

EXPELLED FROM NURSERY SCHOOL and Other Stories

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(This is all true. I solemnly swear that this is my life)

Birth Day

Among my memorabilia there is a picture of my father carrying my pregnant mother and the soon to be born me to the hospital. He is riding a bicycle with my mother balanced on the center bar. Today I imagine myself peeking out from the crack in my mother and thinking “oh, no.”

I Am Expelled From Nursery School

My earliest school experience, in Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, at age four, lasted for less than two weeks because the school claimed to my parents that I was using words then deemed inappropriate for a four year old. Since this is my earliest memory, it may be somewhat fuzzy, but I do recall a room with a wooden slat door and a window with no blinds, where children were sent for punishment. I was sent to that room so often that by the end of the first week I didn't wait to be told to go there, but went there immediately upon arrival. I thought of it as my nursery school home room.

I have no idea where I first acquired four letter words—certainly not from my parents, who never uttered so much as a “damn.” But it didn't take much cultural experience to know that a cute little blond boy who looks up at you innocently and says “Sure looks like we're going to get some fucking rain,” will get lots of attention. Presumably I was not the sort of little boy for whom these people had prepared in nursery school teaching college.

My Yellow Dog at the Emergency Room

When I was four we were living a block away from a hospital. One day I accidentally snagged my little stuffed yellow dog, and the sawdust started to pour out of it. Naturally, I took my yellow dog a block down the road to the emergency room where a few nurses gurgled and cooed over me, and sewed up my dog with suture thread and told me that he should keep off his paws for a few days. I knew perfectly well that this was all absurd, but I discovered early that there really is a sucker born every minute and that almost nobody can resist a four year old. Thank God I didn't know what I know today about sex and drugs or I could really have gotten into trouble.

I Am Expelled from Kindergarten.

We moved to Columbus, Ohio, where my father taught in the Ohio State University School of Engineering and where he wrote a book about mathematics which I have always appreciated for the deep maroon color of its cover, but otherwise have no clue what it says. Ohio State also had an agricultural college and I liked to go into the big barn at feeding time when people would let me hold the buckets of milk for the baby cows. I liked the baby animals and I would moo and sing little songs to them. At the time I had no idea that I was helping to make veal.

My schooling continued as I was enrolled at the Ohio State University Experimental Kindergarten. I guess that part of the experiment was toys, including some wonderful three feet high blocks that nobody ever used.

The place of punishment for the kindergarten was under a big desk, and that is where I spent most of my experimental kindergarten time. I recall one day being at the bottom of a huge wooden slide and as little girls came to the end, pulling down their pants. It was soon after this that my parents were asked to withdraw me from the experiment.

I Am Not Thrown Out of the First Grade.

I hated the first grade. And there was a little girl whom I especially disliked because while I was struggling with the alphabet, she could already read and write and the teacher, Mrs. Frye, thought that she was just wonderful. I fantasized about her being taken away to Monkey Land where she wouldn't recognize a single word and would probably start to cry when she opened a book filled with monkey letters.

Actually, the only thing that I liked about the first grade was sharpening the pencils. We had very large pencils, and going to sharpen them meant that I could get out of my seat. I was always on my feet and was proud of having the sharpest pencils in the room. It was also in the first grade that I made a wonderful discovery. If I threw up, I would be sent home. So whenever I didn't feel like being academic, I just stuck my little fingers down the back of my throat.

There was one day that I decided to refuse to go to school. I got dressed, and walked along the road away from the school bus stop. But somehow, the driver went by, recognized me as a fugitive, stopped the bus, and dragged me on. I cried and cried, and ended up in school. For the few times in my life when I have worked in a regular job, I have felt about the same way, except nobody ever saw me crying as I have gotten forced onto a bus.

Early Religious Experience

When I was very young, my mother took my sister and me to a Methodist church. I can't remember anything about the church, except one day sitting in the front row and hearing whispers that a little girl had been hit by a car as she was running across the street to the service. So my earliest lesson in a Protestant church was to look both ways before crossing the street. In any event, as I grew up I had a sense of being a "Christian," although I always suspected that there was something wrong with the whole idea.

I Consider Reincarnation

I must have been about six when I had my first thoughts about reincarnation. My parents probably mentioned this, because being born over and over again was a concept that came to me early, and that I found very disturbing. It wasn't the idea of living new lives repeatedly that bothered me. It was the thought that every time I started a new life I would have to have vaccination shots all over again.

Did My Parents Love Me?

It was also about age six that I began to suspect that my parents didn't really like me. One day I was riding in the back of our old, round, green Ford and was pretending to be Captain Marvel vanquishing the Nazis, or something equally loud, when my father suddenly stopped the car in the middle of downtown Columbus, and told me to get out. He said that I was making too much noise, and then drove away. I was terrified and started to cry. But a kindly soldier scooped me up and took me to his "Soldier's Home" (whatever that may have been), where there were a lot of other soldiers and they gave me ice cream before they called the police and I was driven home. I was resigned about it at the time, but had it happened today my father would have been charged with child abuse.

I Am Expelled from Elementary School.

I have never been quite sure why I was expelled from elementary school, although I do recall asking some little girl on the bus if she was still a virgin, and then being invited to have a little talk with the principal. And I don't recall smoking very much in those days, and alcohol wasn't readily available. So I have always assumed that I was a victim of trumped up charges.

I recall that one day my mother was ironing in the living room and asked how I would feel about staying out of school for awhile. I was in the sixth grade at Rosemary Hills Elementary school in Chevy Chase, and my teacher was Miss Peirce, a very large person who was also in charge of the school's Safety Patrol. It was a wise choice because Miss Peirce was a very imposing woman who, had she chosen to herself don one of those little belts and a badge, could have made any car stop. I liked Miss Peirce. Her lessons about American history, especially her talk about the "Alamo," a little fort in Texas where something happened, have always stayed with me.

It was a very difficult period for my family. My father had, unknown to us, been doing atomic research at White Sands with J. Robert Oppenheimer, a job that is about as high security as jobs get, and suddenly was approached by the F.B.I. telling him that his sister was a communist organizer. This was the time of the McCarthy communist witch hunt, and after a high-anxiety lie detector test, my father found himself with no security clearance and no job. It was only years later that I understood what had gone on, and it was many years more that his court battle resulted in the reinstatement of his security clearances.

At Age Ten I Help to Build a Library (Sort Of)

I was never quite bored in Columbus, and always found some way to make a little survival cash. Every so often I would go door to door with a cardboard box, on streets

where I wasn't known, and say that I was collecting for a new library. Actually, I don't think anyone really believed me, but I did make a little, and three of four dollars went much farther in those days. The "civic gesture" did help me to keep from stealing quite so much from my mother's purse.

Becoming Scouts and Killing a Pet Chicken In the Basement

My mother volunteered to organize a Cub Scout troop and, meeting in the basement of my house, we scouts wore little blue uniforms and stuck two fingers onto our chest as we saluted the flag. Of course, there was always somebody who would give the flag just one finger, and we would all giggle, but my mother never caught on. Beyond saluting the flag, I have no idea what we did in those meetings, but remember that my mother resigned from running the troupe after a few weeks and that there was some talk about her having a nervous breakdown.

In the same basement, we kept a pet chicken, which my mother decided, one day, should be sacrificed and eaten. I didn't quite like the idea, but went along with the program. My mother descended solemnly into the basement carrying a hammer, followed in a line by me and by my seven year old sister. The chicken was loose, and, staying close together in line, swerving in and out on the dark basement floor, we followed my mother as she chased the uncooperative bird and, over and over again, whacked it on the head with the hammer. Finally a neighbor was called in to break its neck, and then we all had dinner.

I Am Sent Up the River

After I was expelled from the sixth grade, my parents looked for some training that might interest me. We went to a school for elocution where I met a headmistress who actually said "How now brown cow" as an example of how well she could, herself, speak and tried to persuade me that speaking this way would make me very happy. I thought she was a very disturbed person.

Then we got catalogs from private schools, all of which were extremely expensive. But finally some social workers came to the house and suggested that I be sent to a place called "The Child Study Center" in Baltimore which was both economical and close. The "study center" name was basically a euphemism for a place they sent kids when public schools had no idea what to do with them, and when they hadn't been in trouble with the law and so couldn't be sent to reform schools.

The operative principle here was that modern day psychiatry was just beginning to take hold, and it was very stylish for children to be in the hands of shrinks. In all honesty, I cannot think of one positive thing, be it insight or even momentary amusement, that ever came from years of conferences with child psychologists and psychiatrists.

Remembering the Child Study Center

The "school" was a very large house with four floors, one of which was for classrooms, and the rest of which were mostly dormitories. And there was a laundry in the basement run by people I never saw and a few specialty rooms, like the sewing room, inhabited by a woman whose name I can't recall, but whose main passion was breeding guppies. Her second passion in life seemed to have been cutting sleeves off of shirts.

Whenever she decided that a long sleeved shirt was frayed, she would turn it into a short sleeved shirt. When I eventually left this odd place, I had nothing but short sleeved shirts.

I was in B Dorm, which was for the older boys, up to about thirteen. C dorm was medium age boys; A dorm was for little boys, and D dorm was for girls. The D dorm residents got pillows. Nobody else could be trusted with them. And, of course, none of us had ever seen D Dorm, so it was a place of great mystery about which we fantasized regularly.

I hated this place, and felt very rejected by my family. I had nightmares about the Child Study Center for years after I returned to normal life and even revisited twenty years later, by which time it had turned into a dump. A social worker who had been there in my time explained that “the children are much more disturbed than they were when you were here.” Some must have been unmanageable judging from the disheveled look of the place. Today it is a state run residence for juvenile delinquents.

It is odd how you sometimes remember inconsequential things more than some things of great significance. I remember Norman, who showed up about six months after I was imprisoned, hand in hand with his mother and turned over to the powers that were in B-Dorm. Norman was pudgy for a child and had nothing whatsoever remarkable about him, except for a pungent smell. I think it was cologne that his loving mother must have poured all over him. We stood in line and marched everywhere, from the dining room to the classroom, and for days after he arrived you could judge where Norman was in the building without looking.

Psychotherapy

One of the few good things that happened to me at the Child Study Center was our regular visit to the library. We were dropped off in the children’s section, but nobody seemed concerned as we wandered around the restricted section and made faces at the adults..

Probably because I had a psychiatrist from about the age of six months, the name Freud was familiar to me. I knew that he was famous for something or other and sheer curiosity led me to drag down a huge volume of his work and deliver it to a check-out lady. She sized me up to be a twelve year old, but actually allowed me to take the book out. Then, as we marched back to the prison in single file, I carried Freud under my arm conspicuously. Even if I didn’t understand a word of it, such a book in my hands would certainly astonish the peasants.

The reality turned out to be that I found a serious connection with Freud’s ideas about symbolism, an interest that was to last for the rest of my life. What an amazing thing that a person could have a mental image of an orange but that deep down (like Joyce’s symbolism of “moo-cow” as mother), orange could be an unconscious symbol for a pregnant woman. And colors, as Freud explained, could have very special meanings that we don’t appreciate consciously.

I liked as much as I could understand of what Freud said about dreams and the unconscious, although I felt left out as a gay youth having never dreamed about locomotives. But overall this was extraordinary writing and I knew that I was in the presence of true genius and in an intellectual place where, perhaps, I should not be.

But doors were opened that were never to close and although in my youth and inexperience I took Freud’s theories to be gospel. As a twelve year old with artistic inclinations, and a mind filled with magical imagery, I truly appreciated his help in

getting some grasp of what the pictures and thoughts in my head might really mean. But the older I became the more it seemed to me that there was something a great deal more spiritual to the human condition than Freud proposed, and that the sexuality which he stressed wasn't everything.

I remained in awe of his complicated explanations of the supposed sources of our dreams and their relationship to an unconscious. But in his world of thought everything seemed to be happening within multiple levels of a closed house. There simply was no *deus ex machina* and in a thousand dense pages he has never satisfactorily answered my question: Thanks for explaining what's in the house, but where does the house itself come from? I assumed that any doubts were the result of my failure to completely understand. I eventually found much better answers in the theories of Carl Jung.

It was at the Child Study Center that I met my first real Freudian psychiatrist, a nasty little man whose constant references to sex led me to believe that he had some special interest in me, and might someday make me an irresistible offer for a good time. But my chief complaint was the manner of our discussions. He would ask: "How are you feeling today?" and I would answer "Why do you want to know how I feel?" And he would reply: "Why do you think I would want to know how you feel?" I really wanted to tell him to go fuck himself, but ultimately he always won the silly game.

The Freudian left after a few weeks of my "therapy," and I got a very nice new psychiatrist, Dr. Arthur, about whom my only complaint was that his cigarettes were stale.

Running Away

One day I decided to run away. So I waited until everything was dark, slipped on clothes that I had hidden under the bed, and quietly worked my way downstairs to the basement. There was a small tool room that I knew had an unlocked window. Here I pushed several boxes one on top of the other so that I could reach the window which was almost eight feet off of the floor. I fell three times, but finally was able to pull my bruised and sore body out the window to freedom. It was such a feeling of exhilaration in the cold night air, running from this terrible place.

In retrospect, however, I do wonder why I didn't just go out the front door, which was on the same floor as my dormitory, and which was always open, and there was never anybody around.

To make a long and sad story short, the police brought me back some hours later, after I spent several hours in the women's detention area of the Baltimore City jail where, as a twelve year old, they parked me. I had thought to take my cue from Edward G. Robinson or Humphrey Bogart talking to the cops in the old films: "You can't get to me you dirty screws!" But at the time I was much too scared. One way or the other, I was now an ex-convict..

I Learn About Sex

I recall that, at age thirteen, I stood in my bare feet on the kitchen floor of our Washington D.C. apartment, as my Midwestern Methodist mother decided that it was time to tell me about the "facts of life." I have never quite figured out why the job fell to my mother rather than my father and can only speculate that he either didn't know the facts of life or was not completely sure of his information.

In any event, I was nervously looking up at the fluorescent light, wondering how so many stupid little bugs had gotten trapped inside it, as my mother explained that my father had “planted the seed inside of her.” In my imagination I saw my father carefully opening a Burpee seed packet and sprinkling the little dot contents all over her. I can’t remember if I imagined him covering her with top soil and watering her, but the sequence does seem logical.

My Last Baseball Days

I have always hated sports. But I can still hear my father saying that he wanted his son to be “a regular guy.” In his nineteen twenties Chicago-driven mind, I think that meant something between Babe Ruth and Charles Lindberg. Hoping to make me into this regular guy, my father organized what he called a “Baseball Clinic,” in Washington’s Rock Creek Park every Saturday one summer. It featured major league baseball stars who would throw balls around with kids and sign autographs on baseballs. I got a lot of autographed balls from famous sports stars but, unfortunately, I had no idea who these people were.

About two thousand people showed up for the events and, of course, the press loved them and my father and I had our pictures in the papers a lot. We were great apple pie newspaper filler: kids out in the fresh air learning the great American pastime at the hands of the best players. These were the days when my sister became really good at throwing and catching a ball. But I was always afraid of getting bopped on the head and learned to avoid those things coming at me. After a couple of weeks I started a little club of guys who snuck away from the major leaguers and went into the woods where we smoked cigarettes and told dirty jokes until we could see cars starting to leave the lot. Frankly, I admit abject failure in my early attempts to be a regular guy, although I must admit that I didn’t try very hard.

Dad and I Go to Camp Together

I have never decided if my father made some sad, pathological, and extreme attempts to bond with me, or if he was just cheap. Whatever the reason, he twice volunteered to teach tumbling (a form of activity popular about 1900) in return for my two week summer camp tuition. So there I was, the only person at these YMCA camps who brought a parent.

The first time I was little, and it didn’t seem so terrible because I didn’t understand how weird the situation really was. But at fourteen it was embarrassing. And I did everything possible to stay out of his way. My final camp trip, coming a year after the baseball fiasco, convinced me, once and for all, that I had nothing in common with my father. If he wanted to hang out with a regular guy he was out of luck,

I Learn the Power of Looking Upward

One of the unforgettable lessons from my father was that as a person walked along he should always hold his head up and look to the sky. The dreamer looks at the clouds, and revels in the sunlight and in the beauty of creation, and uses the inspiration to create something wonderful.

For years I looked up as I walked. But one day I looked down and found a ten dollar bill. I haven't looked up since.

Junior High School

My best memory of my first Junior High School, in a Washington suburb, was the clicking of a clock in the outer office of Mr. Hitchcock, the Vice-Principal. This was definitely a step up from Elementary School, where I was always called to the Principal's office. In Junior High School I was relegated to a punishment specialist. And, what made me feel most mature, I was now subject to a new and almost adult form of punishment—detention.

More Junior High School and High School

We left Washington and went to Amherst, Massachusetts because in the middle of the security clearance disaster, teaching Physics at the University of Massachusetts was a good job, and something of a relief to all of us.

Until that time I didn't really appreciate the order with which a Physics department functioned. Apparently the chairman of this particular department was very organized, to the extent that I often heard my father complain. One day when I was hanging around the department office I noticed that every ream of paper, every box of paper clips, and every bottle of white-out had a date stamped on it in red ink. This was the date of acquisition which the chairman, himself, had neatly stamped.

I love keys. I was the manager of the football team and the basketball team for the tenth grade because I didn't have to take phys ed if I was on the team. One day the coach loaned me the key to the gym, which I discovered was a master key to every door in the school. I felt that it was my responsibility to copy it, and after I was banished to New England Prep schools, the key was passed down to friends of friends for years.

My New England Church

In Amherst the First (and only) Congregational Church was a key center of social activity, and soon after moving to the town I converted to Congregationalism and became an official follower of Ralph Waldo Emerson, some of whose essays I had to read in school, and which I found incredibly boring. I also had to read a book by one of his friends, *Walden Pond*, and concluded that Thoreau was a very strange fag.

One thing that has always impressed me is the way in which New England ministers say "God." It is a sort of deep, booming sound of "*Gawwd*," that resonates through a church and lets you know in no uncertain terms that we were not talking about a local Roman god of the woods, or some Hindu kitchen god. This Emersonian *Gawwd* is definitely in charge.

I Sing in The Choir

For some reason which today escapes me I decided that it would be fun to sing in the First Congregational Church choir, which I did for almost a year. But the Choir Director, a borderline sadistic woman, always had me march down the church aisle next to an Amherst College student who was about six-six. I was then only about five-four, so the

entrance was always good for a Congregational laugh. And when we got to the choir section, facing the congregation, the disparity was somewhat embarrassing.

So one day I made a little wooden stand, which I stored under my choir seat. As we filed into the choir stall it must have looked strange to see me suddenly and miraculously reach a height almost equal to that of my choir colleague. But I never heard anybody laugh, and nobody ever mentioned this to me. After all, this was New England.

Cultural Tyranny

In Amherst schools I learned about cultural tyranny. That is when the assumption is made that if you don't like certain writers or artists presented to you in a school curriculum, you are stupid and uninformed. I never much cared for Shakespeare and, even after taking a couple of Shakespeare classes in college, and thus being officially informed, I still didn't like to see Shakespeare plays. I know very few people who have the courage to say that they don't like Shakespeare, and that is the whole point of cultural tyranny as it is practiced in high schools. To be perfectly candid, I never felt that I belonged in this environment where education was "canned." And, perhaps fortunately for me, the Amherst school system, which didn't quite expel me, expressed a feeling that I would be happier elsewhere, and made arrangements for me to enter Stockbridge, a private boarding school about 100 miles away.

I Begin Life Again at a "Progressive" Prep School

On my first day in the dormitory several of us went into Jose's room where he had chairs set up like a theater, and we watched him masturbate and have an orgasm that hit a wall six feet away. Seeing a great athlete in action, I began to question if I had the abilities needed for this place. But I learned very quickly that everyone at Stockbridge (from which I was told David Carradine had been expelled and where much later Arlo Guthrie was to begin his *Alice's Restaurant*) was a respected individual.

There was no school in America like Stockbridge and it truly fostered creativity. I recall especially an English class in which we were introduced to Gilbert Swift's satirical essay "A Modest Proposal," suggesting that if people were to eat the children it would not only solve the overpopulation problem, but starvation would become a thing of the past.

In any "normal" high school the idea would have been treated with disgust, but our class of slightly bendy emerging intellectuals seriously debated whether eating children might have some ultimate social value. About half of the class decided that it was a good idea, but everyone agreed that establishing the system would involve some challenging technical details.

Overall, the emphasis on literature was wonderful and I credit my lifetime passion for reading to this place. In the dormitory books were passed from person to person and reading them was something of an unofficial responsibility. There were two kinds of people: those who had read *War and Peace* and those who had not. It was a strange and wonderful rite of passage.

It was in the Stockbridge dormitory that I first read Orwell and Kafka and Dickens and Dostoevsky and Thomas Hardy and Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn*. At the time it was illegal to bring Miller's erotic books into the United States, but on summer vacation in Paris an enterprising student had purchased them and had them rebound and fictitiously titled. As these books were passed around, some who saw them

casually must have wondered how pink and blue bound copies of *Little Men* and *Little Women* could have become so dog-eared.

I also credit Stockbridge with promoting my interest in languages. Zola became my favorite author and many years after high school I was still finishing his ten thousand page epic about the Rougon-Macquart family printed in five volumes reverently printed on bible paper by the French publisher.

I Learn A Prayer

At Stockbridge School the South American students had a phrase which they used over and over again. It was “*coño de tu madre.*” I assumed, of course, that this had something to do with mother. But eventually one of my Hispanic friends explained that this was a special prayer to the Virgin Mary and, after that, I used the prayer whenever I lit a candle in a Catholic church.

My High School Roommate

I had a great weed-smoking, iconoclastic, roommate in the first year. But in my senior year I was banished to room with a person whom I think was supposed to in some way stabilize me. He was contemptibly serious and intelligent and did everything “by the book.” He was, of course, accepted into Harvard without even trying and I have no doubt that today he is a vegetarian and is fighting vigorously to save the rain forest. I don’t believe that it would have been humanly possible for the school to find anyone with whom I had less in common.

Today my ex-roommate is the chairman of a major political science department, and turns out a book every year. Once I saw him being interviewed on the *Today* program. He was aloof and arrogant as if he had a carrot up his ass.

My very best friend at Stockbridge was Alden, whom I still admire as the only truly sociopathic personality I have ever known. He had an enormous male organ, and every morning would stride stark naked down the dormitory hall on the way to the shower, with an erection and a towel draped over it. Those equally endowed did the same thing while most others, like myself, went modestly in their underwear, towels around their necks.

I Do Not Burn Down the Boy’s Dormitory

The school was built on the Massachusetts estate of Mark Hanna, who had been President’s Truman’s campaign manager. It had a main mansion and a barn with a huge indoor riding ring and rooms above it that had been turned into classrooms and the boys’ dormitory.

I recall that we were just going into lunch in the main house dining room when I heard somebody yell “the barn’s on fire.” Of course, everybody jumped up and ran outside, and was shocked to see the old wooden structure with flames shooting out of the roof so aggressively that nothing could be done to save it. Several of the boys stood in a line and pissed on the building in a useless but somehow comforting gesture. Soon there was nothing to do but turn around and go back to the dining room, where lunch was getting cold. I remembered Mrs. Prothero in Dylan Thomas’ poem asking the firemen if they would like something to read.

In any event, on the way back to lunch I ran into a parent, a stuffy New York matron, who was in tears and whom I tried to joyfully console with a line from *Candide* which we were then reading in French class: “We should be happy, because this will all be for the best,” I said. My comment apparently left her so aghast that she went immediately to the Principal, who assumed that in some wave of lunacy I had actually set this fire, and who unceremoniously accused me of having set it. A week later they found out that the fire was caused by faulty wiring, but I never got an apology. I learned early that life isn’t necessarily fair.

I Am Expelled From High School

One night after everyone else was asleep, my sociopathic friend Alden came into the room and whispered that we should go out and have a little fun. The previous summer he had worked at a local summer resort which had a rustic bar attached to it with a lock that he knew how to bypass.

The (now temporary) boy’s dormitory was across the road from the main house in which keys to the school trucks were hanging on a board in the Principal’s office. The house was locked up, but we crawled through a window, crept into the office, and grabbed the key to one of the two trucks. Outside, we did not turn on the motor, but rolled the truck silently about a hundred feet down the front lawn, to the street, where we turned the key and raced off toward the resort bar.

I had very little criminal experience, but Alden, a native of Newark, entered the dark bar and, with impressive stealth and skill, quickly located a storeroom filled with liquor. We rescued about ten cases of whisky, gin, and some most elegant aperitifs, loaded them on to the truck, and drove away. But unfortunately, and due to some new rain on the road, we turned a corner too fast and the truck skidded off the road with its two front wheels balancing precariously down an embankment. It was a miracle that we didn’t go over the hill.

I was hysterical, but Alden was a model of composure and always knew the right thing to do. We left the truck, walked about three miles back to the school, found some ropes, and woke up half a dozen of our friends. Then we went back into the principal’s office, took the keys to another truck, and once more rolled silently down the lawn to the street. Reaching the first disabled truck, we all tied ropes to it, and were able to pull it out of the embankment with the second truck.

When we got back to school at about four a.m., we dropped off the twenty cases of liquor in the dormitory, returned both trucks and silently replaced the keys in the principal’s office. And nobody ever quite figured out how so many teenage boys managed to be drunk every night for almost an entire wonderful teenage semester.

Some time later the Principal asked me to leave the school. He couldn’t prove that I had actually done anything wrong, but expelled me for having a “bad attitude.” Alden was expelled a few months later, after getting two girls pregnant, stealing a cash box from the school office, and crashing one of the school trucks into a tree during a midnight snowstorm. And, although in the past forty years I have seen Alden only once, I have followed his career with interest. He has become one of America’s best known Republican political advisors, and is in constant demand by candidates for elected office.

I Am Accepted At A Weird High School and Actually Graduate

To this day I remain grateful to the Rudolph Steiner “Waldorf” school, “High Mowing” in New Hampshire, that accepted me in the middle of my senior year, and let me graduate. Apparently there was some acrimony between the elderly Head Mistress of this place and the Principal who had expelled me for no good reason, and I think she took me to spite him.

I knew nothing about Rudolph Steiner and the so-called “Anthroposophists” on whose occult principles this school is based, but was able to observe their behavior close up. Anthroposophy is a very eccentric German offshoot of the nineteenth century Theosophical movement. Its followers pursue spiritual enlightenment, meaning that they seek to know the meaning of life and try to appear very spiritual. I tried not to laugh whenever I met one of the most serious Anthroposophists, because they had all had the same acquired personality quirks. An Anthroposophist sits and stares deeply into your eyes in a gesture of listening and, saying very little (ideally in a slight German accent), gives an impression of profundity and inner knowledge. Today, whenever I meet one of these people, I recall what Aleister Crowley wrote about the supposed childhood of his arch rival, Arthur Edgar Waite, whose father he reported as having said to him “If you can’t be wise, look wise.”

Much as I did appreciate the school allowing me to be there, I deeply missed the progressive international school, my sociopathic friend Alden, my religious Hispanic fellow students, and some other mentally ill teenagers who have subsequently made important contributions to our society.

College

My applications to colleges were purely random (as was my whole college career, which lasted for seventeen years). I sent applications to schools with no idea what the places were like. I do, however, recall applying to Bard College, a very progressive institution which I thought might be a logical follow up to my progressive high school training. But I withdrew my application after a visit, and after meeting a strange unshaven man wearing a bathrobe, seated on a bench along a sidewalk, to whom I was introduced as the president.

College Begins Dubiously

I ended up at Adelphi College on Long Island because it was the alma mater of my favorite teacher in Amherst and because I had a pretty good idea that they would accept me no matter what. I will admit that at the time I had very little direction, and so for me one school was as good as another

As with all freshmen in those days, I was required to attend an “orientation” where I was given a very silly little cap and a pile of papers telling me more than I wanted to know about the school. I remember being shown through the library by a consumptively thin lady with thick glasses who explained how to use a card file and who held the rapt attention of the people in my group, few of whom had never been in a library before, much less had used a card file.

There were also some tests, including a writing test, where we were asked to tell some story about our high school experience. I was pleased for the opportunity, and ideas were

still pouring into my ruled blue book as a monitor called for us to stop. Unfortunately, the school critics found my work wanting.

I had come from a high school environment where I had been passionately absorbed in James Joyce, and where I had sworn that I would pattern my life's artistic expression on the inscrutable rationality of *Ulysses*. But stream of consciousness in lower case letters from an occidental with a Chinese name was apparently not what the Adelphi College English people were looking for, and I found myself assigned to a remedial English class with four or five men whom I assumed to be physical education majors. Fortunately, I was put into a mainstream freshman English class after two sessions, but not before I had been forever impressed by the colorful language of these soon-to-be college dropouts.

I met another person who had an adventure at the hands of the same English department. He was an older student, who introduced himself as a poet (meaning forever to be unemployed) and who explained that he had triumphantly handed over a poem for "criticism" to a lady teaching Adelphi upper level English courses. But he was devastated when she marked up his work with biting comments in heavy red crayon and attached a hand-written letter suggesting that he might find a career in shoe sales more rewarding than one in poetry. The poet, however, with remarkable self-confidence, mailed his poem to a national poetry contest and won first prize. He then posted his marked-up poem, the English teacher's note, and the letter of award from the poetry prize committee, on the English Department's bulletin board. *That*, I have always felt, was serious justice.

Into the City

Adelphi had the advantage of being a short train ride into New York City where I could meet my sociopathic friend Alden and his jazz musician friends. Spending more time in the city than in Long Island classrooms, these were the years when I learned to smoke marijuana seriously and to drink myself into creative oblivion. I still pride myself on having thrown up on some of the finest sidewalks in New York.

I was not the only late teen learning the evils of alcohol in Manhattan. I recall being in a very classy apartment, decorated in all whites, belonging to the then out of town parents of a girl who was one of my ex-schoolmates. There were myself and two other guys, to whom the girl offered some of the strange and wonderful contents of her world-traveling parents' liquor cabinet.

We drank for several hours until one man passed out on the couch and the other collapsed stretched out below him face upward on the carpet. And I remember hearing a strange death-like gurgling sound, and looking over to see my couched friend turning his head to the floor and vomiting violently all over the man beneath him. I thought at the time that fraternity life must be much like this. There was a sort of disgusting appeal.

I Join a Fraternity

There were no group houses and the fraternity which I pledged met at a local bar originally called "The Greasy Spoon," but which had, in a flourish of attempted elegance, changed its name to "The Blossom." The fraternity was made up of mostly older men, veterans, who were accounting or business majors, masters of dirty jokes, who spent as little time in class as I did. Nevertheless, this fraternity had one of the highest academic averages on the campus, which had to do not with studying, commitment, or even

intelligence. The fraternity's best kept secret was that it had somehow, years ago, acquired a key to the room in which virtually all of the college's examinations were copied.

First Year Academics

During my first year in college I remember the table where I played bridge for hours, I remember the songs on the jukebox, I remember the faculty parking lot filled with old cars and the student lot with its Cadillacs and Jaguars, I remember the theater where I mostly hung out backstage, and I remember a few faces but—oddly enough—I have very little recollection of anything that happened in a classroom. For some reason I registered as a biology major, but cannot remember a single class in that subject. Most of all I remember the art studios where, by the second semester, I lived as an official art major. Painting was a wonderful way to spend time, but the most fun was with the theater students, as my favorite teacher in Amherst, a former Adelphi drama student told me it would be.

Jim Perrone, a New Yorker whom I met at Amherst High School, was the most influential teacher of my life, and a real friend when I followed in his footsteps and went to Adelphi. It was from Jim that I first learned something about *style*. In Amherst he came into class one day at Christmas time carrying a piece of driftwood decorated with three or four bright glass balls. And *that* was our English class Christmas tree. Nobody else in Amherst would have produced such a thing, and I began to think that New York was, indeed, the center of creative ideas.

But, despite Jim's innate sense of style, I always feared that he might feel somehow unfulfilled, having never made it in the theater and having fallen into a life teaching high school English and directing school plays. He never complained and was excellent at what he did, but one day with him I got a feeling for how depressing a sidetracked career in the arts can be.

We were standing at a subway stop outside of Manhattan in Jamaica when we heard a deep, booming, wonderfully expressive voice announcing the trains, and I saw Jim turn noticeably white. "Oh my God," he said, "as he recognized the actor in his Adelphi class who had been considered to be the most talented, the best looking, and the one most likely to become a star.

I Am Invited Not to Return to Adelphi

One day in the first semester, I was surprised when the Dean of Students called me into his office. I had no idea what I had done, but was assured that this was an unusual audience. Dean Condon (whom we of course called "Dean Condom") was the absolute epitome of mediocrity, being perfectly placed in a mid-range position in this mediocre school and making an all too suspicious effort to be friendly at our first encounter.

It turned out that my blessed parents had called and asked him to check on me, something which to this day I consider a horrible intrusion on my independence and a special embarrassment because the dean had enlisted someone in the fraternity I was pledging as a spy. Apparently the dean got the impression that I was not absorbing into this community particularly well and reported this back to my parents.

It was toward the end of the second semester, after a half dozen command performances in the dean's office, that he told me of his special concern about records showing that I had not attended more than a dozen classes during that entire semester. He seemed completely disinterested in the fact that I was maintaining a B average without

benefit of faculty and was bored to death with my introductory courses. Nonetheless, the dean concluded that I was not appropriately contributing to Adelphi campus life and should take my business elsewhere for the sophomore year. I have always suspected that I made the man very nervous and have wondered if creative people tend to generate fear in people like this dean.

George Washington University and An Aborted Medical Career

Returning to Washington, and to my parents' house, I tried to please my father by registering in pre-med courses for which I had not the slightest aptitude. I hated Embryology, I hated Chemistry, and I hated Comparative Anatomy although I did like to draw from the lab specimens and actually considered a career in medical illustration.

I often rode the city bus carrying the transparent plastic-bagged dead cat from my comparative anatomy class. Nobody ever said anything, but I got some odd looks and, occasionally, I thought that someone looked as if they were about to throw up. My cat's name was Snookie, and I loved my cat as much as you can love an animal that is dead.

The real problem with my cat was technical. I remember one day that we were all supposed to be looking for some obscure little nerves that were very clearly drawn in the book, and I looked and looked for half a hour but couldn't find them. Finally, suspecting that the absence of this cat's nerves might be a significant scientific discovery, I insisted to my professor that the book had made a terrible mistake. But he pulled some little microscopic white string things out from inside of a muscle and looked at me in a way that wasn't exactly contempt, but certainly wasn't sympathy. I dropped the class the next day, having finally come to the conclusion that my special perspective on science would be understood by only a few.

Ultimately, I simply gave up. I stopped going to class, failed every course, and was warned that I might flunk out because the semester had so lowered my grade point average. But I left on my own without being asked.

I Become A Graphic Designer

Soon after leaving school, at about age nineteen, I was thrown out of my parents house for what they claimed was my bad attitude and for wasting their tuition money. I managed to get an apprentice job in a large Washington D.C. illustration and graphic design studio. And, after many months of watching some of the best professionals in the area, I was allowed to a little bit of illustration and design myself and actually got to be quite good.

Two years, two design studios, and an advertising agency later, I considered myself a professional designer, and decided that the studios in which I worked were taking advantage of me by charging clients for my work ten times what they were paying me. So I had a card printed and declared that I was my own design studio.

After watching art sales people in action, and meeting a lot of people who bought graphic design and advertising, I came to the conclusion that making money in the field involved more personality than talent and that many of the people who were assigning design work were young mid-range executives who were either bored or not quite satisfied with their life. These were the nineteen-sixties, when ideas about personal expression and freedom of choice were overshadowing lives of dull responsibility and when everyone found some cause of their own to protest.

My first step was to persuade several young mid-range executives to come to my studio, rather than my coming to them. I knew that this was a waste of young mid-range executive time, but found that those whom I met took the most fragile excuses to get out of the office. And so, little by little, as I made corporate friends to whom I admitted that I didn't quite care for what I was doing, I found that others were sharing the same admission with me.

I created in my studio a place of escape. I had a stereo system set to blast any young mid-range executive into a world far apart from his dreary office. My refrigerator was filled with patés and cold meats and always champagne. On a coffee table was a small jar of carefully rolled joints. In short, I created a place of escape.

My primary self-directive was never to work more than half a day. And to this end my new project-assigning friends were most helpful. In return for a comfortable place to run from their own responsibilities for awhile, they tended to give me design work which provided the most money for the least work. The real key to this was printing. I learned never to let a client go directly to a printer, because if I handled the printing I could take a commission, or get a kick-back from the printer. And reprints were the best. I made money just by picking up the phone and telling a printer to do the work.

I was becoming a very successful businessman. But despite my success in graphic design, I had always kept the idea of school in the back of my mind. At the time I thought that perhaps psychology was where I belonged, and so I took two night courses, one each semester, at George Washington. Having done fairly well in these night courses, which I paid for myself, my parents took pity on me, and agreed to finance the remainder of my education. And, taking no chances, I determined this time to get the quickest and dirtiest degree possible, which for me meant painting.

I Return to George Washington and Get Straight A's!

The only impediment to my copout painting degree was a requirement that I take twelve credits of Art History, which meant a one year survey and two other courses. I knew nothing about Art History and had little interest in it, so this was the bad news. But there was some significantly good news on the way.

During my earliest college career I had been constantly on the Dean's List, but it was the "shit list," not an honor roll. However, this time around, and through an odd twist of fate, I effortlessly acquired the appearance of a very serious and successful student.

In these years there were no George Washington University painting studios, and registered GW students went down the street to the Corcoran School of Art. The main difference was that in the art school there was a teacher only three of the five days, and a monitor casually took an attendance roll on the other two days. I discovered soon that if I signed in, and told the monitor that I was going outside to draw, nobody knew what I was doing, and I could go home and go back to sleep.

I assumed that I would do well, whatever, having convinced the teacher that my parents, whom I described as both working at minimum wage cleaning jobs to support my education, would cut off my tuition payments if I did not earn an A in every course. And since art grades are fairly subjective, I felt safe. In any event, I did earn A's in all of my painting courses, and even got an actually earned A in my first semester of the Art History survey and felt that I was breezing toward graduation. What I could not have expected was that the three professors of Art History had decided to establish an "honors track" available to any art major with a average of more then 3.8 "in Art." But what nobody had

foreseen was that, since there was no departmental division between courses in painting and art history, I was made eligible under the terms which had been accepted by the school administration.

People in the art honors program were supposed to be reading books in consultation with the various faculty members. Students would register in the art history courses, and exempt from any examinations, would receive an automatic A in whatever art history course they took. So, of course, I registered for five courses each semester and began to routinely receive five A's. Notices that I was on the Dean's List also appeared routinely every semester.

I was having a wonderful time and was preparing to graduate when I discovered a terrible glitch. In my eight years of undergraduate work I had taken only one semester of a required four semesters of physical education and found myself in the position of having to petition some dean's committee to be freed from this altogether idiotic demand.

I spent an entire week writing what I thought to be a brilliant and persuasive petition, underscoring my financial difficulties, my father's college teaching profession, my allergy to gym shoes, my pathological fear of having an overly tight jock strap wipe out any possibility of my having children, and my strong religious conviction against basketball, volleyball, and all other indoor sports developed in Pennsylvania where I was raised as a Shaker.

It was a great relief to receive a letter from the dean saying that his committee had granted my petition. He said that they felt that if I had gotten this far without physical education, they would just let me through. Thus, I graduated smoothly with honors in the History of Art, from the George Washington University.

The Kennedy City

My last undergraduate years at George Washington University, four blocks from the White House, had been overshadowed by the Kennedy mystique. "Camelot" was an odd reality about which everyone "inside the beltway" had insider stories. A reporter friend, who had been on the campaign trail with Kennedy, told me that his advisors could hardly keep him supplied with girls, something that was not generally known at the time.

Mrs. Kennedy, then redecorating the White House, was of even more interest than her husband. Years before, she had taken an interior design class with the Chairman of the George Washington University Art Department, a man of floating feather wrists and precious speech, who made a point of telling everyone that he had only given her a B.

Having been in on the Kennedy adulation parade, it came as some shock to hear Gore Vidal, Jackie Kennedy's nephew, say that Kennedy was one of the worst presidents we ever had. But, in retrospect, I have to agree with him. Kennedy came close to getting us into a nuclear war, he was responsible for the Viet Nam fiasco, and he surrounded himself with people who were on the forefront of style, but whose lasting contribution has been minimal: Leonard Bernstein was a master of panache, but was no Aaron Copeland. And Edward Durell Stone, architect of the Kennedy Center, was no Frank Lloyd Wright, but he has left the public with a building which, in its eccentricities, its imperfections, and its dilettante appeal, is a perfect monument to John Kennedy.

I recently went to a performance of the Messiah there. It was terrible. I thought the woman next to me was having an orgasm. She was mouthing words and all but singing along, as the alto belted out some incomprehensible croaks, and I definitely heard my audience neighbor's breath getting heavier and heavier and then she began to shake, and

she took a handkerchief and muzzled herself briefly. And then the chorus went into something else, and I began to count the people who were walking out.

I had some real trouble understanding how a performance at Washington's Kennedy Center, with the National Symphony Orchestra, could be bad. But a violinist friend of mine explained the problem. "It's simple," he said "there just aren't enough Jews in the audience!" And he went on to say that the nearby Baltimore Symphony was much better because it was supported by lots of Jews, who knew what they were listening to, and who wouldn't take any crap.

My Military Experience

Deep down, during the period when people my age were being drafted, I was a conscientious objector. I objected conscientiously to the possibility of being sent into some useless conflict and being killed. And when a notice appeared in my mailbox requesting that I appear for a pre-induction physical, I cringed. How was I going to get out of this?

Having had years of contact with psychiatrists, I thought that my colorfully disordered past might be of some use and immediately made an appointment with a clinical psychologist recommended to me. My hope was to persuade some reputable professional to affirm that I was far too disturbed for military service, but appreciated that this would have to be done carefully.

The psychologist I chose made things much easier by having written a book on therapy, which I read from cover the cover—twice. In his text, he explained all of the little therapeutic clues and cues that were important to him and, it seemed to me that in exploiting these suggestions, I would have to amplify and warp some real part of my personality, rather than trying to invent wholesale.

This man was probably the stupidest psychologist I had ever dealt with, but the one who helped me the most. When I went to the physical I was armed with a letter from my clinician which, naturally, he did not show to me. But, there were two of us in my pre-induction physical group, and I was designated the leader, meaning that I was entrusted with the (unsealed) brown envelope carrying my letter, which turned out to be quite wonderful. In clinical terms my psychologist explained, in essence, that I wasn't so mentally ill that I needed to be hospitalized, but that the Army would have to be nuts to take me.

Fortunately, men who had earlier gone through the process had warned me that the person at the end of the line, seated at a desk, would be a psychiatrist. And when I got to him I was seated on a chair with nothing on but my jockey shorts, and was freezing cold in what seemed an unheated room. So I sat there shivering as this psychiatrist read through the letter and blandly asked; "Well, son, what seems to be the problem?"

Partly because the situation seemed so bizarre, and partly because I didn't want this man to have anything to go on but my glowing letter, I did not say a word! He asked the same question again, but I still sat there shivering, half naked, and silent as he wrote something at the bottom of my form and said that I could go. "What a glorious end to a military career," I thought, as I put on my clothes and walked out thinking alliterative thoughts like "sunlit snowy sidewalk," and "fantastic fucking freedom."

Graduate Work

In the fall, after receiving a questionable bachelor's degree with honors, I moved to another city and began graduate work in the history of art. There was no way that I could avoid this because, faced with my brilliant academic record, I was offered full tuition and a monthly cash payment by a good school. I assumed that I could coast for at least a couple of years, but the road became surprisingly rocky.

One of the draws to this school was a very famous medievalist art historian who had only accepted two other graduate students in his career and by whom I felt rather flattered. But two weeks into my graduate career I came to his class and found a note on his door that he had suddenly died, leaving me stranded without an advisor. So, as a matter of survival, I changed my direction to nineteenth century studies, which I generally disliked, but which was the least offensive speciality of the remaining few faculty members. The professor whom I chose was bright but slow and apparently never bathed, which may have accounted for my being his only student. So when he, too, died suddenly, perhaps from the excess weight of body sludge on his more than ample frame, or perhaps from the considerable task of turning me into a scholar, I was not entirely unhappy. But, once more, I had to change my area of concentration to match the skills of remaining potential advisors. This time I decided to concentrate on prints, and ultimately ended up writing a dissertation in that boring area.

It was very fortunate that when my third advisor died without warning, there was another person on the faculty qualified to direct me in my studies. And, since I dealt with this last advisor only by mail, I felt that he was relatively safe from whatever graduate student bad fortune I might be projecting. Indeed, I received my degree without further incident, and my substitute advisor remains alive and well today—as far as I know.

Mysticism and the Occult

From the age of seventeen I had been deeply attracted to the occult and, especially to tarot, an interest which became a passion in graduate school. My connection to tarot had begun long before tarot became popular, and there were only two or three decks on the market, including the Marseilles deck, the Crowley deck, the incredibly popular Waite deck and the wonderful Case/Waite variation which had to be hand-painted.

My assumption was that the meaning of life was to be found in books, so I had several shelves of books which I had read indiscriminately assuming that all of these authors were “initiates” who would lead me down a path of insights. This turned out not to be the case and I began to appreciate that most books espousing mystical and occult belief systems are little more than the blind leading the blind and that the authors may be some very arrogant and ignorant people.

To me the first ray of light came from Dion Fortune, for whose books I still have great respect, and at the same time I felt an odd and intangible attraction to the nineteenth century *Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn* to which she belonged. I also discovered works by Israel Regardie, a former secretary to Aleister Crowley, who had shocked many by breaking his initiatory vows and publishing in four volumes, *The Golden Dawn*, in which he revealed the most intimate secrets of the order's practices. The books were expensive. So I frequently found myself ordering them in the Library of Congress reading room. Who would have thought that years later Regardie would himself give me an autographed set of these books.

During an intense period when I was pursuing the Golden Dawn methods of meditation and personal ritual I read in one of Regardie's books that he would like, some day, to publish the tarot deck which was hand-copied by members of the Golden Dawn fraternity and which few had ever seen. I wrote to him offering my services as an artist and was astonished when he replied that he would like to talk to me about the possibility.

Months and continuing correspondence with Regardie went by before I flew from Washington to Los Angeles where we met and agreed that together we would recreate the Golden Dawn Tarot. For me this was a period of tremendous hope and excitement. I felt very honored to be the person with whom this noted figure in the occult world chose to work. And I genuinely liked Regardie, who was one of the funniest people I have ever met, although I was terrified to get into a car with him. He was a funny person but an awful driver.

For more than a year I sent slides of my water color paintings to California and Regardie sent back suggestions and comments. One day the paintings were finished, and I made a final trip to California for approval of the illustration before publishing.

Much later the cards appeared and, at the suggestion of Donald Weiser, a key publisher of occult books in America, I wrote a small book to accompany them. This was followed by a five year project, *The Qabalistic Tarot*, which received extremely kind reviews. I shall always be appreciative of Donald Weiser's generosity and encouragement as I produced this book.

Oddly enough, Regardie never commented on *The Qabalistic Tarot*, and at first I assumed that he had reservations about what I had written, although I never asked. I felt that my association with Regardie was ended and that I would now go my way as a writer and he would continue to help many people with his very wise and insightful counseling practice

As Regardie explained it to me, he maintained his credentials as a chiropractor because in the State of California it allowed him to counsel clients and to pursue his interests as a Reichian therapist. His wife, Rev. Dr. Alice, was also a "ministerial counselor," legal in California after she purchased a doctorate from some fly-by-night company specializing in selling religion-based diplomas. She was a wonderful and sympathetic person to whom I last spoke by telephone some years after she had left Regardie. She called to say goodbye and to tell me that she was soon to be picked up by aliens with a space ship, atop some mountain.

Both Alice and Regardie had been positive influences in my life and it took me quite some time to realize that the real reason for my rift with Regardie was that I had done a terrible job of painting the Golden Dawn Tarot cards. I did my best at the time, but whenever I look at these badly drawn, strange little wooden figures I cringe in embarrassment. It's no wonder that Regardie didn't want to talk to me after the cards were published.

I Am Hired to Teach

The chances of my ever being hired to teach at a university level seemed remote and so being offered a position at Antioch College (now "University") happened either because of divine intervention or because they had confused my resume with that of someone else. But however it may have happened I found myself as one of a full-time faculty of five at one of the remote "centers" across the country that had been established by the college in an attempt to bring money back to the financially struggling college in Yellow Springs Ohio.

The Antioch “outpost” in Columbia, Maryland (a “new city” which had been carved out of farmland a few years earlier) was called the “Human Ecology Center,” a title which to this day I do not understand. The largest population of students seemed to be those who had discovered that we would admit anyone and that, with a government loan and other finances provided, they would never have to attend a class. The whole proposition seemed very dubious. but these were the disco-driven seventies and the name of the game in education was “innovation,” a word which I later determined to mean that we would do anything to get warm student bodies.

I was the Humanities Department and had to figure how to bring in my own students, which I did with an absolutely shameless ad in the New York Times inviting applicants to come to the Columbia center and design their own program. That one ad alone produced six registered students, not one of whom had any real interest in being educated, but who *in toto* gave my one man “department” some credibility.

There was, however, a significant problem in that these few humanities majors, required teachers and there was almost no money for salaries. So, once more, I had to make do in a difficult situation and found, if I may say so myself, a very creative way to do this.

My reasoning was that there were quite a number of legitimately credentialed academics in the area who could not get jobs, but who might welcome a chance to connect with a university while they were job seeking. So, I advertised in a local newspaper saying that the school was seeking qualified persons in all areas of the humanities to help develop a new program for the college. Of course, there were many responses and although some were very annoyed when they discovered that we had no intention of paying anyone. The program, as I explained it, was that we were seeking “preceptors” (the word sounded so legitimate) who would teach one class of a few students in their homes (we only had three small classrooms) in return for which we would give them contracts making them auxiliary professors and would write good recommendations as they applied to real schools. It worked. We actually got almost a dozen volunteers, and became an almost common event that deans and department chairman from other small schools would come to my office asking how we had managed the trick.

I was very pleased to explain our program and how it had happened, although I think most of the visitors were quite taken back to discover that one entire wall of my office housed a eight foot long bird cage and that I was trying to breed canaries beginning with two that I had named “The Booger” and “The Boogie.”

My Students

One day I visited the home of one of my students, whom I will call “John” but who was called quite a few other names by my fellow teachers who found him especially strange. In his living room John had shelves and shelves of books bearing stamps and stickers that said “Library of Congress.” It turned out that his uncle was a congressman who ordered the books, and when I asked John if he intended to return them, he casually replied “of course not!” Needless to say, I was appalled. When other students were risking arrest smuggling Library of Congress books out under their shirts, John was simply asking his uncle to get whatever he wanted. The shock and disgust at this immoral inequity remains with me even today.

I had a few other students whose behavior was odd. One was Frank, a twenty-two year old man who had an enormous male organ which he shamelessly flaunted by wearing

jeans so tight that every microscopic outline was visible. Most pretended not to notice, and I cannot recall that anyone ever said anything directly to him, but he clearly embarrassed a great many people. I was, personally, somewhat offended, although I did choose him to be my student assistant for the couple of years before he graduated.

Finally, I recall Brandon, a rather hulking and strange young man who registered for a special class in which he was to write a paper about his family history. After months, he turned in a rambling and virtually incomprehensible account which began “The earth cooled and the dinosaurs appeared.” I gave him an A.

I Am Fired

In my own defense, I must insist that almost any experimental school during this particular period would have promoted some unusual behaviors in students and faculty alike. Our center was half way between Baltimore and Washington, with their then extraordinary gay dance bars and seemed as if everyone spent their weekends at one or the other of the bars. For some inexplicable reason it turned out that all of my students were either gay or were aspiring to be so, and we often shared cars as well as beds.

These were extraordinary days, the first period of gays being “out” in a big city with disco reigning supreme. I even remember standing six feet away from Gloria Gaynor as she belted out “I’ll Survive” at Washington D.C.’s Pier One, a huge place with three dance floors.

I think it was at this concert that I first met David, who was later to be semi-instrumental in my expulsion from the teaching profession (I won’t expand on this). For some reason David came up to me and asked if I would buy him a drink. And when I did he kissed me wildly on the mouth and I couldn’t help but wonder what I would get for a hamburger.

In any event, he turned out to be a hustler with a sad past. At the age of ten his father had been showing him how to fly a kite using a metal cord which got in a power line and which electrocuted him. To this day I cannot imagine what it would be like for a child to see his father killed in this terrible way.

Eventually David earned credentials as a nurse and one of his friends told me that he was routinely substituting aspirin for narcotics prescribed to patients and taking them himself. David died in his mid-twenties when, after hours of drinking and drug use, he sped his car into traffic on a dark road.

Isolation After the Brief Teaching Career

One day a friend, who decided that it wasn’t healthy for me to be living alone, called to ask if I would like to have “a kid” live with me. He had met a six foot six, rather gnarly guy of twenty, who every day wore a very tasteful evening dress and was living in a laundromat. My friend took him on a “date,” a ride on the Washington D.C. subway where the pair got a great deal of attention from the public.

So the kid was brought to my house and I decided that, despite his somewhat unconventional attire most of the time, he was actually a rather nice person and professed to have an overarching interest in doing laundry, in cleaning, in polishing, and in mowing lawns among other things. It seemed that his eccentricities, which I later learned included wetting the bed, might be overshadowed by his help around the house, and agreed that he could move in for a trial period.

I was prepared for his doing some housework, but was aghast when one day the neighbors saw him hauling trash out for pickup at the street wearing sprayed on purple shorts, a halter, huge curlers, and high heels. Soon after this, I returned him to the laundromat from whence he had come.

But I was still in search of company and discovered an interesting prisoner “pen-pal” site. Although most of the correspondence involved inmate claims of ample male endowment, sincere love for me, and pleas for money to help purchase bibles for their prayer group, I found some rather interesting people on line.

Corresponding With a Prisoner

I began writing to a very bright man in Angola prison, one of the meanest prisons in America. Henry was different from others there because, as he explained, he had been falsely accused and had been caught up in a judicial system prejudiced against him because he is white.

After some years of writing back and forth, we decided that we could get along, and I invited him to come to stay with me while he started in at a local university. Unfortunately, however, returning to Texas upon his release from Angola, he met an old friend with whom he drank a lot, and they both ended up in the wrong place at the wrong time, being somehow incorrectly identified in a lineup as persons who had stolen a car and broken into an electronics store. So Henry went back to prison and we corresponded for another couple of years until he was released, and was paroled to my suburban Maryland county.

Creating a Religious Business

For a year or so he went to a local college, Henry was considered to be absolutely brilliant by his professors, and was looking forward to serious graduate studies when stress caught up with him. He lost all interest in school, and flunked out. So he puttered around the house and decided that what he really wanted in life was to be the most prominent magic mushroom dealer on the East coast. At the time he explained to me that growing these mushrooms was not illegal and that he would only be growing them to provide those who used them for religious purposes. I was deeply impressed by his sincerity and effort to help others.

He took over the entire basement and, putting about ten thousand dollars on my credit cards which he promised he would pay back, he constructed four small rooms. One was for growing marijuana (for his glaucoma), one room was for mushroom petri dish cultures, and two were for sixteen huge trays containing soil. There was a CO₂ tank for the marijuana, and special fans and filters and tubes all over the place. I had no idea what he was actually doing. But he attached a little crucifix to the main door of the rooms, and had votive candles burning under it, indicating that the whole operation was blessed.

The Farmer Goes Nuts

Two months later a few little mushrooms began to appear, and Henry seemed happy about this. Then a few more popped up, but never very many, and I thought that something must be wrong. Apparently he thought so too.

He began to change and—as I later found out—was smoking marijuana in the morning, eating magic mushrooms in the afternoon, and often using crack cocaine in the

evening. I should have realized that there was a problem because I found him increasingly difficult to understand, and noticed that he was writing with big crayons on the walls. One day, I found a note on a wall saying "I am God!" and found a cleaver in my bed with a note saying that I should respect him the way Jews respect Jahweh. After this I realized that he had to go, and a week later, unfortunately, had him evicted by the police.

In retrospect I feel very sad, even naive, that I did not recognize the seriousness of this very bright man's condition. Having not used any of these drugs, except for marijuana which I had given up twenty years earlier, I did not truly understand what this man had done and how he must have been suffering. Nevertheless, it was a tremendous relief to me as I threw out every last trace of his garden..

My understanding is that Henry soon went to his mother's home at a major fundamentalist Christian center where he was considered to be a very talented up and coming preacher. However, however, despite his obvious service to the Lord, he was again accused of selling drugs and of breaking into a house, and was sent back to prison.

My only consolation in this is knowing that he is now bringing Jesus to many who really need Him.

Still Trying to Find Some Friends

Having failed miserably with the collection of needy misfits, I decided that joining some group was the way to go. So one day my pal Mark and I decided to socialize with Dignity, the gay Catholic group in Washington. They held regular masses at St. Margaret's, an Episcopal Church, because Dignity had been thrown off of the Georgetown University Campus by reactionary Jesuits and because the Episcopalians knew a small political coup when they saw one. Of course, the coup was not really so small. The church was packed with six hundred men for each of two masses every Sunday.

At the first mass we attended, I found myself standing beside a very large bearded man who was covered with steel chains and who had a pair of handcuffs hanging from his belt. It turned out that he was a member of "The Defenders" and that this was their special yearly mass. The group was made up of motorcycle riding, leather clad, men who congregated in a downtown bar called "The Eagle" where they intensely debated things such as the relative merits of ruffles on kitchen curtains.

At this special mass the priest apologized that he did not have a leather chasuble. My understanding is that the next year he did.

Feeling that perhaps we could make a contribution, Mark and I speculated about what we could do and considered baking bread for the Eucharist. We thought that banana nut bread would be wonderful and fantasized about the priest holding a plate of our famous banana nut bread over the altar and intoning "This is my body."

I have also made friends with a lot of former Catholic priests and understand their special problems. Since the altar boys have been taken away from them, more and more priests are leaving for professions with better perks. And, of course, the Catholic church has been losing members ever since the mass was translated from Latin into the vernacular, and people learned what it really said.

Another Tarot Deck and Writing Books on Jung

The Jungian Tarot and the accompanying books were at once an expiation of guilt for my dreadful work on the *Golden Dawn* cards and an affirmation of a complete change in

direction away from The Golden Dawn toward Jungian psychology. The Jungian cards were carefully painted in oil on canvas using models for whom I invented the various costumes. The cards are the result of many years of study, of frequent consultation with Jungian analysts at the Carl Jung Institutes in New York and in Zurich, and of criticism by scholars in comparative religion and in many other academic fields.

My original intention for the deck was that it be used as a projective device—stimulus pictures for discussion in Jungian therapy—certainly not for telling fortunes. I have always believed that tests such as the Roschach, the Thematic Apperception Test, or the Draw a Person Test are only as good as the therapist who administers them and it seemed to me that images designed on Jungian principles could be very useful for a skilled Jungian analyst.

Beyond my interest in “archetypal imagery” I found in Carl Jung a corrective to the hyper-rationalization of other early twentieth century psychological theorists like Sigmund Freud. But in twenty volumes of his writing he seemed to repeat the same principles over and over again in ever more elegant and reasoned different language.

What most impressed me about Jung was the extent to which my own background in Christian and Jewish mysticism, in the Western occult movement and in both the Hebrew and the “Hermetic” Kabbalah meshed together effortlessly with his ideas about “Individuation” and the Alchemical stages of “turning lead into gold.”

But it was not until I read his autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* that I understood the full extent to which he edited thoughts and insights directed to a potentially hostile scientific and academic community. Most recently I have discovered his *Red Book*, a record of his personal spiritual development held back by the family for years after Jung’s death. The book is inspirational, sometimes frightening and is, by any description, overwhelming.

I cannot say that I really turned away from The Golden Dawn, although I fully appreciate why the person whom I believe to have been the *real* leader of that fraternity, Alan Bennett (teacher of both Crowley and Fortune) became a Buddhist. Golden Dawn is an amazing and syncretistic method of both meditation and ritual. Divorced from the trappings of quasi-seventeenth century magical formulae, the meditative techniques are traditional and very effective. They are, in fact, exactly what Jung called “active imagination.”

To me the practices of the Golden Dawn are relatively “introductory,” and anachronistic (clearly being of late nineteenth century temperament) but may effectively point to more difficult studies for some. Those who have devoted their lives to the search for self-knowledge will affirm that the process requires repeatedly giving up one point of view to progress to another. And Jung’s analogy of the stages toward what he called “individuation” as *alchemy* is very appropriate because the terrible “blackening” and production of spiritual goal happens over and over again. Just when you think you have achieved something significant, you realize that you are at the edge of a whole new desert.

Jung makes very clear that the process of inner growth literally tears a person apart before it puts a man or woman back together in a new way. Indeed one who has felt the pain, the suffering, the abject terror of “the blackness” cannot adequately communicate the experience. Saint John of the Cross got it right in his *Dark Night of the Soul*.

And, in this regard, Regardie was fond of saying about the process of enlightenment that “It has nothing to do with goodness.” May West said the same thing, but in a different context.

I Get AIDS

I tell people that I got AIDS from a toilet seat in a roadside chapel. This is not really true. I got AIDS from a partner of sixteen years. When I found this out, I was very resentful and blamed him for his promiscuity over the years. It was especially difficult for me since I had been completely faithful to him, and monogamous—except, perhaps, for a few old friends, and people that I met at bookstores and at fundamentalist Christian gatherings.

A Hospital Show Starring Me

I got very sick and was in the hospital for a week. At the time, all of the nurses seemed to gravitate to my room, to the extent that I felt as if I were holding court and being sparkling and entertaining despite a high fever. It seemed that this was an ultimate affirmation of my charm and wit, until I learned that the nurses had nobody else to talk to because everyone else on my floor was in a coma.

Publishing An Art Newspaper in Washington, D.C.

After leaving academia I floated—writing and working as a reporter/photographer/art writer for a number of Washington D.C. publications. The most interesting of these was a magazine dedicated to music, theater, and art events in the city. Originally I was called in to redesign the publication and ended up writing articles for it about local art.

The editor was a wonderfully creative and charming artist who lived in a special and strange world, and who did her best to cope with the fact that the magazine, which she had edited since its inception, had been sold. A wealthy and influential Washington politico had bought it for his wife, who knew absolutely nothing about publications, but who wanted it as a plaything. Thus I, and everyone else working on the magazine, found ourselves in a strange environment. The husband, a large and imposing man who seemed to the editor to be rarely sober, visited the office about twice a week to make pronouncements of one kind or another. The wife, a rather nice little socialite puppet type, showing up now and then to discuss idiotic stories that she would like to see in *her* magazine, and to look at galleys and Ektachromes which clearly meant little to her. The routine was that minutes after either the husband or wife left the office, the editor would discreetly disappear into the darkroom, and we would hear the sounds of profound sobbing and then none of us would say a word for about two hours.

Ultimately realizing that the magazine was losing a great deal of money, the red-nosed husband appeared one Friday afternoon, fired everyone, and closed the publication's doors. There was a one paragraph obituary of the magazine in the *Washington Post*, describing a "Saturday Night Massacre" and that was that.

Soon afterwards I woke up with nothing to do and faced myself with a serious question. If I could do anything in the world, what would it be? My answer was that I would like to publish an art newspaper and to this end I spent a whole day doing a comprehensive mock-up of a front page. It looked like a newspaper, it felt like a newspaper and it was actually rather exciting. I had years of production experience in newspapers and magazines, and could certainly take any publication from text and art to press almost by myself. So the only thing really lacking was the money. As it worked out, I was able to borrow enough money for a first printing, and acquiring a wonderfully

competent accomplice in publishing who had a typesetting machine, my newspaper was on its way. Ideally the publication would be free and supported by advertising from galleries and museums.

I went through the usual steps of getting on every local art group's mailing list for press releases and soon found that I was making a lot of friends. There really was no competent publication describing the visual arts in Washington, and my newspaper quickly filled a need.

But although I had written about art for various local newspapers, I actually knew very little about the city's art scene, beyond the obvious museums. So I set out with the positive idea that there was something worthwhile happening in Washington galleries, which turned out to be completely untrue. The galleries were filled with crap, and I learned that, except for its museums, Washington has always been a wasteland for the arts, as anyone not in some way connected to the Kennedy Center or other dilettante arts organizations, such as the Ford's Theatre, will tell you.

Producing A Newspaper

Very few people were aware that a friend and I were producing a twenty-four page tabloid newspaper in one room of the basement of my suburban Washington townhouse. It was a fairly dark place, except for the glowing green of my original IBM PC computer, which I bought to do the newspaper and which at first I had no idea how to use. But soon we prided ourselves on being one of the first newspapers setting type by desktop computer.

Some years before, IBM had approved an account on which I bought two typewriters as a graduate student and, now in a gesture of corporate insanity, they allowed me to charge more than \$5,000 (a lot of money in those days) for a then state-of-the-art machine with 8 megabytes of memory and no hard drive. Two months later, and enervated by the amazing ease with which I had acquired the first machine, I charged another computer for my managing editor/partner. This one, the first on the market with a hard drive, added another \$7,500 to my debt with IBM. In these early days, before rampant credit card abuse, it was a great deal of fun to charge recklessly. And it was reckless, since I hadn't the slightest idea how I was going to pay for these machines. Certainly, the paper was producing no money.

But my managing editor/partner had an idea. We wrote to the chairman of IBM in Armonk, New York, explaining that we were a small art newspaper in Washington, D.C., with an influential clientele, and were in a technology forefront producing a whole newspaper on IBM machines. Would they consider taking out our debt in advertising? Please? One day a letter arrived asking that we call a local IBM executive responding to our request and, although I could never reach, him the bills stopped coming. That was the good news. The bad news was that the paper only lasted for a year. Its demise was very sad.

A Free Flight to Paris and A Scam

It is absolutely astonishing how much attention people pay to you when you own a newspaper. Magically, you turn from an ugly duckling into a swan; magically somebody cares what you have to say, and lots of people want to twist your arm.

One day, after my newspaper had been published for a few months, I received a call from an executive in a Washington D.C. office of Pan American Airlines whom I assumed to be a lobbyist. She introduced herself and asked if I, and another person, would like to take a trip on a special “Inaugural Flight” to Paris with the compliments of Pan Am, somehow working into the conversation the fact that her husband was just opening an art gallery in a Virginia suburb. It didn’t take me long to figure out that this was a little bribe, and I clicked over in my mind just how much newspaper space an article on her husband’s gallery would require. For a moment, I even had thoughts of journalistic integrity, and of never being bought. But I remembered the last lines from the movie *Arthur*, and decided that I too, might be crazy, but I wasn’t stupid.

So the next week my young assistant and I boarded a plane for Paris, thinking that there had to be some way to work a story about Paris art galleries into a Washington newspaper. Unfortunately, there were no seats on this inaugural flight except in tourist, and we sat in the very last row where, as we took off, and where there in this dark and dingy feeling area, my seat belt broke out of its metal clamps and fell onto the floor. Of course I called a flight attendant, who called the Purser, a man wearing a Harvard class ring (for whatever that may have been worth). I expressed my amazement that the airline would invite journalists on board for such a special flight and then put them into such a condition, which brought a blank stare to the face of the purser. Journalists? Special flight?

I was armed with a letter from the Pan Am executive describing the flight and asking for our participation, which was news to the purser. It was also news to the Captain and to whomever he immediately called in New York. We remained unhappy but, by this time being somewhere over the Atlantic ocean, decided to stay on the plane.

The return flight a few days later, in first class, was pleasant and uneventful and as non-inaugural as the first one. But I knew that they knew who we were, and the flight attendants were attentive to the point of being unctuous. Sometime later I declared another company, TWA, to be “The Airline of Washington Art.”

A couple of months after this “free vacation,” I got a call from the gallery-owner-husband of the Pan Am executive telling me about the extraordinary and secret sale of a major work of art, a Velazquez, in which he was seeking some commission, and in which my advice was urgently sought. He asked if I would please meet him, and some mysterious representative of a super-rich Swiss Countess, at an apartment off of Dupont Circle. I agreed.

The apartment was creepy, and not even with the most fertile of James Bond imaginations could I conceive of this as just a cover. It was a dump, and a dark and musty dump at that. Seated in attempted elegance on a tattered sofa was a woman in her mid-fifties, who, speaking in a very strong French accent, introduced herself as having been the French tutor of President John Kennedy. Now she was acting as an agent for the sale of an unnamed great painting for some unnamed great lady. After some spiel about this supposedly major Velazquez painting, and the necessity for absolute discretion in the sale of this work, I was shown a few black and white, out of focus photographs featuring a man on a horse. (Or perhaps, as the pictures were so bad, a woman on a rhinoceros.)

I am not a specialist in the Spanish Baroque, but knew that there are no more Velazquez paintings to be sold, and that this was little more than a comedy act for my benefit. I wondered what the Virginia gallery owner and the mysterious agent may have done or said after we quickly excused ourselves, and later heard that the woman and an accomplice had been arrested in Philadelphia for fraud. All in all, I found the behavior of

these people to be appalling and unconscionable, concluding that people like this should leave art fraud to the professionals.

Death of A Reporter

Except for articles which I took from press releases, in the beginning I wrote almost everything myself and, for appearances sake, I invented four writers. But, as time went on, real people began to contribute, and I looked for creative ways to pare down my increasingly burgeoning staff. My best writer “dismissal” was of Cynthia Jarokowsky, one of the first writer inventions on the newspaper. On the inside front page, beneath my editorial appeared this (sad) article:

Art Reporter Dies in Bizarre Accident

Noted art writer Cynthia Jarokowsky, 34, was killed in a freak accident on December 10 near Berne, Switzerland, where she was researching a story on Swiss art galleries. According to the driver of her car, Bernard Culdebois, Dr. Jarokowsky asked that the car be stopped on a particularly scenic, though dangerous, mountain curve, and that her electric wheelchair be placed on the road so that she could admire the landscape. As she moved closer to the mountain edge, her hand apparently slipped on the control, and her chair bolted forward through an open area on the guardrail hurling her down a 15,000 feet precipice. Culdebois, whose English is very poor, believes that as the journalist fell, she cried out either “Help me, you idiot,” or “God save Washington art.”

Cynthia is survived by her husband Cyril, and by her two children, Cedrick and Celia. In lieu of flowers the family requests that contributions be sent to this newspaper.

A few people actually called and said that they thought this obituary was crude, and that it must have upset the family. And somebody actually xeroxed the article, added a large caption : “IN MEMORIAM CYNTHIA JAROKOWSKY” and posted it on every floor of the Washington Press Building. But nobody sent money.

Long Term Friends

I tend to be very loyal to my friends, many of whom have made interesting marks in the world. I recall, especially, a good Catholic priest whose portrait I painted in a yellow chausible with his hands outstretched illustrating his self-evaluation that “I give good hand.” The last time I saw my friend was on a national TV newscast. He was shown in New York City, with brightly bleached yellow hair, being handcuffed and arrested as an allegedly egregious child molester.

And there was Alvin, a smallish person who proudly displayed one of the most incredible collections of enormous dildoes that I ever seen. They were in white and black and orange and green. Perhaps they were intended as an affirmation of his belief in racial

equality, but I found them frightening. Alvin lived in a tiny, dark, subsidized apartment where he routinely entertained drug addicts. In return for the use of his space, his friends provided him with crack cocaine and performed unspeakable acts upon him as he faded happily into lala land.

My most educated friend is Lyndon, a meteorologist with a Ph.D whom I always introduce as a “urologist” because it’s a shorter word and easier to say. Lyndon is the person whom I call whenever there is a heavy rain to ask what I should do, which pisses him off every time. Annoying people is one of the things that I do best.

But of all my friends, the most colorful is definitely my appliance repair man, Michael, who usually asks if he can take his clothes off while he works and usually fixes things stark naked with a hard-on. I do find this behavior somewhat idiosyncratic, but try to be respectful of the life styles of others. In this regard I recall a wealthy, world-traveling, lawyer friend telling me about dinner with a well-known Archbishop in Africa. The archbishop told a story of having been with the African dictator Idi Amin as the dictator proudly showed him the contents of a large freezer—severed human arms and legs and torsos on which Amin dined regularly. “How,” my friend asked the Archbishop, “could you possibly tolerate such an abomination?” And the archbishop replied: “Well, people do have different customs.”

I have always admired the way the Catholic church accepts cultural diversity.

Finding Out that I Am Jewish

Some years ago my mother visited and, after dinner, drank a half glass of creme de menthe, which was probably the first alcohol she had ever consumed in her life and which produced an unexpected effect. She started to cry and haltingly said that there was something she had wanted to tell me for a long time. She had earlier told my sister this terrible thing, and my sister had reacted so badly that she was afraid to say anything to me.

After a number of tearful starts, stops, and gurgles, my mother said “Your father...,” and then she started to cry again, “Your father...is *Jewish*.” I don’t know how I kept from breaking out into uncontrollable laughter, but I did manage to console my mother somewhat by telling her that I appreciated knowing the ethnic source of my nose.

My roots became even more clear when my mother mentioned offhandedly that her mother’s mother had also been Jewish, and I began to think that I should find out what Judaism is all about. So for the next two years, I tried to teach myself Hebrew, spending about an hour a day every morning, and coming to the conclusion that this is a very, very difficult language for somebody who hasn’t grown up with it. At the same time I read Leviticus and tried seriously to comply with its dual admonitions about sausage, but failed on both counts.

At the time I had a number of Jewish friends, whom I had never really thought of as being Jewish, but to whom I now addressed endless questions about their religion. One particular friend seemed to know more about Judaism than anyone else and spent a great deal of time at temple and in prayer. I did, however, find it somewhat peculiar that he went to considerable effort, using some kind of skin stretching device attached twenty-four hours a day, to uncircumcise himself. In his mind this seems to have been an aesthetic quest, but to my novice Jewish perspective it appeared to be a rejection of the covenant of circumcision between God and Abraham. I asked this question to “my rabbi,” who never did give me a satisfactory answer.

This rabbi was a person whom I had known casually twenty years before, with whom I had rekindled a friendship, and whose congregation I discovered to be somewhat out of the ordinary. I only went to one of his services, but that was enough. The congregation was dominated by lesbians wearing men's prayer shawls and yarmulkes, with whom I was advised not to argue about anything in an after-service coffee and bagel encounter. By comparison these Jewish bull dikes made the Catholic motorcycle men, whom I had encountered at a Dignity service, seem very gentle and unthreatening and made me look back fondly on my ideas about the banana nut bread body of Christ.

The Jewish excursion ended abruptly, and I turned briefly to Buddhism, when I discovered that my rabbi had invited my partner of sixteen years to share a hotel room with him in New York and had proposed to engage in some behaviors which seemed to me to be most unrabbinical.

Today I am coming to dislike Judaism, Catholicism, and every other organized religion. I consider myself to be an equal opportunity iconoclast.

When I'm Too Bored to Paint or to Write

I will admit to being an unabashed watcher of television. In fact, I believe that imbedded in many of today's television programs are the essential philosophical challenges of our time. In a backhanded way, this medium poses questions as profound as that of a *koan*, such as "the sound of one hand clapping." For example, in a recent episode of a very popular medical show, a bird somehow flies loose in the operating room and defecates into the open heart of a hapless patient. There are those, of course, who will describe this plot as puerile and gross and attribute it to a writer desperate for a shocking plot. But to me, it is an allegory equal to the story of *Job* in its brilliance and mystery. The bird is the great teacher, who unexpectedly drops darkness and anguish upon the frail mortal, in order that he (or she, of course) may learn to reach new levels of divine understanding. The astonished surgeons are like the many in Plato's cave, who see reality only by reflection and who do not really understand what is going on. Of course, in the television program the patient sues, but I keep trying to find some lesson for my own life on the TV screen.

No interruption of my TV watching is more annoying than Jehovah's Witnesses banging on the door. In the past I have dismissed them politely, but they keep coming back. So I began to say nothing but to assume a look of abject fear, make some very strange whimpering sounds, and abruptly close the door. Then I collapsed in laughter on the floor.

More recently, I have been telling the recurrent pair of young men that "we are Jewish," hoping that they will take their bibles and depart quietly. However their new programmed response seems to be "but is there anything we can do for you?" I have found that they leave quickly when I say "Sure. Do you guys give blow jobs?"

What to Do Next?

It is very difficult for me to do the same thing for long periods of time, and I will admit to being constantly restless for new challenges. But it seems that every time I get a good idea for a new direction in my life, I am unceremoniously turned away for one reason or another. Neurosurgery is out because I have not gone to medical school. A career in ballet couldn't work because I am not strong enough to lift *anybody* off of the floor. And

most things in the real job market are closed to me because my largely-empty resume states that I retired at the age of twenty-four and some may perceive me as unreliable.

Other than writing and painting, which I have done for so many years, only the more mundane occupations seem available. One day I stood in front of a mirror and practiced saying “Sir, would you like fries with your Big Mac?” This is something that can be said in the most incredible ways—from a resounding Shakespearean tone in an English accent to a small whimpering affirmation of utter subordination to the god of fast foods.

It also occurred to me that I might make a good roofer—standing proudly atop some house in the burning sun with my shirtless fellow workers, emphasizing the word “ain’t,” and creatively using “fuck” variously as a verb, a noun, or even an adverb. But, much as I might enjoy a macho job on a construction site, I could never bring myself to miss the daily TV reruns of *Captain Jack* and *Torchwood*. So that was out.

I will probably just keep painting because that is something I can do while hiding out from the world and from those soon-to-be-forgotten souls who don’t like my work and who earn their living as curators, art dealers, and critics.

The fact is that in the first years of my adult life I tried to live like everyone else and to be responsible. But I just haven’t got it in me.