediate connexion with one of the learned professions..." [1]

"To David Copperfield, Esquire
"The Eminent Author

"My dear Sir,

"Years have elapsed since I had an opportunity of ocularly perusing the lineaments, now familiar to the imaginations of a considerable portion of the civilised world. ... "

"Among the eyes elevated towards you from this portion of the globe, will ever be found, while it has light and life,

"The
"Eye
"Appertaining to
"Wilkins Micawber,
"Magistrate" [2]

1. Dickens, Charles, *David Copperfield*, Everyman's Library, J. M. Dent & Sons, N.Y., 1922, p. 495
2. ibid., p. 818

My own closings were far less imaginative than Micawber's, being more on the order of, "And so, until the aforementioned time of the aforementioned engagement of our ensemble, I remain, etc., ..."

The truth is, I loved writing letters. It was the only literary form I felt at home in. Unfortunately, it was also the one literary form that had essentially no value — at least not until you had become famous writing in the forms that did have value. So I had nothing but contempt for myself for enjoying it.

Needless to say, I kept copies of all the letters, and they followed me through the rented rooms and apartments and houses I lived in. Unfortunately, in my fifties, I stored them in the damp basement of my house for several years, and most of them were destroyed. As with all other losses of possessions in my life, I felt that a part of my body — no, of my soul — had been removed. (And I had not even known about it until I opened one of the three-ring binders containing the letters. But in 2004, David R — said in an email that he had saved all of them, although he didn't know where.)

Our Pay

At the end of a weekend's job, the social chairman would come over and hand me a check, say, for $650. Then, on the way home, as we dropped each musician off, I would write a check for his share, which was usually the total amount, minus cost of gas and tolls, minus Big Al's ten percent, divided by the number of musicians. (I never took an extra cut for being leader.) But since the Catskills, I felt this distribution formula was not just. I had this nagging feeling that musicians ought to get paid by how many notes they played. I was jealous of Romig's ability to play piano, in fact of all piano players' ability. They had to think of much more than we horn players did. Anyone can learn to play a single sequence of notes, but to play a lot of notes all at once, all evening: now that was something! But the one or two times I mentioned my scheme, it was received with laughter, and since the piano player didn't pressure me, I kept the old formula.[1]

Keeping Alive With Jazz

Music kept me alive. Sometimes, when we were playing well, and our glorious noise was filling a fraternity house, or, later, a night club, I would think, "How can engineering compare with this?" I would ask myself this question even after I had transferred to being an English major.

(You can get an idea of what we sounded like at our best, and of the crowd that danced to our music, from the opening scene of the 1959 film, *Look Back in Anger*.)

For all I knew, even then, even on party nights after the Big Game, the good engineering students, serious, plodding, were up in their rooms, grinding out the calculus problems, no questions asked: they did their masters' bidding, and some day would be paid high salaries and work in ugly buildings in an ugly city and not even notice or care. How could I possibly convince myself that such a life was preferable to playing music, trying, always trying, to come up with a great improvisation, listening to records, arguing with other musicians, traveling, watching the girls in the audience?

1. "Paying by the note: Great and amusing idea, but what if some notes are worth more than others? And should you get docked if you play too many notes?" — J.S.

Comfortable Around Artists

I didn't fully realize it until my late fifties, but the only type of human being I have ever felt comfortable around is artists and, in particular, musicians. At a company I worked for many years later, our dept. hired a new employee who was a conductor of a small local orchestra. The woman and I were friends by the end of the hour during which I interviewed her for the job.

"...even if she... wasn't ready to listen to all the music I wanted her to, at least we could talk about something that was in the blood and bone of each of us. We could whistle or sing a fragment of a theme and know that the other would either recognize it immediately, or know that he or she didn't know it. We could notice the odd interval that a phone ring had, and then think of all the classical pieces that began with that interval. I lost all my shyness, or, rather, all my otherwise constant attention to the other person's reactions whenever I talked, a habit cultivated out of necessity over a lifetime." — "Sybase", third file of Vol. 4.

And however late its realization, this comfort around musicians, this being able, in their company, to briefly become a human being , began during the Music Days.

Our Repertoire

We seldom had rehearsals, mainly because so many of the musicians we used lived too far away, for example in New Jersey and in New York City. We practiced wherever we could find space: fraternity houses, empty rooms in buildings on campus. I was always ashamed and extremely nervous about playing jobs with what amounted to a pickup band, one that sounded like any other. I could not be assured, especially with Heim, that the musicians had ever heard some of the tunes we played; but most of the time they were able to fake their way through and if necessary take a passable solo. Nevertheless, I felt that most of the time we were cheating our audiences.

The only rehearsal I distinctly remember was held in Lewis's fraternity, Phi Gamma Delta. I remember us in a large, front room with gray-white walls, barren furnishings. I think it was some sort of common room for the fraternity. It had the kind of hollow sound quality that rooms without carpets and curtains have, a quality that sound engineers call "bright". I think this was also the room where I composed, with Romig, one of my tunes. On this or one other occasion I may have attempted to tape-record us, because I was convinced that that was what we really needed — to hear how we sounded — but we didn't do this more than once or twice. Perhaps the reason was the difficulty of getting hold of a tape recorder, I don't know. In retrospect there is no doubt in my mind that I was right about the importance of recording our rehearsals. I should have done even more of the same thing in my own practicing, because it was the fastest way to improve. (Mr. Salvo had recorded me every once in a while.) In any case, the rehearsals were like pulling teeth: some of the musicians felt they should be paid for rehearsal time; others, perhaps most, felt that it was silly to have rehearsals for what often amounted to a pick-up band (unlike the Saints at RPI).

I no longer remember how we went about learning new music, since there were no books we could all refer to. I had The Saints' repertoire to build on — some written-out melodies for trumpet, with the chords marked above. Most of the musicians knew the basic Dixieland standards by heart anyway. Probably our piano player, Gerry Romig, somehow got hold of the piano score and since we usually knew the melodies, or someone who did could quickly sing or hum them, the rest of us picked it up from there, playing by ear. This was easier for the trumpet, of course, since it played the lead, unlike the clarinet, which had to play an obbligato accompaniment, and the trombone, which played its bass line. I still have a list of some of the tunes we played, since I had to keep it handy in order to "call the tunes" as the expression was, meaning, decide what to play

next. I will reproduce it here in its entirety: it was typed using my old manual typewriter on both sides of two 3 x 5 cards which are held together by now-brown transparent tape. The key signatures never meant anything to me, since all I needed was the starting note. They were for the pianist and for the rare horn player for whom they actually were important. But I include them for historical interest As in the original, I have used "b" to represent "flat"; "m" for "minor".

"UP" [meaning up-tempo, that is, fast]

"A Train" (Ab), "Moonglow" (G), "I'll Never Smile Again" (Eb), "But Not For Me" (Eb), "Thou Swell" (Eb), "The Way You Look Tonight" (Eb), "Mountain Greenery" (C), "Isn't It Romantic" (Eb), "Dancing on the Ceiling" (F), "Love Is Here to Stay" (F), "I Get a Kick Out of You" (Eb), " 'S Wonderful" (Eb), "This Can't Be Love" (G), "Almost Like Being in Love" (Bb), "Foggy Day" (F), "Love Me or Leave Me" (Ab), "I Can't Believe That You're in Love With Me" (C), "Pennies from Heaven" (C), "It's All Right With Me" (Cm), "Give Me the Simple Life" (F, Eb), "Anything Goes" (C), "Everything's Coming Up Roses" (Bb), "Lady Be Good" (G), "It's D'Lovely" (F);

Then, under "BALLADS":

"Autumn Nocturne" (C), "Mad About the Boy" (C), "April in Paris" (C), "You Go To My Head" (Eb), "Beyond the Sea" (F), "I Can't Get Started" (C), "Willow Weep for Me" (G), "Lover Man" (F), "For All We Know" (F), "Here Lies Love" (Ab), "These Foolish Things" (Eb), "Tenderly" (Eb), "Greensleeves" (Gm), "Easy to Love" (G), "Close as the Pages in a Book" (Eb), "I Didn't Know What Time It Was" (G), "Georgia On My Mind" (no key given), "Stardust" (no key given), "Laura" (no key given), "What's New?" (C), "Polka Dots and Moonbeams" (F);

Then, under "UP DIXIE":

"Ja-Da" (F), "Royal Garden Blues" (F, Bb), "Peoria (V) (Gm, Eb) (I have no idea what the "V" signified: possibly "Verse", but we also played the Chorus), "Buddy's Habits" (Bb, Eb), "Muskrat Ramble" (Bb), "When the Saints Go Marchin' In" (F, Bb, Eb), "Jazz Me Blues" (Eb), "Dixieland One-Step" (Bb), "Blues My Naughty Sweetie Gave To Me" (Gm), "Dixie" (Bb), "Sunset Cafe Stomp" (Eb, Ab), "Mostly Martha" (Ab), "That's A'Plenty" (Dm, F, Bb) (to the announcement of which Charlie Acito always responded, under his breath, "'Atsa too much"), "Four or Five Times" (Eb), "Strut Miss Lizzie" (Gm, Eb), "Bill Bailey" (Dm, F), "Struttin' With Some Barbecue" (Eb)(the old Louis Armstrong tune from the twenties; I tried to play at least part of his improvisation whenever it was my turn to solo), "Weary Blues" (Eb, Bb), "San" (F), "Darktown Strutters' Ball" (C), "Bourbon Street" (Ab), "Baby, Won't You Please Come Home" (Ab), "Panama" (Eb), "Copenhagen" (Eb), "Down by the Riverside" (Eb);

I notice that for some reason I neglected to list "Dr. Jazz", which we often played (and sang: "Hello Central, give me Dr. Jazz/He's got what I need I'll say he has ...);

And under "SLOW DIXIE":

"Buddy Bolden's Blues (F), "Basin Street Blues" (Bb), "Memphis Blues" (Eb, Ab), "Sweet Substitute" (F), "Just A Closer Walk With Thee" (Bb), "Tin Roof Blues" (Eb), "Atlanta Blues" (Eb), "Black and Blue" (Bb), "Beale St. Blues" (Eb), "St. James Infirmary" (Gm).

In a couple of old three-ring binders which had been stored in the damp basement of my house in Berkeley many years later, I find the crumbling lead sheets (music sheets with only the melody and chords indicated) for many of the above tunes, and also for "The Doodletown Pipers", "Dixieland One-step", "Monday Date", "Bienville Blues" [often deliberately mispronounced as "Beanville Blues"], also known as "Storyville Blues", "Ballin' the Jack", "Oh! By Jingo", "Aunt

Hagar's Blues", "South Rampart Street Parade", "Ain't Gonna Give Nobody None of My Jelly Roll", "The Saints", "Big Butter and Egg Man", "Twelfth Street Rag", "Waiting for the Robert E. Lee", "Salty Dog".

In another binder I find the written-out trumpet and clarinet parts, with chords, plus the piano lead sheet for Charlie Parker's "Yardbird Suite". Other "progressive" tunes I know we also played include "Perdido", "Blues Walk", "Line for Lyons", and "Bernie's Tune".

Some of the Dixieland standards, such as "South Rampart Street Parade" and "Tiger Rag", were in the form of the marches I had played in school bands from my primary school days through high school, and so, were especially easy to memorize. I had a fake book, but almost never used it, since for me it was always much easier to learn by ear.

We sang the lyrics to some of the tunes, for example, "Peoria":

"[Verse:]
S.O.S, S.O.S., Captain we are lost!
Ship is floundering in the sea,
By wind and wave we're tossed!
Lifeboats here, lifeboats there,
Hear the shrieks and groans.
Captain cried 'All hands on deck!'
And announced in trembling tones:

[Chorus:]
'How I wish I was in Peoria,
Peoria, tonight.
How I miss those gals in Peoria,
Peoria, tonight.
You can pick a morning-gloria
On the outskirts of Peoria.
How I wish I was in Peoria,
Tonight.' "

And then with a roar of brass and a crash of cymbals and a tweedle of clarinet and a thumping of chords on the piano we would burst forth with a joyful noise unto the Lord and unto the dancing crowd, many of whom had joined us in singing the lyrics.

Improvisation

As I have said more than once, I was always bothered by the question of how to improvise: how one should approach it, what one should think of or not think of while improvising. Improvisation in jazz is now, in the nineties and early 2000s, a dead art, despite the phenomenal technique of many jazz musicians, not to mention all the new technology at their disposal. But a jazz solo is far more than a demonstration that the player can "make the changes", that is, play notes appropriate to each chord, and do so with dazzling technique. A jazz solo must be a work of art, it must have a beginning, a middle, and an end, be an organic whole, must "go somewhere" and say something — when it's done, you should feel, you should *know*, that you just got News about

something important. How much of the solo was produced spontaneously and how much had been previously worked out beforehand is irrelevant (at least as far as I'm concerned).

From the vantage point of old age, I know that what I needed to know about improvisation I could have learned by listening intelligently to Mozart. What I needed to know was how a melodic idea is developed — how it begins with a "sentence" which is then followed by a variation on that sentence and then a further development of that variation, with the original always somehow present. But such a systematic, self-conscious approach to improvisation was alien to jazz musicians in those days (and probably is to this day) since it would have been conceived to be too limiting to their creativity. And yet, I think that some of the very best — Chet Baker, Charlie Parker, Paul Desmond, Brubeck, John Lewis — consciously or unconsciously did exactly what I am describing.

I always played primarily by ear; I didn't know by heart the names of the chords in a single piece except for the simplest blues. Despite the crushing conclusion I had reached that afternoon at Stiers' Hotel[1], the truth was I had good relative pitch. (Perfect pitch refers to the ability to *name* a note purely on the hearing of it. Even though I couldn't do that, what I could do was reproduce (most of the time) the note — play it or sing it or whistle it — even though I couldn't name it.) Thus, when I felt like it, I could begin a solo by duplicating the last few notes of the previous solo, a minor show-off trick that many jazz musicians employed. If someone sang or played the first few notes of a tune, I could fairly quickly duplicate them, or, at least play their equivalent in another key. For example, one night we were walking along a street on the way to Eddie Condon's nightclub in Greenwich Village. As always we were chattering away, illustrating our talk with frequent musical quotes, via whistling, from jazz tunes or improvisations. Suddenly someone called for quiet. Faintly, from the next block, we heard whistling. It was part of "Ornithology", Bird[2]'s tune! One of us, probably Heim, immediately picked up where this unknown other stopped, whistled the next few bars with, it goes without saying, appropriate embellishments to show that there were musicians here. He stopped. We all listened. Back came the next few bars, departing even further from the original line.

"And so, as kinsmen met a night,
We talked between the rooms"[3]

We continued for a block or more, the other one and Heim each showing off his creativity without having any idea who the other was and without setting eyes on each other, until eventually there was no reply. We assumed that the other had turned down another street.

Or, to take another example: in *The Book of Jazz* (Dell Publishing Co., Inc., N.Y., 1976, p. 231), Leonard Feather gives several measures with only the chords indicated: Gma7, G6, Gma7, G6, Gmi7, C7, Fma7, F6, ... He then says that, though "it does not show a single note of music and consists simply of chord symbols and diagonal strokes (each standing for one beat of the bar), no literate jazz musician would fail to see in it, at first glance, the first nine measures of *How High the Moon*." He should have added that there were jazz musicians (and I was one) who by his defi-

1. See the section "The Summer in the Catskills" in the file devoted to White Plains High School.
2. "Bird" was a nickname of the great alto saxophonist, Charlie Parker, whose soaring improvisations made the name seem only appropriate.
3. Emily Dickinson, "I Died for Beauty"

nition were illiterate but who if they merely *heard* these measures played, with no melody, would very quickly have been able to recognize the tune these chords belonged to.

At this point I should not fail to describe a little exercise in improvisation that Heim would occasionally challenge me with. When we were walking along, or driving to a job, and things were kind of boring, Heim would suddenly say, "Hey, Franklin:— " whereupon he would sing two notes in quick succession. On the spot, I had to come up with a passable improvisation on them, whistling or singing in bop syllables. It was great exercise for jazz musicians. In old age, when I spent years trying to get mathematicians to read a paper I had written on a very difficult problem, I had to see, over and over, how these bureaucrats could not imagine their way into a new idea. First and foremost, it had to come from a person with the right credentials, namely, a professor of mathematics at a reputable college or university. Second, it had to have been approved by at least some of their peers. Third, the writing had to be flawless, and use only ideas the mathematicians were familiar with. I thought of how miserably these plodders would have failed Heim's challenge.

So, despite my inferiority complex about my lack of musical ability, I always felt confident about what my *ear* told me. If music were *only* sound, and not also notes on paper that often had to be sight-read, and theory that had to be learned, I would have been confident of my abilities[1].

But at the time, had anyone asked me, I would have said that the reason I didn't try to learn a little theory was that it would have interfered with my creativity. To make matters worse, I was always trying to play Dixieland like modern jazz (lots of notes, chromatic runs). In the case of modern jazz, the chords in many of the pieces were simply too hard for me, and yet instead of settling down to learn them somehow, I thought it more important to try to be original, to break the rules, to be "far out", with the result that my modern jazz solos were truly bad.

I had enormous admiration for Paul Desmond — the way he put together those magnificent long solos, each part connected to the previous, like long statements, narratives. His solos *said* something. They had a beginning, a middle, and an end. They went somewhere. I urge the reader who has any doubts about this — or who wants to see how much has been lost in jazz improvisation since the fifties and early sixties — to listen to, for example, Desmond's solo on "Tangerine" [The *Dave Brubeck Quartet in Europe*, Columbia CL 1168 (but possibly available on CD; it was accessible via YouTube on Feb., 2011)]. How did he do it? It was beyond me. I didn't have the faintest idea of how you did that or how you learned to do it.

I had certain peculiar prejudices. For example, I thought that major chords were chicken-shit. They had no originality, you could never do anything interesting improvising on one, and especially not C major! (Late in life I realized how often Vivaldi and others used major chords!)

I got an important hint of an answer to the question of how to improvise at a Sunday afternoon job for some Lehigh function. It was in a big hall, and as the sun set, the rays passed through the branches of a tree outside an upper window, with the result that I had a flickering light in my eyes where I was standing. The sensation was restful, so I stayed in exactly that position as I improvised. This seemed to take my mind off of concerns of how to make the solo "great", and enabled it to go where it wanted to. The whole task was "easy". As soon as I finished, Frank Acito said, from the piano, "Man, you're really cooking today, Franklin!" Since it was virtually the only compliment any fellow musician had ever given me that wasn't the automatic "Yeah!" which fol-

1. In old age, I began losing my shame over not having perfect pitch. To be able to duplicate a note on hearing it — to be able to whistle or sing or play it without knowing its name — seemed nothing to be ashamed of, and I began wondering about the prestige that perfect pitch has always had.

lowed when a player finished a solo and which was really an exclamation of joy over the mere phenomenon of jazz, of speaking the message again, I knew that something different had in fact occurred.

Without question, Heim was the best musician and, in particular, the best improviser, I ever personally knew. He would stand, slightly bow-legged, leaning forward, the sax at an angle to his body, his elbows out, so that, with his moving fingers, he seemed to be getting his arms around the music, embracing it. His expression was one of concentration, amusement, and occasional delight, as though every phrase he played had been merely selected from a shelf full, all of which he knew were good.

Regardless of my skill, or lack of it, at improvising, throughout my life I have been able to overcome some of the boredom of walking by whistling improvisations to tunes that happen to occur to me, or that I have just heard as the background music in a coffee shop. I interminably try to come up with the perfect solo on "Lady Be Good", "Ornithology", "Mysterioso", "Star Eyes"[1] and other tunes. And I have spent a lifetime perfecting my "atonal" solo on "China Boy", which, one way or the other, will be given to posterity. A few bars will be enough for those with ears to hear to understand what I have in mind.

(The reader will find more extensive reflections on improvization in the essay, "Music", in my book, *Thoughts and Visions*, on thoughtsandvisions.com.)

I as Composer

I actually composed two tunes while at Lehigh, though it would be wrong to say I "wrote" them, for a reason to be made clear. One tune was called "Clown's Theme". Its chord pattern was a slight variation of that of a well-known tune that I have now forgotten. I worked out the melody in my head — I can still remember it: it is the kind of thing that makes listeners immediately say that it reminds them of several other tunes, but they can't exactly say which ones. Then after rehearsal, got together with Dave Hunt and asked him to help me come up with the chords. I gave him the written melody, he played a few chords. I: "The first one's OK, but the second should be more, I don't know..." He would try some alternatives. I: "Yes, that's it. Now can you make the next go sort of like, you know, in Brubeck's "Blues Waltz", do you know that one?... OK, that's almost it..." The truth is that, even though I was ashamed that I couldn't come up with the chords myself, I also felt that this was the intelligent, the efficient way to go about writing a tune: you have the idea, then you find someone else to help you complete the work you are unable to complete. I had a mental block about inversions of chords, or, I should say, about associating the correct names with each of the inversions of a given chord. Yet I had no doubt that if, in a given piece of music, someone played the various inversions, I could choose the one that sounded best.

When I called the tune on a job, I always seemed to sense a barely-suppressed smile on Charlie Acito's face, the smile of a man who thinks the boss's talent for writing music is minimal, but the smile of a man who knows that if you want to keep being employed, you do what the boss says.

The other tune, which I wrote with Romig, was called "The Nightwalker". We played it less often than the other.

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1. "Ornithology" and "Star Eyes" were tunes composed by Bird (the alto saxophonist Charlie Parker). We had no doubt about the unsurpassable excellence of all of Bird's tunes. I remember Heim's awe of the perfection of "Star Eyes". "Mysterioso" was composed by Thelonious Monk. The melody is almost mindlessly simple, the kind that makes you say, after the fact, that anyone could have composed it, and yet it sticks in your mind and compels improvisation.

The Problem of High Notes

I also couldn't play high notes. It was yet another congenital inadequacy, along with not having perfect pitch, not being good at calculus, having acne and male-pattern baldness, that made me hate myself. Only one famous jazz trumpet player was able to play well without playing high notes, and that was Chet Baker. So I felt there was still some slight hope for me. Perhaps it could be argued that Bix Beiderbecke didn't play particularly high notes. But just about every other jazz trumpeter did, going back to Louis Armstrong. So I grasped at whatever straws promised to help me overcome my problem. I heard that Maynard Ferguson (the champion in this area) wore a truss belt so that he could press out against it with his diaphragm and thereby gain extra air pressure into the mouthpiece. I bought one of these belts and carried it around in my trumpet case. At jobs, I would go into the men's room, lower my pants, wrap it around my middle as tightly as I could, and then, if truth be told, go out and play pretty much as before, since for me to play high notes while pressing my diaphragm against this belt seemed an affectation at best. The other musicians, Charlie Acito in particular, would kid me about my faith in the belt, considering it yet another quirk in a rather odd band leader. I don't know if David R — thought it would help me play high notes, but he at one point gave me an old silver trumpet with an enormously elongated bell. He called it an "Aida trumpet" because it resembled the trumpets used in the pageants in Verdi's opera. It had valves and a normal mouthpiece, so it didn't really enhance my playing of high notes, but R — thought it amusing if nothing else that a jazz group had a trumpet player who at least occasionally played such an odd-looking trumpet. Audiences didn't know what to make of it. Did it really sound different from a normal trumpet? Why does the bandleader use it only for some tunes? It occurs to me now that the bell, when he saw the horn in a used-instrument store, may have reminded him of the rather obscenely upward-pointing bell of Dizzy Gillespie's trumpet, and made him think that the Aida trumpet, although the bell went straight out from the horn, might achieve a similar comic effect among audiences.

I worked so hard at playing — not only at playing high notes — that I had to put a plastic cover around the valve chambers of the trumpet to prevent my sweat from eating through the metal. Even so, the lower part of my palm eventually ate through one of the small, U-shaped tubes, and I had to have a metal patch welded over it. The transparent plastic was designed to click in place, but it soon became so warped from the heat of my hand that it would fall off unless I was actually holding it. It also tended to wobble around, so after a while, I began using a white handkerchief instead, in imitation of Louis Armstrong.

Trying to Play Progressive

As Heim reminded me in the nicest possible way more than once, I couldn't play progressive jazz. I was ashamed of and furious at that fact. He would sometimes say, when the subject came up, that I should stick with Dixieland, that it's happy music, Louis was a great trumpet player, none better. But Heim wasn't skillful enough at concealing his condescension and that made me all the more determined to play progressive. One of the idioms of the music, used occasionally by the best players, was an ascending run based on the notes of the whole-tone scale. It definitely sounded progressive. So I threw that into my solos — far too often. Another idiom was straight out of the exercise books and hard solos of my childhood, in which each note of a melody, for example, in "The Carnival of Venice", was followed by three lower sixteenth notes, so that it

sounded like two instruments — as though you were accompanying yourself: **dot**-(dit-dit-dit), **dot**-(dit-dit-dit), ... the emphasized **dot**s being the notes of the melody, the quieter dit-dit-dits being the accompaniment. Trumpet players like Chet Baker had made this into a new art form, sometimes barely playing the lower dit-dit-dit notes, so that the listener would hear them anyway. A classic example is his solo on "Love Nest" (*Quartet: Russ Freeman and Chet Baker*, Pacific Jazz PJ-1232, released in 1957), which also ranks among the greatest jazz solos. If anyone were to ask me what I mean by a jazz improvisation delivering "the News", I would have them listen to this solo. It develops a single "idea", the successive parts are related to the previous ones, and it is an organic whole. I challenge the reader to find a jazz trumpet solo since, say, 1990, that comes anywhere near this one in quality. I used to be able to play it; still have it memorized, can finger the notes, can whistle it, sing it (in the way that jazz musicians "sing" tunes that have no lyrics, each note rendered in some form of "dah" or "dee" or "dit"). I also was able to play Jon Eardley's solo on "Yardbird Suite" (*California Concerts or Jazz Goes to High School*, World-Pacific Records, PJ 12101, released in 1955), another solo that I unhesitatingly put into the category of great jazz solos.

John Lewis does the same omitting of notes on one of the Modern Jazz Quartet albums . I remember asking my brother to tell me what he was playing and I am pretty sure he gave me a description (he wasn't musical) that made me believe he heard the nonexistent notes. But here as elsewhere, I tried to get the sound without analyzing it, tried to do it all by feeling, because if you had to actually *figure it out*, that meant you had no business trying to play it.

And yet for all my yearning to become a great jazz musician, I at the same time dreaded the possibility, hoping instead that I would be able to continue as I was: barely competent, always struggling to become better. I knew that if I became a really good soloist, I would be expected to live up to my reputation, I would have to perform, in the fullest sense of the word, all the time. My life would no longer be my own.

Traveling With the Band

The Acito brothers had a big black gangster car, a Packard I think. It was clear they enjoyed looking the part: they often wore long coats, said very little to each other or to us initially. We might as well have been on our way to hit some errant member of the gang in Bayonne. But the Packard had plenty of room for instruments. I think Rick Lewis usually drove separately, since the drums took up so much room. I'm not sure I trusted my own car to make it over the distances we traveled to jobs — from North Carolina to the border of Canada, incredible as it may seem. One time David R — drove up in a Messerschmitt, a three-wheeled vehicle then becoming popular. In retrospect I am surprised that he, a Jew, would have bought a vehicle with not only a German name, but one with such an obvious reference to World War II. Or maybe it was a Vespa. But I remember that there were two wheels in front, one in back. It was barely four feet high. The entire front opened to the side, you climbed in, put your horn in the little space behind the double seat, he pulled the door closed, and off we went. That evening, or weekend, we were playing in the Poconos, so in this tiny vehicle, powered by nothing more than a motorcycle engine, he drove from New York City to Bethlehem, then to the Pennsylvania mountains, then back.

Our season ran through the dead of winter, which meant that, drunk or sober, we had to drive through snow. One time, returning from a job in Troy in a heavy snowstorm, we weren't sure if we had gotten onto the New York Thruway. The windshield was so coated with ice that only an ever-diminishing clear spot was available for the driver to see through. The guy in the passenger

seat was scraping away like mad to keep the spot clear, but the steam from our breaths kept freezing on the glass and making the hole smaller. The tires whined, we felt the car sway gently from side to side. The driver was hunched down over the wheel, trying to see through the hole. Finally someone said, "Hey, are you sure we're moving?" And suddenly everyone else joined in: "Hey, we aren't moving!" The driver rolled down his window, but the flakes were so thick it was still hard to tell. He pushed the door open, looked down at the pavement. "Fuck, we ain't moving!" Doors flew open, everyone piled out, and there was the car, its nose stuck in a huge snowbank at the side of the road. We probably had not been moving for several minutes. We all laughed and climbed out and slipped and slid around to the front, started pushing, got the car straightened out on the roadway, and set off again.

When the fraternity houses promised sleeping accommodations to the band, that offer had to be taken with a grain of salt. More often than not, we wound up sleeping on the floor. The social chairman might give us a few blankets and mattress pads, but at four or five in the morning, with the brothers in bed drunk, or somewhere else with their dates, that was the best we could hope for. By that hour, the place was filled with the smell of stale beer. The rugs and floors were wet with beer. We were too exhausted to care.

One time we had to take a hotel room, I forget in what city, and I had to share a bed with one of the musicians, I think Charlie Acito. When he saw how I moved to the side of the bed, until I was practically falling off, so there would be absolutely no chance of any part of me touching any part of him, he said, "Christ, what's the matter with you, Franklin, are you queer?" Another time I put up the band in The New Merchants Hotel in Bethlehem. I had never seen the rooms before. Angie gave us, or, rather, gave the two or three musicians, the front corner room. It was dingy beyond even what I had imagined. A two-branched ceiling light had only one weak bulb. Everything was dusty, old-smelling. The walls were painted some dreadful yellow. The musicians resigned themselves to spending a night there, but made sure I knew how unimpressed they were with my ability to find suitable accommodations for the members of my band.

In Trouble With the Union

As I said in the chapter on RPI, the union rules in those days required that we never play for less than scale. In the Bethlehem area I think this was $15 per person for four hours or less. The fraternities could meet that, but none of the bars like the Lehigh Tavern could, although they were able to give us exposure. The second rule was that traveling bands had to hire a certain percentage of their number from the local in whose venue they were playing, or else pay a 10% traveling tax. In Bethlehem as in Troy, we laughed at this rule — what union hall hack could know all our tunes, much less be able to improvise properly? — and hence we ignored it. We drove hundreds of miles to a college, played for the big game weekend, and were gone before the union officials knew we had been there, and even if they had known, it would have taken them more time than it was worth to track us down.

Eventually, of course, our luck ran out, and one evening, as we were just taking our first break after playing to a packed Mushroom Farm audience, a guy in a loud orange and yellow sports jacket who had been sitting on the left side of the stage came forward and asked which of us was the leader. I said I was. He said he was a representative of local — and didn't seem to find a record of our hiring local musicians or paying our traveling tax. I: "Oh, yes, well, we were going to pay out of our income for the night." He: "But don't you play here every week?" I: "Well, yes. But it's only been a few weeks and we've been very busy — we're all students." He: "Well, you're supposed to pay 10%. What's your total?" I told him. He: "You can give me a check now.

And then I'll be back each week from now on to collect." I: "Oh, that won't be necessary. We'll pay you by mail. What address should I send it to?" (Where was Charlie Acito's uncle?)

Later, and I don't remember if it was because of this incident or another, I received a letter summoning me to appear before the Big Daddy of musicians' locals, namely, Local 802 in New York City. I called them: "Couldn't we settle this over the phone?" They: "No, we don't hold hearings over the phone." I: "I know, but I'm a student. I'll be glad to send you a check for whatever penalty we owe." They: "We don't decide penalties until after a hearing. You have to appear in person ["yuh havetuh appeah in poysson"]". And so I took train or bus to the city, somehow got to Local 802 headquarters, and sat before some very dour old gentlemen indeed, who let it be known that there aren't many musicians who continue to keep working once they start breaking union rules, in particular the rules about the traveling tax. But since we were only college kids, the Board, out of the kindness of its heart, was only going to fine us whatever it was: several hundred dollars, certainly. But if it happens again, we lose our union cards and we should all know what that means. Little did he know that most of the musicians we used didn't even have cards — the Acitos did because they played jobs all around the New York City area, and I think whoever among us played the Jimmy Ryan's job (described below) had been forced to get a card. But otherwise, no.

Needless to say, we continued not paying our traveling tax, or hiring local musicians. We never got caught again.

The Perfect Cheeseburger

By today's standards, our musicians' diet was awful: black coffee, cheeseburgers, which I especially loved, french fries, and a sprig or two of parsley now and then for vegetables. Artin and I at some point began wondering if there was a truly perfect cheeseburger, and from then on we began a search to find it. At each roadside diner, whenever he was playing with us, we would order cheeseburgers, taste them, chew carefully, breathe in to get the most of the flavor, swallow, take another bite or two, then render our judgment: "Nope." "Possibly but not quite." "Too greasy" (the most frequent complaint). If the slice of Velveeta or whatever kind of cheese they were using was merely sitting on top of the hamburger, the candidate was automatically disqualified, since every connoisseur knew that the cheese had to be melted starting at just the right moment, so that, when it was served, it had dribbled over the sides of the burger, but not all the way down to the plate, which was crude, and showed that the place had no class.

Eventually, and quite unexpectedly, we found the object of our quest, and in Artin's own back yard. We had played a job at Princeton, and around two in the morning felt that irresistible pull, that craving that could only be satisfied by...a cheeseburger. Just about every business in town had long closed, except for a hamburger place which obviously had remained open to cater to the students returning home after the fraternity parties. The place was completely white inside, just like White Tower, except that it was an independent business. It was almost empty. The waiter was a young Chinese. We trooped to a table near the back, and Artin and I ordered cheeseburgers. We talked as musicians do after a job — about the odd behavior of the fraternity guys, about the outstanding women we had noticed, about this or that jazz star — until the food came. Artin and I looked at each other, not holding out much hope. The bun looked all right, the cheese had been melted just right, but... We took a bite. Immediately we knew we had found it. The meat was wonderfully meaty, just the right temperature, the bun fresh, the yellow cheese sticking to the roof of your mouth but only long enough for you to experience its texture and flavor before the flavor

merged with the juicy beef. We shook hands, for all I know the others applauded, and munched away, at peace with the world.

Places We Played

We played from North Carolina to Northern Maine near the Canadian border, fall, winter, and spring, often leaving Bethlehem early Friday and not returning till late Sunday evening.

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

I remember two things about this job: one is that it was my first, and only, attempt to lecture the South on the importance of getting rid of racial prejudice. I stood in the front porch with some of the good ol' boys, who were already well into the main business of the weekend, which was getting good and drunk. I made some sort of white, liberal, New York intellectual argument which did nothing but arouse at first shock, then controlled anger that the leader of the band they had hired to provide entertainment also apparently saw fit to correct them on certain aspects of Southern culture. I went back inside to start the entertainment with the feeling, "Well, that'll give them something to think about. Good thing us northerners get a chance to come down here once in a while and help them get rid of these old prejudices." The second thing I remember is what they were serving in the way of an alcoholic beverage. They called it "Fish-Eye Punch" and here is how they made it: first, a brand new, shiny, thoroughly washed, garbage can was placed on the floor. Then several loads of ice were dumped inside. Then gallon jug after gallon jug of grapefruit juice was poured in, and, finally, an unknown amount of pure alcohol that one of the brothers, a medical student, had managed to borrow from one of the University laboratories. The drink was served in large tumblers and looked perfectly harmless — in fact, like iced grapefruit juice. It tasted like it, too, and so we in the band drank it as if it were nothing more than that. However, after half a glass or so, I noticed that things had become alarmingly soft and pleasant. I drank a little more, then put the glass aside while I urged the others to finish setting up. Unfortunately, Rick kept accepting every refill he was offered, and got slower and slower in setting up his drums. I prodded him, but he had the big smile that said "There's no need to hurry! Life is great!" Finally, he was sitting on his little three-legged fold-up stool, tapping at the cymbals, thumping the bass drum. I called the first tune, was on the verge of counting off. I looked over at him again, saw him sitting rather too erect. What was going on? Then he was leaning back a little. "Rick. You ready?" He answered with that big, toothy smile, and leaned further back. Several of the others were now looking at him, some laughing because they knew what was going to happen. Slowly, slowly, he leaned further back and soon both feet were in mid-air, pointing forward. There was a crash as he sank into drum boxes and extra cymbals. He lay there, laughing, as though inviting us to try it. The social chairman came over. We helped up our drummer, asked for coffee. I told Rick that if he could just sit on the stool while he recovered, he didn't have to play. He could just kind of slump there. Yes, he thought he could. And so we started the set without a drummer, some of us having considerable difficulty playing because of having to hold back laughter at the image of a man, slowly, gracefully, contentedly falling backward off a drum stool.

In an August, 2009 email, David R — wrote:

"My principal recollection of Rick Lewis was that: 1. he frequently got so drunk during a gig that he passed out over the drums, knocking all the cymbals to the floor; 2. he secretly married a girl from Cedarhurst College (they didn't allow married students) and shortly afterwards, when we

were playing a gig at Princeton in the second story living room of one of the eating clubs, somebody set off a smoke bomb. Lewis, whose drum kit was backed up against an open window, immediately jumped out and then realized that he had left his new wife behind. So he started screaming at us to save her."

The Lehigh Tavern

A couple of times we played at the Lehigh Tavern. This was always done illegally as far as the union was concerned, since we were supposed to play for no less than minimum scale, which I think was around $15 a musician per evening, and Bob Czopoth, the owner, couldn't afford that kind of money. Nor did we care about it, as long as we had the opportunity to play for people. We usually got free beer and sometimes $5 a piece in addition. The place was so small that the band had to stand lined up and pressed against one wall (a linear band!), some of us standing on chairs, and the horns had to play most of the time pointing sideways, parallel to the wall, so that we weren't playing into the backs or faces of people sitting at the bar. Nevertheless, we filled the place with our deafening noise, and the place was always crowded.

I should mention in passing that those were the days of the Bert and Harry Piel ads for Piels Beer. These were superbly drawn cartoons; Bert was short and fat, Harry, tall and thin. The voices were those of Bob and Ray, famed and beloved New York radio comedians. If a bar or restaurant had a TV set, all conversation stopped and all eyes turned to the TV screens when the ads came on. Sometimes we waited for them to come on if we knew they would be broadcast on the hour.

A Job in Maine

Once, Big Al got us a booking in the north of Maine, a distance of many hundreds of miles from Bethlehem. Personally, I didn't care where we had to go to play, but some members of the band clearly regarded this job as close to the limit of what they should be asked to endure. I seem to remember a phone conversation with Charlie Acito:

"*Where's* this job?"

"Maine."

"Where?"

"Well, a few miles from the Canadian border."

Laughter. "You're gonna drive from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, to the goddamn *border of Canada* for a *gig*? Holy shit!"

"It might lead to other gigs."

"Where, in fucking Nova Scotia?"

"I know. I won't blame you for not taking it."

"Who else is on the gig?"

I rattled off a few names, and mentioned that we would have a girl vocalist.

"What's she look like?"

"I haven't actually met her yet."

"Christ." Pause. "Well, Frank and I don't have anything for that weekend. We'll go."

"Thanks, Charlie!"

(Under his breath) "Dis band oughta disband."

We started Friday morning, cutting the day's classes. Off we went, taking turns sitting in the back seat under the bass and other equipment. The vocalist lived in New York. I liked her immediately: she had a quiet professionalism about her. She was slim, with hair cut short at neck-

length. I liked her boyish looks. After God knows how many hours of driving, we began to notice the smell of farts. At a gas station, when she had gone to the rest room, one of the guys asked, embarrassed, "Hey, who keeps letting go?" "It's not me," "Well, it sure as hell isn't me," came the chorus of replies. And I doubt very much if it was me. I was constantly on guard for such a loss of self-control, since to me it was one of the worst possible things you could do in the presence of others. A few gas stations later, we (the males) started blaming each other. Then someone said the unthinkable: "I think it's her." I argued against it, since to me (although I didn't say so out loud) a girl farting was an impossibility. Soft, gentle, weak, beings with cunts didn't fart. You didn't even like to think of them taking a crap. Pissing, yes, because they had to sit down to do it, which made it demure and proper. On the other hand, these farts were different than the typical male variety: they were richer, smoother, more stop-you-in-your-tracks. But eventually even I came to believe it was her.

The school turned out to be largely composed of pre-fab buildings. Most of the students were Arabs, the story immediately circulating among us that this was the best American school their oil-rich fathers could get them into. Better an American education even at this level. They were delighted to see us. They gave us real bunks in the dormitory. Double-decker. They hovered around us. I think the contract called for us to play Saturday afternoon, Saturday evening, and then briefly on Sunday. We more or less arranged our music on the spot, as usual. The girl singer had a kind of Beverly Kenney voice, kind of brave and young. When she wasn't singing she sat at one end of the band, hands folded, or demurely at one side, leaning on the piano. Of course, no real triumph here, since the audience was so thankful for any band at all that could play something that resembled jazz.

I think it was on this job that after one of our breaks I decided to see how the audience would react if we sang Jimi Hendrix's devilish version of the old song, "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." The original version went:

Take me out to the ball game,
Take me out to the park
Buy me some peanuts and cracker jacks
I don't care if I never get back for it's
Root, root, root for the home team,
If they don't win it's a shame,
For it's one, two, three strikes you're out
At the old ball game.

What Hendrix did was to shift the lyrics two notes back, so that now the song went as follows. The melody from "Out to the ball game take me" on is the same as it is from "Take me out to the ball game" in the original. The reader is encouraged to try singing this alternate version.

Take me
Out to the ball game take me,
Out to the park buy me
Some peanuts and cracker jacks I don't
Cafe if I never get back for it's root, root, root
For the home team if they don't
Win it's a shame, for it's

One, two three, strikes you're out at the old ball game

The reader will observe that the final "ball game" occurs two notes before the original melody ends. The listener is left hanging, wondering what has happened. And already by the end of the first couple of lines, members of the audience (the Americans at least) were looking from side to side, sensing that something wasn't quite right. And yet the melody and the lyrics both were the old familiar ones. But when the lyrics ended two notes before the melody ended, a nervous laughter began to ripple through the audience. We in the band enjoyed our joke, but soon returned to the familiar blare of the music we had been hired to play.

We left early Sunday afternoon. Again we had to take turns sitting half crouched under the bass in the back seat. I did a lot of the driving back, over roads through nowhere, with snow on the sides, open fields, hardly any traffic. I was proud of my ability to stay awake, or, rather, to drive when I was half asleep. But the memory of the Studebaker experience in the Carolinas (see chapter, "RPI") prompted me to ask the others to make sure I didn't nod off. So they kept talking to me, and we did endless rounds of "Row, row, row your boat", trying to vary the interval between the entry of successive voices so that it was as confusing as possible and forced you to concentrate. For example, instead of the second voice starting when the first voice reaches "Merrily, merrily....", the second voice would start when the first voice sang the second "row", or "your", or "boat", or "gently" or "down" or even on "the". Then, when a third voice entered the game, it required such concentration that keeping the car on the road was no trouble at all in comparison.

After the trip, we were exhausted. David invited me to grab a few winks at his apartment. He told me to use the couch and gave me a few blankets. I took off my shoes and socks and was out like a light.

The next thing I knew he and Janet were standing around me, laughing and holding their noses. The windows were wide open. They pointed at my feet, which were sticking out from under the blankets. The entire apartment stank of socks — mine — which I hadn't taken off in several days. It was beyond the usual cheesy smell of dirty feet. It was the smell of foot cheese caked and fermented between toes with dirty nails. It was the smell of rottenness. I was beside myself with embarassment and self-disgust. It was though they had seen inside me, had seen my shit, seen how corrupt I really was. I apologized but knew that this dirty secret would never be overcome, could never be erased.

And that wasn't the only time that my true nature was revealed to others. Once, as we were getting ready to play after a long trip to the job, I had to take a shit very badly, and went into one of the stalls in the men's room. My stink soon filled the place. I tried to cover it with a cigarette, but it was no use. Charlie Acito came in, took one whiff, and said, "Jesus Christ! Is that you, Franklin? Man, you're rotten inside!" He said it casually as he was wiping his hands, as though it were simply a fact of life.

Cornell

We played a job at Cornell University at least once. I remember tall, ancient trees on the edge of a dark gorge, a river rushing along below, and someone in the car singing the other version of the school song:

"Far above Cayuga's waters,

There's an awful smell:
Some say it's Cayuga's waters,
Others say Cornell."

Pat Hurley was a student there at least one of the times we played. I wrote her a letter, pleading with her to come and hear us, which she did. She had the same self-contained, distant manner; she politely listened, politely talked to me during the breaks, and had no idea, I'm sure, what I was feeling: not even the fact that I was now the leader of a jazz band that plays colleges and New York nightclubs, and my acne has almost gone away, was enough, was it? Despite the three or more years we had not seen each other, I felt the same as when we went out in high school: that this was my happiness, standing right there, but it would never be mine. Nothing I could possibly do would make her love me. I would gladly have spent the rest of my life just looking at her face, would have taken up any profession, even given up music (if such a thing were possible short of death), if she had loved me. As it was, after listening to a couple of sets, she excused herself, thanked me for inviting her, and I never saw her again[1].

The Mushroom Farm

Somehow, I don't remember how, we were able to get a job playing once or twice a week at the Mushroom Farm in Orange, N.J. The place derived its name from the fact that at one time someone had grown mushrooms in the basement, or so we were told. It was a good room for jazz: a bar area in the center, tables along both sides, a three-foot-high stage at the back, and wooden floors, which I always associate with whiskey sours with a red cherry inside, the drink I always had before starting the evening's work. The drink was just right, bathing mind and body in pleasantness but not slowing down reflexes. It freed me for the task at hand.[2]

I have no idea if I ranked in the upper, middle, or lower third of the mediocrity range of trumpet players, but I do know I sacrificed what little good I might have been able to do for the Dixieland tunes on the altar of modernity. Every trumpet player then who wasn't permanently stuck in the 20's or 30's, and believed, with Lunsford, that jazz stopped with the death of Jelly Roll Morton — every trumpet player was trying to *play cool*, which meant, among other things, playing lots of notes. And so when playing Dixieland, I ran up and down the scales in a poor imitation of someone who was playing modern jazz. A regular member of the audience — an old guy (meaning he was probably in his early fifties) — who always sat with his wife at the same table about halfway down the room on the left-hand side, would sometimes come to talk to us, compliment us, saying that he was a great jazz fan who collected records. I mentioned how much I liked Jelly Roll Morton[3]'s "The Chant", which I had first heard on a record of Carl's or George's at RPI and which seemed to me then, as now, to be unique among Dixieland tunes, with its nervous, jagged opening bars that I have been able to hear in my mind's ear throughout my life. One evening he came up to me as we were stepping down from the stage for a break, and said he would like to give me a gift. It was an LP of Jelly Roll Morton containing "The Chant". I thanked him effusively, shook his hand. Then he said he had only one criticism of my playing, namely, that I

1. Until old age, as described in the last chapter of this book.
2. Whiskey sours and martinis were men's dirnks. Manhattans were universally regarded as a woman's drink. Yet I was curious what they tasted like. So eventually I tried one, either by asking a girl to let me have a sip, or by actually buying one in a place where no one knew me. I found I liked it, and in fact couldn't understand why it was regarded as a girl's drink.
3. One of the great pianists of the early jazz era. He lived from 1890-1941.

played too many notes. He said it in the kindest, most apologetic way, and despite my immediate attempts to explain why, I knew he was right. But it came down to a choice between doing something that only I and one old guy believed was right, vs. having a fighting chance of playing the way the best jazz musicians were playing, the way that immortality lay, and so I chose the latter. No one, I felt, could dare to disagree with the obvious fact that cool represented the future.

I put the record carefully in the instrument closet at the side of the stage, went back, and finished the evening's performance. When we packed up, we shared the labor of carrying microphone stands, amplifier, and other hardware off the stage. With a microphone stand in one hand, and talking to someone, I opened the closet door and without looking thrust the stand inside. I heard a crack, looked down, and saw that the bottom of the stand had split the new record in half. Even though I could probably have replaced it, I felt I must not: someone who liked us had given me a gift, and I had broken it, and therefore I must spend the rest of my life with only this story to remember.

However, on Saturday, July 25, 1998, while looking for a reissue of some of the early Brubeck and Desmond recordings in the Used Jazz bins of Amoeba Records on Telegraph Ave. in Berkeley, I saw a bin marked "Jelly Roll Morton", and the first CD I looked at was a reissue of all his 1926-27 recordings with the Red Hot Peppers. It included "The Chant". I bought it, and find that in all likelihood it is the same recording that the old man had given me.

If you were going to be a great artist, it was important to suffer like one. So, sometimes, after an evening's performance, if I happened to have a car that was working, I would sleep in a room above the bar at the Mushroom Farm, rather than drive back to Lehigh that night. The room was full of old, broken-down furniture, smelled as though the door hadn't been opened for years, and had a big bed with a filthy coverlet over a huge, half-ripped-open ancient mattress. Good enough for one destined for greatness. But in the middle of my first night there, I woke up scratching my arms and chest. When I turned on the light, I found dozens of little red blisters all over my skin. I looked for bugs, couldn't see any, and tried to go back to sleep. I may have tried to put the coverlet between myself and the mattress, that is, sleep on it rather than under it, but that didn't help. I endured this for several nights, then decided that immortality would just have to make an exception this time, and so I drove back to Lehigh after jobs, or let someone else drive while I slept in the car.

Depressing Utica, N.Y.

Somehow, God knows how, Big Al got us a job in Utica, in upstate N.Y., one of the most depressing cities I had ever been to — it was even worse than Troy, N.Y., where RPI was. I remember the empty, cold streets, gray buildings, the absence of any feature to arouse the interest of anyone who was even half alive. We played in a hotel, and I remember us standing on a stage above a dance floor. A few couples waited, resignedly, for us to start. I'm not even sure it was a college function that we had been hired for. Charlie Acito, our trombonist, was standing on my right, and I heard him mutter again, "Dis band oughta disband". There were no curtains in the hall, and as soon as we started to play, the polished wood echoed our futile attempts to bring something approaching pleasure, or even a relief from depression, into the souls of our meager audience. I asked myself again and again, what kind of human being willingly lives in cities like this?

Over the years, among the many dreams I have that express end-of-the-world hopelessness, one is about a town along a brown river in upper New York state — old, soot-covered brick buildings, narrow, empty streets, an empty Odd Fellows hall, a vacant baseball field at one end.

A Girls' College

One of the things about jazz that appealed to me was the fact that, if you had any talent at all, you could always convert a mistake into something for which the audience would forgive you, if they noticed the mistake at all. For example, in the Gerry Mulligan album, *Jazz Goes to High School*, the trumpet player Jon Eardley cracks a note at the start of a solo on "Western Reunion" and immediately converts it into a repeated phrase that begins a new part of his improvisation. However, there are certain cases where you can't save yourself, and I ran into one of them at a concert we had been booked to play at a girls' college in New Jersey. We were late in leaving Bethlehem, then we had to wait for some of the musicians we were picking up, and so, by the time we got there, it was at least half an hour after the scheduled start of the concert. The auditorium had no fixed seats, merely a polished, wooden floor on which the students were sitting. There was a low stage. The audience had already started clapping and shouting in rhythm as audiences do when the performance is late to start, but this changed into applause as soon as they saw us hastening onto the stage with our instruments. We had to set up in full view of them, an embarrassing process when there are no other distractions, as at a party in a fraternity house. We fumbled getting horns out of cases and assembled. Lewis finally got the drums set up, sat down on his stool, gave the bass drum the usual sequence of thump-thumps from the foot pedal. We tuned quickly, by which time I was already sweating like a pig from the shame of being late and from the embarrassment of being watched by all those girls. In order to try to make up for our being late, I called, as the first tune, "Blues Walk", which for the trumpet begins on a high G (not a Maynard Ferguson high G, the one above high C, but the high G an octave lower than that: no problem for any competent trumpet player, but a potential problem for a trumpet player who is extremely nervous and whose lips are dry). I counted off a quick, "One, two, three, four!" and cracked that G so badly that not only the entire audience burst into laughter, but so did some of the members of the band. My face grew red, we carried on, I tried to make up for the blunder with a demonstration of technique, but the whole performance was pretty much a disaster, not the least reason being that we slowly gathered that very few members of the audience had any experience of jazz. And so we knew that one of our major tasks was to try to "show" them the music, try to make them like it, which was a chore that none of us wanted, and was especially difficult after the leader had made a fool of himself with the very first note.

Jimmy Ryan's and the Wilbur de Paris Band

Twice we were invited to play at Jimmy Ryan's nightclub on 52nd St. in New York as part of the club's college jazz series: one night a week, they invited a college jazz band to share the stage with the house band, which was none other than that of Wilbur de Paris. We had enormous admiration for this band, and had gone to hear it several times. There was Wilbur, bald, with his gentlemanly manner — the photo on the band's album *Wilbur de Paris at Symphony Hall* (Atlantic 1253), showing him with his poodle, made me suspect he was gay, though no one said anything — there he was, playing trombone, sitting on the left-hand side of the band (he never stood while playing, for some reason that I never found out). To the right of him stood Omer Simeon, with his raspy, lemon-juice, clarinet sound; on the right of Omer, big, fat Sidney de Paris, Wilbur's brother, also bald, and the only brass player any of us had ever heard of who could play trumpet *and* tuba[1],

1. Technically, E-flat bass

a feat which is roughly equivalent to juggling, say, a BB and a bowling ball with one hand, because the embouchure — formation and pressure and control of the lips — required for the small mouthpiece of a trumpet was entirely different from that required for the huge mouthpiece of the tuba. He would play the trumpet line at the start of a tune, then put the trumpet down and leisurely pick up the big silver tuba (not Sousaphone!) and, gazing benignly out at the audience, lay down the bass line with rhythmic puffs of his cheeks, then pick up the trumpet and play a magnificent solo. He stood there, this big pear-shaped man with the chocolate brown skin and shiny bald head, sometimes directing the horn to different parts of the audience, but never in the overdramatic way that lesser musicians sometimes did to gain applause, sometimes casually swaying a little from side to side as he effortlessly laid down the irresistible sentences of his improvisations. I never spoke to him, but I suspected he didn't say much in real life — he didn't have to, since everything important he had to say was contained in those glorious solos.

Among the reasons we admired the band so much was that they played actual arrangements, and did not merely rely on the standard jazz formula that we used, namely, playing the melody, or "line", then allowing each instrumentalist to improvise, then repeating the melody and stopping. Furthermore, in the de Paris band, one wind instrument, for example, the clarinet, would often provide a background riff behind another's solo, for example, the trumpet's, instead of just having piano, bass and drums behind each solo.

A perfect example of jazz improvisation at its best is Sidney de Paris's solo on "Wrought Iron Rag" on the above album, which unquestionably belongs in the category of great jazz solos. I ask anyone who thinks that Turk Murphy kept Dixieland alive in the latter part of the 20th century to compare this recording with any of Murphy's ossified renditions of Dixieland. I have listened to this recording hundreds of times over the years, and it still brings tears to my eyes. The solo has the crucial characteristics I have spoken of elsewhere — a beginning, a middle, and an end, and it says something, it brings you the News. Sophisticated listeners will tell me that his quoting "The Anvil Chorus"[1] is corny, and I say it doesn't matter. In his solo, he uses a metal top hat as a mute, as we saw him do many times in person. He would hold the brim of the hat almost daintily between thumb and index finger — he had the fat man's grace — and gently wave the opening — waft it— in front of the bell of his instrument. After the first time I saw him, I immediately wanted to be able to duplicate that sound, so I went out and bought a rubber toilet plunger, removed the stick, and, holding one point of the circumference of the rubber against the bell, used that as a hinge to move the plunger closer and farther from the bell. There was an aluminum mute, called a "wow-wow" mute, that enabled you to produce the same effect, but the sound wasn't as earthy, as bluesy, as damped, as the one that could be obtained with the toilet-plunger, much less with the top hat. Why I didn't try the latter I don't know, except that I may have felt it was too obvious an imitation. On the other hand, I would have given my right arm to have been able to duplicate the lip-trills of which he, like Louis Armstrong, was a master. But they were beyond me.

In any case, the crowd realizes what it has just heard, as you can tell from their response[2] at the end of his solo. I used to be able to play the solo by heart, as well as his solo on "Cielito

1. from Verdi's opera, *Il Trovatore*

2. It would be monumentally unfair not to praise Omer Simeon's clarinet solo on the same tune, immediately preceding Sidney's. Here, too, is a master improviser at work, and I would unhesitatingly advise any jazz clarinetist who aspires to accomplish anything worthwhile, to memorize this solo.

Lindo" on the same album, which also belongs in the category of great jazz solos, as does his solo on "Are You From Dixie?" on another album.

Our own performances at the club were entirely too nervous: I took the tempos too fast, played far too many notes in my solos, all out of eagerness to impress the de Paris musicians.

When we weren't playing I would stand at the bar, listening to the band, and, in particular, to Sidney's solos, feeling the hot sting of tears in my eyes, blushing, hoping no one noticed what this music was doing to me.

After one of our guest appearances, we and de Paris's band were invited to the penthouse of a member of the Fawcett family (owners of the publishing empire). I think one of the sons was in Lewis's fraternity. This family member apparently was a long-time fan of the de Paris band, and particularly admired Omer Simeon's playing. So, feeling like honored guests, we rode the elevator up and stepped out into a marble foyer, complete with Roman statues and potted plants. Inside the apartment, all was very upper class indeed, with servants coming around with drinks on silver trays, and every one fawning over the talented blacks, and saying a few kind words to us. It was the first time I had ever been in the presence of New York wealth like that.

I don't remember if I ever told Sidney how much I admired his playing. I was probably too shy. Writing this, I remember Fast Eddy's words to Minnesota Fats at the end of the film, *The Hustler*: "Fat man, you shoot a great game of pool." I wished I had had the courage to go up to Sidney when we knew we were making our last appearance at the club, shaken his hand and said, "Fat man, you play a great trumpet". Yet in four jazz books in my library, I find only the barest mention of the de Paris brothers, and not a word about the band itself. But on my death bed, one of the very few things I will be proud of is that I recognized the greatness of the improvisations of Sidney de Paris, and that I once led a band that made two guest appearances in the jazz club that was the home of this extraordinary musician.

It is sad that another extraordinary musician, Herbie Nichols, who was introduced above, apparently was not impressed by Sidney's playing. Herbie played with the de Paris band

"for twenty-two weeks at Jimmy Ryan's. It was revivalist Dixie at its most frigid and commercial. I once asked Herbie if the music interested him, and he replied with a succinct 'No.'" — Spellman, A. B., *Black Music*, Schocken Books, N.Y., 1976, p. 167.

On the basis of the CDs of the de Paris band issued by Collectables Jazz Classics (www.oldies.com) I must agree with Spellman that most of the band's music was undistinguished. But that in no way detracts from the extraordinary performances of Sidney or from the often outstanding clarinet work of Omer Simeon.

In the above section on Nichols, I mentioned that I was not sure how we first heard about him. Possibly his name and number were given to me by someone connected with the de Paris band after one of our performances at Ryan's.

I was surprised and pleased to learn in a phone call on Feb. 26, 2011 with Carl Lunsford, the banjoist with the Saints, the RPI band I played in, that Carl had played for several months with the de Paris band prior to 1954. He had the highest respect for the organization, and, in particular, for Sidney, and agreed that his solo on "Wrought Iron Rag" belonged in the category of great jazz solos. He said that he was angered that trumpet players later tried to imitate Sidney's playing, which he considered impossible, not the least reason being that none of them had Sidney's extraordinary talent — or collection of mutes! Carl said that he became good friends with clarinetist Omer Simeon, and sometimes, at 4 or 5 in the morning, drove him home to Harlem in his (Carl's) MG.. He said Omer lived in a YMCA.

But he had told me earlier that the band broke up in the early sixties. Omer Simeon died and then, not long after, Wilbur himself, in a bizarre accident: he had apparently been in the habit of avoiding electric utility bills by stealing electric power from other apartments in his apartment building, he having learned how to splice the wires so that his apartment received some of his neighbors' current. But he was careless on one occasion, and electrocuted himself. I am unable to check any of this because, as of June, 2011, there is apparently no biographical information on de Paris on Google.

The Central Plaza

The summit of achievement for college Dixieland jazz bands in those years was considered to be playing at the annual College Dixieland Festival (that may not be the exact name) at the Central Plaza nightclub in New York City. I think Big Al somehow got us invited. Every college band worth mentioning played there. The place was huge, like a Munich beer hall, with rows of tables, at which sat beer-swilling, shouting students. The air was warm, and thick with cigarette smoke and the smell of sweat.

Before our performance, I found a phone booth and called my mother. She: "Who? What's all that noise?" I: "It's the crowd. We're going to play at the Central Plaza!" She, not having the slightest idea what I was talking about: "What? Where are you?" I: "At the Central Plaza. In New York. The band has been invited to play here. It's a big honor." She: "What band?" I: "My band. The jazz group." She: "Is this something with that Peter Heim?" I: "No, don't you understand? This is a great occasion. We're going to play for lots of people". She never understood. She kept complaining about the noise, and asking what I was doing out that late.

We stood in the wings and waited as the bands ahead of us performed, criticizing each performance. I was a nervous wreck, sweat pouring down. Finally, they announced us, we went out to big applause, and played our two best tunes. But, as at Jimmy Ryan's, the tempos I gave were too fast, and so it sounded like we were frenetically trying to please the crowd by playing as fast as we could (which we were).

A Disastrous Appearance at Seton Hall

I made a fool of myself more than once. I was so taken with the Sauter-Finnegan rendition of the "The Doodletown Pipers", a tune that we also learned to play, and which featured a flute, I think, that I decided to incorporate recorder into our rendition. I had a cheap, plastic instrument that I had attempted to teach myself to play. I sensed that the band was not entirely overwhelmed by my solos, but I didn't realize how bad my playing was until Charlie Acito said, "Put away that fucking recorder, man, or else learn to play it." And so I didn't play recorder any more on jobs.

Probably the most disasterous public performance of my life occurred at Seton Hall radio station. Here I made a fool of myself before an audience of thousands. This was the school where our bassist, Dave Hunt, was a student. Somehow or other he had gotten it into his head that select members of the band constituted a perfectly good studio orchestra for some afternoon show on the station. I seem to remember it being after a job we had played, his argument being that it was on the way home anyway, no extra driving was involved, and we were all perfectly capable (he kept insisting) of sight-reading the simple arrangements. From the start I protested, telling him that I was unusually poor at sightreading, that he was asking for trouble in trying to do this with me playing trumpet. "Nonsense, you'll be just fine. Come on, man". (Snapping his fingers in rhythm.) The others seemed confident they could get through it, and so he positioned us in front of music stands in the studio while the previous show was nearing its end, set out the arrange-

ments, went over them quickly, told us what the cues would be, and at the signal from the engineer, counted off. The others started playing; I got lost immediately. The arrangement called for muted trumpet, and I was unsure about which mute to use. He looked over at me, motioned with his finger to forget about past mistakes, just jump in at a good spot. I hadn't the slightest idea where that was, since, of course, none of the parts were scores, that is, none showed what each of the other instruments was playing at any given time. With the sweat breaking out on my forehead, I began trying to improvise. This was even worse. Charlie shook his head from side to side while he was playing. Dave signalled Cut that out. I think I eventually just stopped altogether and let the others finish. My performance was so bad that the others didn't even bother to lose their tempers afterward. That is the kind of thing you do about something that could have been avoided. But it was clear that I simply didn't have the ability, the musicianship, for studio work, and so silent contempt was all that deserved. In subsequent days I thought seriously about suicide.

Going to the Jazz Clubs

The two best modern jazz clubs as far as I was concerned were Birdland — "The Jazz Corner of the World", at Broadway and 52nd St., an address that every hip musician knew by heart — and the Five Spot Cafe, in the Bowery.

I liked the Five Spot because of its bleak surroundings. You got off the subway and went down these vast, deserted, dark streets with closed-up buildings and warehouses on each side, and drunks sleeping in doorways. Then, near a corner, a gleam of yellow-brown light in the mist. Commotion inside.

> "5 Cooper Square (3rd Avenue) between 4th and 5th Streets. It was an elemental place; store front where you might see a Bowery bum mugging if you looked out through the plate glass window; tables to your left as you walked in, until you arrived at the bandstand; more tables in front of the stand, an aisle, and a bar against the right wall, its stools also facing the bandstand; then tables curving right to the back. There was nothing fancy: low-wattage lightting and a funky men's room to the right of the bandstand. The music was all." — Gitler, Ira, liner notes to *thelonious monk quartet with john coltrane at carnegie hall*, Blue Note/Thelonious Records

The place was always packed, the air thick with tobacco smoke; there were always lots of blacks in the audience, which told you this was hard-core jazz. Teeth and gold gleaming in the darkness. Sharp suits, beautiful black women. The laughter of blacks who knew what was going on.

I saw Thelonious Monk and Johnny Griffin there several times in the late '50s, with Roy Haynes, drums, and Shabib Shibab (or Ahmed Abdul-Malik[1]), bass. (We always referred to Monk as "Thelonious", which I always wanted to pronounce, "Felonious".) Monk never announced his tunes. I don't even recall if the club had someone to announce him. I remember that he usually came out carrying what looked like a bowl of soup, which he placed on the piano. The crowd noise never quieted before the group began to play. The sudden burst of sound took care of that. The audience stopped talking because they all knew that something important had just begun. I loved Monk's "wrong" notes — lemon juice to go with his soup in the yellow-brown light — and the slight awkwardness with which he seemed to play, as though his technique wasn't very good. And Griffin's extraordinary, long, virtuoso solos, an example of which can be heard

1. Both, despite their names, were American blacks, of course.

on "Rhythm-a-ning" (*Thelonius in Action: Thelonius Monk Quartet*, Riverside RLP 12-262), which certainly ranks among the great jazz solos. The LP was recorded live at the Five Spot, possibly (who knows?) on an evening when I was there.

During one break, Griffin came over and happened to stand near me at the crowded bar. He was short, slender, with a thin moustache. Another black began talking to him, saying that he too was a tenor sax player and was working hard to become good. He asked for advice. I was surprised at Griffin's willingness to listen to the guy, and at his obvious desire to help him as much as he could — his reply in essence was, "Practice, man" — especially considering that he must have been asked similar questions several times a night on every night he performed. I thought, "This is a good man."

Girls

The Lehigh engineers had Cedar Crest College, in Allentown, as a reliable source of dates (it was, in fact, a wife farm for the young engineers). Jazz musicians had neither the time nor the inclination to hang out with engineers and go through whatever rituals were required to meet Cedar Crest girls. Fortunately, there were always a few girls — which a later generation would call "groupies" — who found jazz musicians interesting, and who could, at the very least, be drawn into conversation. This possibility was one of the main reasons I played jazz in the first place.

I never picked up any girls when I was with the Saints. Why exactly I don't know. The action began when I got involved with the Christmas City Six in the fall of 1957. Laddie Souchek, the guy from whom I took over the band, had a girlfriend named Geri Thorpe, a tall, leggy English girl with an irresistible accent, and I was soon infatuated with her. God knows what no-but-yes I endured as I concealed from her/revealed to her my feelings. Just as I had to have control of the band, so I had to have this girl, or, in my case, have her like me.

Her mother was an airline stewardess, and they had a tiny apartment in New York City. As you walked in the door, the tiny kitchen was on the left, behind a couple of thin curtains. Straight ahead was the tiny living room, with the bedroom and bath off to the left. I thought that living there must be like always practicing for being aboard an airliner. I remember the mother as seeming rather old, perhaps a little alcoholic, but that may only have been an impression due to the fact that she immediately offered us cocktails.

Geri and I wrote letters back and forth — for all I know, she may have written me first, asking for advice about her relationship with Laddie. But in any case, we soon were carrying on a passionate relationship, without sex, behind L.'s back. I knew that sooner or later the chips would be down and I would have to deliver the goods, but the delight of being around her, of receiving those heart-thumping envelopes in the mail, was enough to take my mind off it.Once I invited her to my house in Valhalla, God knows why, since it meant introducing her to my mother. Perhaps I hoped to show her how successful my father had been. I see her now, striding around on those gorgeous gams, being infinitely polite with my mother, and I see the look in Geri's eyes that is the female expression of "Keep this one!" I built a fire in the fireplace. My mother was busy in the kitchen. I lay down in front of the hearth, invited her to do the same. We kissed, I simultaneously concentrating on doing interesting things with our tongues, and keeping an ear out for the sound of my mother's footsteps in the dining room or the front hallway, which would have meant she had decided it was time to see what we were doing, since we were so quiet.

Fortunately, we were never sufficiently alone, either at my house or anywhere else, for the issue of my delivering the goods to come up. I don't know why we parted. But I do know that

one piece of music was, and is, and always will be forever associated with her, and that is Brubeck's "Two-Part Contention" (*Dave Brubeck and Jay & Kay at Newport*, Columbia CL 932). I am sure I had bought the record before we met (the recordings were made at the 1956 Newport Jazz Festival), and I know for certain that I knew as soon as I met her that this was the perfect expression of her. I must have begged her to listen to it whenever she came up to my room at 618 Muschlitz.

Considering all my troubles with the rapid accumulation of scratches and hisses on long-playing records, I count it nothing short of miraculous that the above LP, which was some 53 years old at the time of this writing, still has little noise after countless playings.

The previous tune that the Quartet played was "In Your Own Sweet Way". As the enthusiastic applause dies down, the almost shy voice of Brubeck is heard, with its professorial pauses:

"Thank you. Right now we'd like to do...another tune we call ... 'Two-Part Contention' because it's like...a two-part invention but not quite....It's in three sections...and each section is marked by a tempo change by the drummer, Joe Dodge. The first part you will hear will be the two lines, one ...played by Paul Desmond, on the alto saxophone, the other by the bass player, Norm Bates, and we'll develop the full three sections from this original...thematic material."

The first part begins, and already I am holding my breath. Even before the end of the first part, my face is flushed, I feel shivers in my scalp. "Please God, don't let her be bored. Please let her understand how great this music is. Please don't let her see that I am on the verge of tears." I'm sure I must have said a few words now and then to prevent her from losing interest. At the start of the third part, I'm sure I said something like, "Now listen to this! Listen to the bass!" And then, near the end, "Listen to this. It's a fugue! [between Brubeck and Desmond] Listen!" And then at each crash of Joe Dodge's cymbals, I smashed my fist in the air and shouted, "Pow! Yeah!"

The poor thing no doubt did her best to like it as much as I did. How these associations between a piece of music and a person take place in the human soul we will probably never know. (Why not some other piece instead of this one?) The piece is by no means "romantic" in the usual sense. But even now when I hear it, I see her hair, cut to neck-length, and curving forward a little at the ends. I see those beautiful eyes, those legs, which she showed off like jewelry she was only half conscious of the effect of. I hear that beautiful voice speaking English words the way they should be spoken.

At the Five Spot, around March of 1958, I managed to pick up a girl, a rare achievement for me. I was standing in the crowd at the bar, when I noticed, standing next to me, this girl in a raincoat.We began talking, I remember she told me that on weekends she participated in a kind of motor racing in which cars have to travel assigned distances in precisely assigned times, the challenge being not so much speed, since the times were not that short, but driving skill — covering the distance as nearly as possible to the specified time. I don't remember what she called the sport, but I think the correct name is "gymkhana". By the time we parted, we had exchanged addresses and phone numbers[1]. Her name was Nancy Carrier. I called her from Lehigh, asked her if she would like to go out. She said yes, so I took a bus to the City. I can't remember where we went, but afterward, she invited me up to her apartment. She opened the door, went inside, but told me to wait because she had to check on her roommate. She came back out, said her room-

1. In the black book, under her name, is "c/o P. Langdon, 244 East 78th St., New York City, N.Y., TR 9-2521"

mate was there with a guy, we couldn't go in. So we necked on the cold steps outside the apartment at 2 or 3 in the morning. I liked it but because I knew what was coming next, I wished there was some way I could get out of there, especially as I could already claim credit for having succeeded in getting a girl to go out with me, even to like me. She had on her raincoat. What was I supposed to do? Even if I accomplished the impossible, which is, managed to keep an erection, we couldn't have sex on the landing. I continued to kiss her, caress her through her clothes. At one point she whispered, "It's so long..." Did she mean it was such a long time waiting for me to have intercourse with her, or was she referring to the size of my cock? I had no idea. Somehow I managed to leave, probably on the excuse that there was no use our continuing to torture ourselves when there was no place to go.

We wrote to each other, she always printing in capitals. (I have no copies of what I sent her.) Her first or second letter revealed something I had not remotely suspected:

Saturday nite

> I have something to tell you, John dear, and <u>having</u> to tell you gives me a sickish feeling, for I'm wondering how terribly you will care. Will you feel it repulsive? Tragic? Or something equally dreadful? Or will you accept it, as I think I have, as too bad, but inevitable — predestined, perhaps, and if so, for an ultimate good. You have heard me say before that I believe everything happens for a reason and for the best (no matter how obscure that "<u>best</u>" may be). At any rate, my beliefs probably stem from my "misfortune". Possibly I'm being an ostritch [sic] — but I really don't think so. The most difficult part of this is not knowing whether you <u>know</u> or not. You're a pretty observant guy, I'm sure, but I've played bridge with girls, (the sorority set, of course) for four months, who never noticed. Oh hell, best I say it — I have an artificial arm (George). Automobile accident, 2 years ago, and that's all there is to say about it. I'm not sensitive about it at all (just a bit nervous when I don't know if people are aware of it or not) but feel that if you're going to accept me you have to accept George <u>and</u> me.

I liked the total femaleness of her postscript:

> P.S.
> You know, New York is doing this damn Spring bit again — you look at a tree, trying to decide if those are really little green buds and the next thing you know you've been standing in the pouring rain for an hour — all weak and sorrowful and strong and singing inside — so you wander home and take a hot hot shower and curl up in your old soft blue bathrobe smelling all clean and nice and drink your hot coffee and three hours later the book is still open at page one on your lap and you've burned one hell of a hole in the table with your long forgotten cigarette.

She was damaged goods but I continued to go to New York to see her. I don't remember a single date, but we almost certainly went back to the Five Spot at least once. After one date, I sent her roses. She said, in her next letter,

> When I got home I found your roses waiting for me. John, I don't know what to say — no one has ever done that for me before and I had lost hope — feeling that I just wasn't the

> kind of girl a man sent roses to. What does one mouth, but a very inadequate thank you? You have come into my life and you are perfect.

Although she was working (for a firm called Multiple Products Corporation on 13th St — I never found out what she did there), she had occasional financial problems.

> This has been a dreadful day. For I have no money (per usual) — hence, no lunch — and I'm ravenous!

I have no memory of her physical appearance, but in the same letter she said:

> I don't really want to look like Audrey Hepburn — I'm happy if you think I look like Leslie Caron (and like it).

And she always tried to be comforting about the depression that was clear from my letters.

> Do not be sad, my talented friend. You are so handsome when you smile.

I sent her poetry, which she always praised, though it was all dreadful stuff.

In one letter, after receiving one of my brow-beating tracts, she addressed me as "Il Penseroso".

But my trips to the City grew more infrequent. There was no sex — certainly not because she was unwilling. Then — I can no longer remember the circumstance: it was not in a letter I still have; perhaps it was over the phone, or when we were together — she revealed that she had slept with a guy she went to a gymkhana event with. In so many words, she said that she needed sex; if I couldn't supply it, then she could hardly be blamed for going elsewhere. I should have been prepared for this, since one night, as we were walking along a New York street, the subject of Harry Belafonte came up, and she remarked, "He can put his shoes under my bed any time," which I thought was vulgar, and convinced me to put more distance between us.

Then there was a Jewish girl named Judy Calvin whom I met in the big room of a rich old house in Albany. The band must have had a job there. From her address in the black book[1], I assume she she was a student at a college in Albany. I remember nothing about her except that she had black hair, wore dark blue dresses, and lived on Long Island (Belmour, according to the black book). I once took her to Eddie Condon's — our band had shared a stage with him at some college concert: he was so drunk he seemed not to be aware of what was going on. I proceeded to demonstrate my recently acquired deep knowledge of tequila. (Actually, someone had showed me the technique: you had a cut lime ready, then put a little salt on your wrist, then took a drink of the liquid, which to me tasted like concentrated cactus plant, then licked the salt, and bit into the lime. For some reason, it always sounded like instructions for having a finger amputated.) But I proceeded to order a shot of tequila for both us, with the necessary accoutrements, and since the first drink was kind of fun, I was soon ordering another, and another, and then, as I was about to

1. 294 Washington Ave., Albany, N.Y.

go to the men's room, I realized I couldn't get up. "Well, I'll go later," I said, as I settled back into my chair. I think she was the girl with whom I made my one and only attempt at the European custom of kissing a woman's hand, which I had come across in a film or novel. I thought she would be impressed by my European charm and so as we were saying goodbye, I took her hand, bent forward while keeping my legs stiff, and, closing my eyes, placed a soft kiss on the flesh before me. Unfortunately, in my nervousness, and with my eyes closed, I missed her hand and kissed my own.

Uses of Alcohol

In comparison with most other students, I was a moderate drinker. I used alcohol to reach a point where I could play well, and stopped there. Why I didn't drink more, I am not sure. I hated losing control, of course, and I hated anything that seemed to slow down my thinking, but the real reason I think was that I knew that anything that made me feel good (apart from music) was a lie.

But there was one use of alcohol, apart from relaxing your nerves, which seemed to pay off in the pursuit of girls. You asked the bartender to fill a shot glass with vodka, then you held the glass tightly in your hand to warm the vodka. Then you asked someone to light a match and bring it close to the surface of the liquid. Eventually, the surface would burst into a blue flame. Now came the dramatic part: you held the glass in front of you and then tossed the contents of the glass into your mouth. If you did it right, an arc of blue flame appeared briefly in the room, ending in your mouth. Unfortunately, if you didn't do it right, it spilled on your clothes and set them on fire. (I heard that some guys practiced with shot glasses filled with water, slowly increasing the distance from their mouths at which they tossed the water in. I never practiced.) So I held the glass far out in front of me, then quickly brought the glass close to my mouth and tossed the vodka in from just in front of my lips. Which was still a little shocking, but nowhere near as shocking as seeing a blue flame arc a foot or more from the glass into your mouth. Actually, it was much less painful than it looked, since you swallowed it immediately, thus extinguishing the flame. I remember that sometimes the inside of my lips were tender after a few of these. Needless to say, the drink was called a Blue Flame. The girls were always impressed.

Playing Polkas

Not everything about those years in Bethlehem was bad. One good thing, apart from playing jazz, was playing in polka bands, namely in the Joe Timmer Orchestra. I have no idea how he heard of me, since our genres of music were at opposite ends of the spectrum. I think he may have initially asked me to sit in on a rehearsal, to see if I had the technique. Then, after that, he would give me a call every once in a while. The jobs were in big halls, where there was ample room for dancing and ample room for large supplies of beer.

Bethlehem was polka country because of the large Slavic population that worked in the steel mills. In polka country, you weren't really a man unless you could dance the polka for hours on end. Since such dancing was, for all practical purposes, like doing exercises to music, the dancers soon were perspiring and the loss of all that liquid naturally demanded replenishment, which was supplied by pitchers of beer.

The typical polka band consisted of two trumpets, sax, piano, bass, and drums. From the musician's point of view, playing polkas was also like doing exercises, hour after hour. Here you didn't stand around, as in jazz, while the other players improvised through several choruses. Here, you sat in front of a music stand and read the notes on the sheet music before you. No ad-libbing. Within half an hour or so, your main concern in life was trying to preserve your lip

enough to get through the remaining three and a half hours. You learned to grab and savor every allotted rest, even if it was only a couple of beats. Sometimes double-tonguing, my nemesis, along with triple-tonguing, was required.

In Bethlehem, there were even polka records on the juke box at each table in some of the diners. Some of these records were made by local bands, including Joe's. He was something of a force in the local polka scene, having not only a band which made records, but his own radio show, which was broadcast from a station, WGPA, just up the street from the *Globe-Times*. Once, when I dropped in to his muffled little studio, he sitting there with his radio voice and smile, he had me say a few words on the air. By day he worked as a stock clerk in a warehouse of Sarco Manufacturing Co., in a nearby town. He was married but had no children.

(While walking past his station one day, the idea occurred to me of a fully-automated FM station, in which all the music and announcements and ads were pre-recorded and then simply played, without the need for any humans to be on hand. It seemed a brilliant idea. Many years later, some FM stations did exactly this at least for broadcasts during the night.)

He had curly hair, almost flat across the front (I envied him), always wore a cheerful smile, and never said a harsh word to his musicians. He played drums competently but was certainly no virtuoso. He had found a composer in Connecticut named Ken Morey who ground out original tunes, including mazurkas, czardases, obereks (pronounced oh*bed*icks). Joe could pick up the phone, call Ken, and sing a few bars of a melody he had thought of, and in a week Ken would send back a complete arrangement of the tune. Joe recorded the Morey arrangements with us in a local school gymnasium, hiring a local guy to act as engineer. The engineer sat hunched over a table with the tape equipment on top, listening through earphones, adjusting dials. Each piece required several takes. For two or three hours of this work, each of us got $7, and I was always glad for the money. I still have some of these records, which are 45 rpms. The sax player, Joe Tancaretti, had a tone — plain, with no vibrato, at times a bit hesitant, at times just a bit out of tune — that had the same appeal on polkas as Fats Domino's sax players had on rhythm and blues tunes, the lack of virtuosity somehow drawing you into the music.

Timmer's band had competition, needless to say, and sometimes I played in these bands (with his full knowledge and consent). Some of the musicians were truly extraordinary. I remember a job in a Godforsaken coal town far from Bethlehem. This was one of those semi–ghost towns which dotted the landscape. Before the coal ran out, they had been able to provide employment for the miners who lived there with their families, but now they were blighted areas, the men preferring to live on welfare and the little work they could find rather than leave their families and try to find work in the big city. The band that hired me was probably the main competitor to the Joe Timmer Orchestra. I think the name of the leader (and drummer) was Bob Clewell. One of his legs had been crippled by polio, but that didn't prevent him from being a thoroughly competent drummer and band leader. We drove through the depressing, rural hills in darkness, through an occasional town with abandoned streets and only one or two street lights, finally came to a little dirt roadway that led between two slag heaps to the brightly-lit dance hall. We dragged our stuff inside, set it up, the dancers already milling around, drinking, talking. I had to sight read the entire evening's music. Fortunately, the alto sax player, whose name, I think, was Walter Kuczan, knew all the parts by heart (because he had written and arranged most of the music), so he could always play the melody. He was probably in his twenties or early thirties, thin, with black hair, and was a virtuoso on his instrument. I had recently heard Jacques Ibert's *Concertino da camera* for alto saxophone, and I kept thinking that Walter could easily have played it. He had flawless technique, and yet at the same time kept an eye and an ear on the rest of the band, turning occa-

sionally while his fingers flew over the keys, ready to jump in and cover any mistakes or gaps. He may not have been the official leader, but he did a great deal of the work. Like Joe, all the musicians, including this remarkable sax player, worked at dull jobs during the week, with no hope of promotion or increased income. But I never heard them complain.

Joe went on to prosper in the polka business, as described in the last chapter of this book.

Writing

Soon after I got established at 6 E. 4th, I started writing an essay on the importance of education. The idea was that education is a glue that holds society together. But since I wanted it to be an immortal work, I made every minute I spent on it as much of an agony as I could. I wrote on the heavy, second-hand typewriter I had acquired somewhere, and, of course, that meant that every change and correction to a page required that the entire page had to be retyped. I weighed every word, not from the point of view of "Is this word or phrase better than what I have now?" but from the point of view from which I always wrote, namely, "Is this word or phrase the one that is supposed to be here if this is to be an immortal work?"

I was tormented by this and other unanswerable questions.

The Unanswerable Questions

What is fiction?

There was no doubt that the professors placed a high priority on a work of fiction being *fiction*. It couldn't be autobiographical, although sometimes they, and reviewers, and critics, were forced to describe a work as "semi-autobiographical". And so we were asked to believe that it was purely coincidental that Hemingway, who had been an ambulance driver during the first World War, should have the leading male character of *A Farewell to Arms* be an American lieutenant in the Italian ambulance service in the first World War. Authors had learned to make the standard disclaimer, in interviews, that their latest novel was *not autobiographical*, and I remember, many years later, hearing an author on FM who had just published a novel about someone who worked in some obscure job, denying, apparently in dead seriousness, that although the hero of her novel worked in the same job, and had faced many of the problems she had, this was purely a coincidence.

And yet, although Rule 1 was that we should write fiction, not autobiography, Rule 2 was "Write what you know about!" There was no end to the repetition of this rule in the How to Write books and in creative writing courses. For me these two rules were hopelessly contradictory. If you wrote only about what you knew, then certainly something of what you had experienced — at least some of the personality types of people you had known, not to mention physical locales — must necessarily be in your so-called fiction. Furthermore, there was the embarrassing fact that the greatest writer of all in the language, namely, Shakespeare, wrote about people and places he had no first-hand knowledge of. What about that?

I was tormented by the fear of not writing fiction in the same way that I was tormented by the fear of being a literary Romantic or of being queer. No member of the Inquisition, no fanatical Leftist, no academic practitioner of the New Criticism, was more obsessed with sniffing out signs of the hated Other than I was. Every story idea I had was forced to appear before my internal Star Chamber: "Did any of this ever happen to you? Are you absolutely sure that you never saw any of the locales you are imagining the story to take place in? Wait: doesn't the character — bear certain suspicious resemblances to you? Be honest. So you are writing autobiography after all!

You are doomed to failure!"

Inevitably, I tried to arrive at a continuous scale of "autobiographicalness": at the lowest level was straight autobiography: you told what you had done, what had happened to you, and gave the actual names of all the people and places. At the next level everything was exactly the same thing except that you changed the names. At the next level perhaps the original chronological order was changed. Eventually you would reach a level at which the actual people, with changed names, were described doing things you made up. And so on, up through who knew how many levels? I wanted to know, from the professors, at what level did *fiction* begin? So that, if I wrote at that level, or any higher one, then I would know that at least, thank God, I was writing fiction, and wasn't writing the worst of all things to write (outside of something Romantic).

How is it possible to write something for an audience that may never exist?

For me, from the very beginning, this was a question that could stop me in my tracks more than any other. Because it seemed to me that writing anything but a letter or a paper for school was in itself a fiction. You pretended to be writing for — whom? You had to pretend there was a reader out there, or would be a reader out there, who would one day read your words. But suppose you were wrong? Then what were you doing other than indulging in the most pathetic self-delusion imaginable? I couldn't escape the idea that *first* came the audience, *then* came the writing, just as with letters and school papers. It is no exaggeration to say that the first twenty or thirty years of my attempts at literary writing were primarily attempts at finding a way to write honestly and genuinely to an audience that didn't exist and might never exist.

What is a short story?

I never understood, I could never grasp, the essence of the short story, although in conversation I knew how to reduce the boredom of an anecdote, namely, by keeping it short, using dramatic tricks like, "Something interesting happened yesterday..." "You'll never believe this but...", and by always maintaining a sense of humor. But the written story was an entirely different matter. It was a matter of guessing a secret code that was known only to editors, successful writers, and professors. I hated the fact that the little magazines always specified a *length* for publishable stories. Why that length, or range of lengths, and not some other? What did you have to do, or be, to learn the answer to that question? I often thought of an item in the puzzle column of a comic book I had read as a child. The item was titled "The World's Shortest Story" and consisted of the four words: "Sail, gale, pale, rail." Why wasn't that a perfectly good short story?

I took it for granted that if a story was any good it didn't have a plot. Furthermore, everything had to be suggested, not touched, and always with a whimper behind it, a tear, and a surprise at the end. I hated this requirement more than any other, because life did not have surprises, little candies in obscure wrappers, at the end of little episodes of ordinariness. Had I been given my wish (and I would have turned it down if I sensed it wouldn't lead to publication), it would have been to be allowed to approach the task of writing a story by thinking about what I was aiming for, then thinking about the plot, the various what-happens, as means of achieving what I was aiming for. A masculine approach. I knew that Poe had advocated this approach to the story, but I also knew that in the eyes of the academics, and of women, this was 19th-century stuff, and thus didn't apply to us. Instead, the story had to be the outcome of a mysterious feminine process in which you didn't know what you were doing but it somehow came out right because someone wanted to publish it. I am also amazed, now, how unquestioningly I accepted the Hemingway edict that you must always write in the plainest possible Anglo-Saxon words.

What is the correct number of words to write each day?

I was convinced that there *was* a correct number of words that each author was supposed to write each day, that if I wrote that number of words, my immortality would be assured. Furthermore, I was convinced that anyone who was, in fact, destined for immortality, knew what the number was, and the fact that I didn't was a very ominous sign. I had read something that Hemingway had written about how he wrote one of his novels; how he got up in the morning, and went to his typewriter, and kept working throughout the morning until he had completed the 500 words he had set as his required daily output. Then he wrote down the exact number of words he had written, and did other things for the rest of the day, and next morning repeated the process. I absolutely detested the idea of counting words like that, of running one's artistic life as though it were no different than working in a factory, or, even worse, working for Mom and Dad. Yet he was famous and I couldn't even get published, so his way must be right. I also detested the worship of quantity of output among the professors: how these bureaucrats would be beside themselves with envy of the one of them who could publish more papers per year than any of the others. How they loved thick books that were difficult to understand! I felt, although I didn't think of it in these words: Haven't any of you sons-of-bitches any integrity? Suppose you can think of nothing to write for a few days. So what? Suppose that what you want to say can be expressed in a few paragraphs, and doesn't need a paper, much less a book. Shouldn't you have the courage to circulate the few paragraphs, and not to waste all that time and effort padding them out to meet the self-serving interests of journal editors and deans of departments?

What is the relationship between sound and meaning?

I was completely at sea on this question. I didn't even have a clear idea of the difference between syntax and semantics. Had you asked me then, I would have said that, since changing even one word in a sequence resulted in a change in the *sound* of the sequence, the meaning of the sequence — at the highest level, the poetic level — might therefore change drastically. But there was no way to tell *how* drastically. Years later, I tried to write by beginning with the sound, and produced part of a novel this way, namely, by blurring my mind so that it heard only verbal tones and rhythms, to which I fit whatever actual words I thought might produce something immortal. I wrote a number of short short stories and prose poems this way, all of them rubbish. The one literary agent I managed to find in my life said as much when I sent some of these things to her. I didn't know then that James Joyce had already explored this approach to writing, namely, in *Finnegan's Wake*.

How much should you describe?

I had absolutely no idea how I or anyone else figured out how much to describe. You visualized a scene — but much of the time I thought that if you have to *visualize* the scene first, that is a sign of weakness! If you were truly great, the words would simply come, and you would only realize what they were describing, if anything, *after* they were written. But assuming, in your weakness, you had to fall back on visualizing first, then how could you possibly know what was "enough" of a description. A room has walls, a ceiling, a floor, furniture. There are one or two or more people in it. They are wearing clothes, shoes. They look a certain way. Painters have spent days painting just the objects on a table, yet your task is infinitely greater, because you have to somehow convey, without drawing or painting, just with words, the scene in the room. Should

you describe the feet of the legs on the table, and if not, why not, and, more important, how do you know you shouldn't? Why not give the exact dimensions of the chairs and tables and the room? Why not provide a drawing? But then why not provide a painting, done by someone else if necessary? Why not give the names of the real or fictitious stores where every item in the room had been purchased, and then describe the people who had purchased them? Where did it stop? Who would have the gall to leave some of this material out? How accurately do you have to describe the hair of the people? (What author has done a good job of describing hair with words?) Furthermore, once having decided that this or that thing should be described, how could you know what words would do the job best? There were many possible combinations of words that could convey some idea of the scene, and the associated feeling, you had in mind. How could you possibly find out the effect that each possible description would have on each reader, or on various groups of readers? (In Mrs. Spettel's class, we had to make copies of our stories and essays available for the other students, and then, on an appointed day, they critiqued the stories and essays in class. But the aim here was entirely to get their, and Mrs. Spettel's, approval. There wasn't the remotest chance of sitting down with one or more of the kids and saying things like, "When you read this paragraph, what exactly do you see in your mind?") I felt that the only honest way would be to subject each description to a poll of prospective readers, with a questionnaire, to see if they were seeing what I had in mind. Nothing less would do.

I was tormented by something else about descriptions that no one seemed to talk about, namely, how many closely related actions you should string together before you put in the "and" and brought the sequence to a close. "He reached into his pocket for the pack of cigarettes," (or should you say, "*his* pack of cigarettes"? or did that make it too babyish?), "tapped a cigarette out of the pack, put the pack back into his pocket, fished out the pack of matches" (or "*his* pack of matches"?), "tore off a match, struck the match, touched it to the end of the cigarette, tossed the match away, inhaled deeply, removed the cigarette from his mouth, allowed smoke to descend like tusks from his nostrils, blew the rest of the smoke out from between his pursed lips, resumed his walk past the store fronts, wondered if she would call that night, wondered where he was going to find the money to pay for the movies if she did, tripped on a piece of uneven cement, took another drag on his cigarette..." How did you know where to break up all those actions? Where did the "and" go? He did this, this, *and* this. Or should it be, he did this, this, this, *and* this. Or this, this, this, *then* this? Or ...

What sequence of words will be remembered?

This was the ultimate question, and it was motivated by the following *facts*:

(1) Only a finite number of short stories, poems, and novels will be remembered in the next century and beyond — in other words, will be immortal;

(2) Therefore there is only a finite number of ways to begin a story, poem, or novel, namely, the way that those that will be remembered begin.

Maybe several of these stories and books will begin with, say, "The", maybe only one will, maybe none will. Or suppose that God or your own desperate intuition told you that an immortal story will begin with words having to do with rain in the early afternoon. Well, one possibility might be, "Although the rain finally let up in early afternoon...", but another possibility could be, "The rain finally let up in early afternoon..." or "' Did the rain finally let up?' 'Yes. In early afternoon.'" (It would make an interesting experiment to submit the same story written just slightly differently to different small magazines.)

I had a superstition, which remains to this day, that no immortal work can have two successive paragraphs that begin with the same word. I have never made a systematic study to determine if this superstition has any basis in fact.

But if you began a story or book with a word or sequence of words that was not the beginning of one of the immortal works of your time, your subsequent efforts were utterly futile! Why waste time talking about character development and prose style, much less about being true to yourself, when the real question, the only question, was, *How do you guess or otherwise figure out what the first word, then the second word, then the third word, then the fourth word, ...is in at least one of the books and stories that will be remembered?* Yet the number of possibilities was astronomically large. Even if, by some miracle, all the books and stories that would be remembered used only a vocabulary of Basic English, that is, 10,000 words, then already by the fourth word, there were $10{,}000^4$ possible sequences to be considered — ten trillion! True, if you allowed only grammatical sequences of words, or, rather, potentially grammatical sequences of words, that number would be decreased. But even if, by some miracle, God boiled the possibilities down to, say, 100 four-word phrases, you still would have no way of knowing which ones would be the start of books and stories that would be remembered. This thought more than any other made writing seem a fundamentally hopeless activity — like trying to live a happy, normal life while believing in predestination.

(3) Therefore the question was (and is), "How do you guess or figure out or somehow come to know what one of the immortal sequences is?"

I was filled with boundless, ferocious envy for those writers of the past who had been able to figure out some of the immortal sequences.

Of course, everyone knew that you were supposed to be true to yourself, be an individual, fight the crowd, but I considered this a prime example of the dim-wittedness of the mob, because we only heard about those who had been true to themselves *and* had produced work that lasted. What about those who had been true to themselves and had been forgotten within a year or two after they died?

So my real task as a writer was nothing less than to guess what would please the authorities who decided which writers would be remembered and which would not, that is, which would be judged to have had a reason and which no reason to live.

For those who find all this rather silly, let me ask them to imagine that tomorrow they would be subjected to several hours of unimaginable torture, like that described in the opening paragraphs of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, unless they were able to write a short story that would be remembered in the next century. They will then have some idea of the price I was convinced I would have to pay for failure.

How can you learn the names of female things without becoming queer?

All the good short story writers and novelists seemed to know the names of these things — kinds of furniture, household decorations, food, female clothing, shoes, perfumes, hairdos. But how did they learn them? If you went up to a girl or a woman and said, "Excuse me, but what is the name of that perfume you are wearing?", they might laugh in your face, maybe reply with sarcastic disdain, "Why, do you want to *wear* some?" If you managed to get into a wealthy home, how could you ask the woman who lived there, "Excuse me, but what kind of material is your dress made of?" "What style of shoe are you wearing?" "What material are your curtains made of?" "What style of sofa is this that we are sitting on?" Unthinkable. They would judge me, without the slightest doubt, to be queer, and *therefore* I would become queer. But on the other

hand, maybe the real reason I wanted to be a writer was *in order to* have an excuse to learn about feminine clothing, because I was really queer after all!

But my hatred of American culture and of the *New Yorker* writers who came from rich families and knew these things as a matter of course also made me rebel against the learning of the names of things *not* particularly associated with women: car models, men's clothes, shoes, stereos — in fact, anything in the vast catalog of products which made life worth living for the American upper middle class.

What is the correct way to revise a story?

I could never understand people saying that they had *rewritten* a story several times. Why rewrite the phrases and sentences that were fine as they stood? Why not just rewrite the inferior parts, and then insert them where appropriate?

What right do you have to be self-confident?

I had absolutely no self-confidence, yet I had a nagging feeling that no writer worth his salt can produce anything worthwhile if he doesn't have it. But I felt that I had no right to be self-confident until I had produced something that others would admire, or at least publish, and that couldn't be done without self-confidence.

Attempts at Poetry

One winter at Lehigh, possibly for Prof. K —'s creative writing course, I wrote a poem whose last lines were:

"... Snow —
And the children come out and print in it."

I sent it to Miss Coester, the woman who had rented a room from my mother, and who then lived with another woman in a saltbox in Brookfield Center, near Danbury, Conn. Her reply was complimentary. I tried another poem, something about a circus tent ballooning in the rain (shafts of sunlight coming down from the rainclouds, puddles in dark gray mud, some poor soul finding brief solace in something ephemeral). I worked on it for weeks, believing, trying to force myself to believe, that if I got the words right, this could save me. I can still feel the sticks and wet canvas and mud and hopelessness of it. Only a struggling writer with no talent can believe that anyone could pin such hopes on such talentless material. I sent the poem to Miss Coester, again she was complimentary.

I sent a few lines of another poem to David R — . The only line I remember now is:

"Only the past is inevitable"

to which he gave a grudging approval.

Copying Down Conversations

Since all great writers were masters of dialogue (witness how everyone admired J. D. Salinger), I made a habit of copying fragments of conversations I overheard in restaurants or on buses or trains. I remember sitting behind a girl on a bus trip to New York City and taking down every

word I could. I was like a girl myself, exulting in this humble pleasure — oh, all we need to be happy is our art! I thought about carrying around a tape recorder, disguising it as a suitcase, and letting it run as I sat in restaurants. But then I thought: if this were a good idea, someone would have done it by now, I would have read about someone doing this, and I hadn't, so it must be a sign of no talent as a writer to do it, and so I won't do it.

The truth is, I wanted to do everything in dialogue (only in my sixties did I come across a novelist who actually had done this, namely, Ivy Compton-Burnett). I hated what seemed to me the phoniness of description, description that was somehow needed to justify the good stuff, that is, the talk. "...he said, looking down, not meeting her eyes."

A Creative Writing Course

Whenever I felt I had achieved a syntactic construction that had a chance of making me immortal, I sent it to the *New Yorker*. Within a week or two, back came the printed rejection. I had to respect them for their promptness. Of course, we aspiring writers were supposed to read *Writer's Market* in order to find out What Editors Want (and how to present it to them). But I absolutely detested the idea of going to a magazine to find out what I should write and how I should write it. I remember reading that editors would often reject a story if there was a single *erasure* on the first page — a single word erased and then typed over. God knows how many hours I spent typing and retyping the pages of my manuscripts. I would get all the way down to the end of the page, heart beating, palms sweating, thinking that I had it right, this one would be acceptable to them, and then, a moment's failure to think about the next keystroke and it was all worthless: start the page all over again. We were warned, in those endless articles about how to succeed, all written by people you had never heard of, that you should *not* turn a page of your manuscipt upside down to see if the editor had actually read that far. Editors were wise to these tricks. (It was a measure of my naivete that I imagined that an editor couldn't legitimately make up his mind about a manuscript until he had read it all, when, in fact, I, like most bookish people, usually knew in a matter of *seconds* whether something was the kind of thing I wanted to read.)

Around this time I saw a book titled *Chocolates for Breakfast* written by 18-year-old Pamela Moore. My jealousy and perplexity were boundless, because again I saw writing as an ingenious act of guessing an enormous sequence of words that would please important editors in New York. How did she do it? What could account for such unfairness in the doling out of gifts in the population?

So, since I wasn't getting anywhere on my own, I felt I might as well take a creative writing course, especially since I could get academic credit for it. It was taught by Prof. K —. He wore dark-rimmed glasses, as I did, and I remember looking frequently at his receding hairline, thinking, "That will be me. I am looking at myself in a few years". I can't remember a thing I wrote for the class, but he seemed to take an interest in me. One fall day he invited me to his house. Perhaps the subject of painting had come up in conversation, I don't know. His nondescript house was in some nondescript vaguely suburban margin of the city. It looked like an English professor's house: small, old, funky, with books everywhere. He lived alone. There was something about a divorce many years ago. He seemed very lonely. As it turned out, he was a talented watercolorist, showed me a number of paintings of forest floors, with dark pine needles, leaves, and mushrooms. I was impressed by how realistic the paintings were. The leaves were luminescent. My worst fear was that he was queer and was trying to seduce me. This seemed more and more true. He had a way of standing too close to me. The invitations became more frequent. Eventually, when the course was over, I stopped all communication with him. Although I would

never have admitted it to him, much less to myself, I was charmed by the fact that someone found me interesting, even physically attractive, despite the lingering pimples.

A Greek

Another possible seduction attempt occurred at the apartment of a guy I used to talk to at the Lehigh Tavern. He was very handsome, with sleek black hair, moustache, and was famous because he was Greek and always seemed to be with the most attractive women. He wore black pants and a black turtleneck sweater. I would look at him with amazement and jealousy: how come some are born handsome, while others, like me, no matter how hard we tried, or what we might do, could never be? He had a little photography studio near the Blue Anchor Restaurant.

He said he was interested in jazz, so we talked about it. He was also well aware of his reputation as a sexy Greek. He told a joke about a young woman who is going to marry a Greek guy. On the eve of the wedding, her mother warns her that Greeks like to indulge in peculiar sexual practices, so if, when they are making love, "he asks you to turn around, don't you do it!" After several months, they decide to have a child. That night, he asks her to turn around. She remembers her mother's warning, and refuses. The next night, and the next, he repeats his request. She keeps refusing, until one night, he turns away from her in disgust and says, "Well, we're sure not going to have any kids this way!"

As always, I was afraid he was queer, but, as always, I was furious at myself for thinking so, since the Party line at the time was that if you constantly suspected people of making homosexual advances toward you, that was a sign you were queer yourself. So, if I had *really* been OK, I would have consistently suspected nothing, and only when the guy tried to put a hand on me, would I have allowed the thought to enter my mind. Which was equivalent to trying not to think of a white bear all day. He kept trying to get me to come up to his apartment to listen to some old jazz records he had, I kept saying no, but eventually fear of what my fears might be pointing to made me agree. He lived above his studio. Everything was stylish, with portraits on the wall. Too creepy. I let him play a few sides, then found an excuse to leave. Things were getting just a bit too friendly.

Summers of '58 and '59

After the summer in New York, I decided to stay at home. I have almost no memory of these months, except for the ordeal of daily caddying, the main benefit of which, as far as I was concerned, was the fact that the sun helped to dry some of the acne pimples, and gave me a nut brown tan that hid the ones that remained. I trudged through 9 holes, 18 holes, a day, whatever I could get. Once in a while on the weekends, it was 36. I lived from one soda to the next, fighting the boredom of waiting in the caddy shack with candy bars and reading. At the end of each day, my T shirts would have dark streaks from the shoulder straps of the golf bags. In the late afternoon, as I walked along the asphalt road from Whippoorwill out to Route 22, I would look at the thick green bushes and trees along the road's edge and wonder what lay beyond them, but also feel that it would have been useless for me to cross the little drainage ditch and the tall grass that separated the greenery from the road, and find out for myself. It wasn't a matter of fear of being chased by someone, or by a dog, but rather that to do such a thing would be to step out of character, to embark on a detour that might lead me away from the grim life I knew I had to endure if I were going to have any hope of accomplishing anything.

A Growing Bald Spot

I don't know exactly when I began worrying about going bald. Certainly in high school I was constantly comparing my hairline with other boys' and men's, envying Italians' the most, since it bowed only a little to the front. I must have realized that receding hairlines begin with a V-shape in the front. My father had been bald, and I must have heard or read that baldness is inherited. Heim, who had strong, thick hair which was almost flat across the front, put the first nail in my coffin by remarking one day that this V was called a "widow's peak" (a phrase I had never heard before), and then, laughing, remarked that this was the first sign of impending baldness. But by the time I was in Lehigh, this was high on the list of my daily torments.

I had a hand mirror which my mother had given me. I found that, if I stood with my back toward the vanity in the room on Muschlitz and then held up the mirror, I could see the back of my head. And so, when things were really bad, I would stand there, looking at my bald spot and trying not to see it. Everyone has that little spot at the back of his head, I would tell myself over and over, even guys with full heads of hair. Mine is just a little larger. Perfectly natural. But the hair is thin *around* it. The scalp shows through. Oh, God! (*I won't be peppy enough!...*) I was constantly looking at other men to see if their widow's peaks were as sharp as mine, and if the V went back as far. Was there any hope that it was *naturally* sharp-angled, or was that always due to loss of hair? James Dean clearly had me beaten. But what about Jack Palance? His hair came to a point in front, and he was much older, and still wasn't going bald. Who knows how many hours I consumed in those years looking in that mirror, brushing my hair, trying to convince myself, "It's fine, there is no sign of thinning if the hair is brushed like that, look, nothing to worry about...but wait: if I stand this way, and the light from the window is like that, you can see the flesh shining through, the hair is too thin, Oh, God, *it's too thin!...*" Only one story published, no talent for engineering or science, no genius in music, impotent, possibly homosexual, so that, by the time I'm cured of my acne and neuroses, no girls will want me anyway!

A Suicide Attempt

Despite the fact that the band was getting jobs, and that I was managing to stay in school, my sense of overwhelming hopelessness and failure increased with each year at Lehigh. Once, I was walking down New St. on the far side of the bridge, carrying my trumpet case, on the way back home after having gotten off the bus following a visit to my mother. It was a black, cold, late afternoon in early winter. I walked head down, resolving to kill myself that evening since no living thing could endure more suffering like this. Every once in a while I would look at the houses, at the warm yellow light of the lamps behind the curtains:

> Some candle clear burns somewhere I come by.
> I muse at how its being puts blissful back
> With yellowy moisture mild night's blear-all black,
> Or to-fro tender trambeams truckle at the eye.
> By that window what task what fingers ply,
> I plod wondering ... — G. M. Hopkins, "The Candle Indoors"

Two middle-aged women passed me. They apparently saw my expression. I heard one say to the other, "Did you see him?" There was genuine concern in her voice.

I felt that I was being hastened toward suicide, just as the condemned in some countries are hastened to the place of execution, practically lifted under the armpits and rushed to the stake or the wall. From somewhere or other, possibly left over from moving, I had a length of white plastic clothesline. It was prevented from stretching by a wire running down the center. At first, I tried tying one end to the doorknob of the closet in my room, running it up over the top of the door, then tying a noose in the other hand. Then all I would have to do was to stand on a box or chair and just step off. But despite the wire, the line seemed to stretch when I pulled it taut. One evening, talking on the phone downstairs I mentioned to someone that I was going to end my life. Mrs. Mann apparently overheard me because the next day when I came back from school, the clothesline was gone. I decided to postpone the attempt for a while.

I wrote a letter to myself in the future, I think some ten years ahead. I asked myself how I was doing, and tried to express how wretched I felt. Years later, when I got married, I gave it to my wife and told her to give it to me on the indicated date. She did. I read it and found, as I had expected, that I was as miserable then as when I had written it.

A Psychiatrist

In order to keep going, and, in particular, in order to try to find out, once and for all, if I was queer, I decided to see a psychiatrist. I didn't want him to be associated with the university, so I found someone in private practice in Bethlehem. He was a friendly guy, probably in his late thirties, blond, with thinning hair. He impressed me by his manner of complete ordinariness, complete openness and curiosity about his patient. After describing my anxieties, I heard, for the first time, a technical term which apparently described them: obsessive-compulsive disorder. He mentioned the term in passing, in that apologetic way that some doctors have — "We have a term for it, but the name doesn't matter". (But it would be many years before I outgrew my fear of medical terms.) During one visit I told him about a dream I had had in which a man had walked up to me in a room, made me kneel, and then shot me in the head with a revolver. I asked him what it meant. In the kindest way he asked me what I thought it meant. I mumbled something about fear of being threatened by forces beyond my control. He nodded, said yes, that could be part of it, but what does a pistol resemble? And suddenly I got it: of course, the dream expressed my fear of homosexuality, the pistol resembling an erect cock. I was ashamed of my naiveté, and filled with revulsion at what the dream implied about my sexuality.

Graduation

Before they gave you your degree — before the approval for your degree went through — you were obliged to see Dean Christenson, the dean of the Liberal Arts school. This formality, this final humiliation, was deemed necessary before you took your place in the working world. The Dean's office was something out of 19th-century England: a big, carved wooden door opening onto a large room, with expensively bound books on all the shelves, a dark, wooden interior, and in the center of the room a big wooden desk behind which sat this representative of the world of learning and all the higher things: a fat pig with a big mole on one cheek, who spoke with a lisp. I had heard his name, of course, many times before, but this was the first time I had ever seen him up close, much less actually talked to him. I hated him immediately. With his glasses low on his nose, he scrutinized me, then opened a folder, and read off my accomplishments: "Two and one half years electrical engineering..." looking up at me over the glasses, waiting for my confirma-

tion "Yes." "Then commencing work toward a bachelor of arts degree in English..." looking up "Yes..." "with all work satisfactorily completed for a total of ... units" and he gave the number. "Yes." And then, with remoteness and disdain, as though having now to pick up something that one doesn't actually like to touch, "Extracurricular activities...jazz... the Christmas ... City...Six". "Yessir. A Dixieland group. But it didn't interfere with our studies. Only on weekends." A sniff, a swiveling of the massive head across the papers containing who knows what other inside information. "...Scholarship awarded..." He may have asked me what I intended to do next, and I may have said something about working at a resort for the summer, then finding a job. But then, suddenly, the interview was over. The folder was snapped closed, a sigh escaped the porcine lips, and the words were pronounced, "Degree granted". I wanted to stick a knife in that fat belly.

In the last few months before graduation, despite my revulsion at all things academic, I considered taking the GRE exam (in English literature) just in case I decided to apply to graduate school after all. I asked one of the professors how to study for it. He said that my course work so far constituted most of the studying I could do, but in addition I might "take a walk down the row of English literature shelves in the Library and try to memorize some of the titles and authors." I hated this advice when he first offered it. (These bastards don't care about the depth of your feeling about art, all they care about is the kind of stuff you can impress others with.) But his advice stuck with me over the years for a reason that is clear to me now, namely, because it encouraged a Big Picture view of a subject, a view which turned out to become more and more important to me.

The band played its last job at a graduation party at some school for rich kids in Tarrytown, N.Y. We stood on the side of a grassy hill while the graduates and their dates danced below. As we played "Mountain Greenery", I kept repeating to myself, almost with tears in my eyes, "This is our last job, this is our last job..."

What the sea had been for Melville, and what the Mississippi River had been for Mark Twain, jazz had been for me.

Summer of '60

In the summer, R —'s parents ran a restaurant called the Sandpiper on Fire Island, off the coast of Long Island. R— invited me to be the *maitre d'hotel* — the *maiter dee*, he said it was usually pronounced. I told him I had no knowledge of good food, much less wine. No problem, he said. You can fake a French accent. We'll teach you what you need to know about the rest. I knew that Fire Island was full of queers, and I didn't want any part of spending my summer in their presence. R — said that Ocean Beach, the little village where the restaurant was located, was mostly heterosexual. Since I had no interest in starting to work for a living and I didn't want to appear to be chicken, I accepted.

Before we left New York, we had to pick up the dishwasher, Hector, from his apartment in the Puerto Rican slums in New York. R— drove there, parked, and ran into a building that looked as though it might have been in Berlin at the end of the War. The dishwasher turned out to be a skinny, small, eager-to-please guy whose arms and the lower part of his face were covered with some sort of dried pustules. I thought immediately of leprosy. I wanted to say to David, "Christ, man, you can't let a guy like that wash dishes in your restaurant!" But I never did.

So, there I was, as six years earlier, spending my summer as a gentile among Jews. The R—'s house was a roomy gray-wood beach cottage with beach sand all around. The ocean was an easy walk from the back door. My room was in a little cottage next to the main cottage. In the next

house lived the jazz critic Nat Hentoff. R— casually pointed him out one day. Sometimes, in the afternoon, if I happened to be in the big cottage, or if I was up early and came over to talk to David, I could hear his parents making love on the second floor.

The center of attraction at the restaurant was the chef, who was supposed to be some kind of culinary genius. As partial proof thereof, R— pointed out that he had worked at the UN. The chef was famous for his bouillabaisse. I tried it once, didn't like it.

I felt I had absolutely no business at a place like this restaurant, whose customers included important New York people who knew all about food and wine. But I didn't want to lose face, and so I used the same trick I had used on the golf courses, namely, I let the customer do all the work. He would call me over and ask, in that New York successful voice, "Well, what do you recommend? We're having..." And I would purse my lips and wrinkle my brow and say, thoughtfully, "Well, ..." and he would say, "I think a nice Cabernet would go well, don't you think?" I: "Yes, perhaps..." He: "The 1957 ... " and he would read off the name. I: "Yes, that's an excellent choice..." He: "Or maybe..." Then, closing the menu, "No, we'll go with the 1957. Thank you." And I would go back to R— and say, "They want a bottle of the 1957..." I didn't even know the name, but he would be able to fill in the rest, and would get a bottle from the wine rack. Sometimes, though, he would ask, "Which 1957?" "I don't know." He: "Are they buying red or white or what?" I: "I don't know." He: "Where's Janet? *Janet!*" (calling her over and whispering to her:) "What the fuck are they having at... ?" and he would surreptitiously point to the table. She would tell him. R—: "OK, it must be the '57 Chardonnay." And then turning to me, with a laugh, actually enjoying the degree of my ineptitude: "Christ, Franklin... ."

One evening, the editor/publisher of *Fortune* Magazine arrived with his entourage. He was confined to a wheelchair. My trick worked perfectly. (What I really wanted to do while he was there was listen in to the conversation at the table, see what kind of people hung out with a crippled man with more power than anyone I had known in my life.)

There were two waitresses, Janet and an attractive young German woman named Suzanne. She had black hair, a nice slim body in her white uniform and soft white mocassin-like shoes, and a bored look that told the world she didn't really have to wait on tables for a living. I thought of her as one of those women whose purpose in life is to look for a man who can remove the boredom from their lives. It was an open secret that she and the chef were having an affair. I was mad with lust for her. (Slim, haughty, with a *German* accent...) She must have sensed it, and she must also have sensed that I was still a virgin, which meant I had sexual problems, because once, in a conversation between Janet, her, and me after hours, when the subject of sex somehow came up, she remarked, with visible contempt, "But John doesn't *like* women." The wave of blushing that swept over me was so overwhelming that I immediately found an excuse to leave the room.

I practiced my horn in the afternoon in my little cottage, playing jazz and classical exercises. But it was all bone dry, without hope. I knew I kept making the same mistakes over and over. One day, R—, who was not inclined to be tactful with people who were not far above him in prestige, remarked, "You know, Franklin, you keep practicing but you never seem to improve." I felt as if the remaining tatters of my soul had suddenly been torn away. I recovered by telling myself I was self-conscious practicing within earshot of R— and his family, and that I was put off playing better because I wasn't sure if I had a musical career ahead of me anyway.

Another humiliation, nowhere near as bad, occurred one day when Artin came to visit. We were idly talking about the band, perhaps about the difficulty of getting reliable musicians, when he remarked, with the same casual insensitivity as R—, on my "unctuous manner". (I had an idea what the word meant, but raced to look it up later.)

Because of Mr. R —'s extensive learning, I found myself trying to engage him in conversation. But his carefulness, I might even say, his pedantry, put me off. He was adamant on the subject of the split infinitive: it must not be allowed, ever. He also had strict limits on what he was willing to talk about. On the occasion of the recent publication of a book on the Bible, I asked him a question I had always wanted to ask of Jews, namely, if they didn't consider Jesus to have been the Messiah, then were Jewish scribes, historians, prophets, continuing to extend the Old Testament into modern times? It seemed, and still seems to me, a perfectly sensible question, but the old man became visibly angry at it, and never spoke so much as a word in reply. I have never asked the question of another Jew, so to this day, I do not know what taboo I had broken.

Mrs. R — , with her New York accent, always called her husband "Edguh". She had a little studio in the back of the house. She was always cheerful, clearly enjoyed the fact she had the talent to be a successful painter, and was proud that each year she was asked to illustrate the cover for the Macy's Christmas catalog. Like all the Jews I have ever known, they never showed the slightest prejudice toward me, a mere gentile. On rare occasions, they might kid me a little, as when, one day at lunch, when discussing marriage possibilities for a Jewish girl they knew, among which, they said, nodding in my direction with insider smiles, was marrying a *goy.* I had no idea what that meant[1].

One afternoon, after I saw the chef and Suzanne in a clinch in the back of the kitchen — *He can do it, I can't!* — I knew I had to get out of there. Clearly I had no future in the restaurant business. And I sure as hell didn't want to become a professor or an engineer. I knew that if I stayed in music, I would be facing a life of poverty, since I would never be more than a mediocre trumpet player. No one would pay me to write what I wanted to write. Far more significantly, the Vietnam War was closing in, although officially we were still just sending "advisors" over there. There was talk of the draft being revived. I would have no guaranteed deferment because I didn't have an engineering degree. And worst of all was the feeling of abject humiliation before Suzanne. I could feel the bitch's German contempt for my lack of manliness, could feel how much she lusted for the burly, all-man, no-nonsense-from-females, chef.

I found a pay phone and asked Information for the number of American Airlines, because it was a name I knew. I asked the woman who answered how far I could go for $150, which was most of the money I had to my name. She said there were three possibilities: Los Angeles, San Francisco, or Nova Scotia. I certainly didn't want to go to Nova Scotia, which I imagined as a foggy place with lots of rocks and nothing to do except catch fish. Los Angeles I associated with Hollywood, which I detested. San Francisco was where my father had once worked, and where my mother had gone to live with her second husband. Had someone pointed out this strange coincidence of my choosing the same city where she was going, I would have said that I hoped this would be a chance for us to end our war. I would go to a psychiatrist, get myself straightened out, and she would be there so I could say things that needed to be said, and, possibly, even give her a chance to tell her side of the story to the psychiatrist. In any case, her stamp of approval was on the city.

At the crack of dawn, without telling anyone what I was about to do, I packed, put on Bill Clarke's seersucker sports jacket, which he had loaned me because I couldn't afford my own, and, with all my manuscripts and records in a suitcase — God knows what happened to the typewriter — and my horn, I crept out of the cottage, got on the earliest ferry to the mainland, and took the train to the International Airport at Idlewild (later to become John F. Kennedy Airport).

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1. In Yiddish, it is a somewhat disparaging term for a Christian.

All I remember of the flight was enduring the almost uncontrollable anxiety by repeating to myself, “Just get through the next few seconds, that’s all, just the next few seconds...” I was a hollow man in a hollow tube hurtling through the air at several hundred miles an hour. What would it be like to hit something at this speed? What possible future could there be for me in another city if all I had done with my life was publish one story and a letter and been a mediocre jazz musician and, worst of all, was a mother’s boy despite a lifetime of effort trying not to be? More than once I was on the verge of running to the pilot’s compartment and demanding that he land the plane immediately.

From the vantage point of old age, however, I say without a moment’s hesitation that getting out of New York when I did was one of the few good decisions of my life.