

THOUGHTS FROM THE SHOWER

By Alton Smith

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A TRUTH

Until the age of forty five, I had never experienced real happiness or being deeply in love. That's when I met my wife Crissy. Since then, my life has become an ongoing, wonderful joyride.

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FOREWORD

Scratching athlete's foot, experiencing orgasm or taking hot showers are three of life's great pleasures. Forced to choose one, I opt for the last.

This book is a recollection of my thoughts from the shower. Having been eased into bliss by the soothing spray, I yield to a plethora of memories of events and people spanning the gamut from profound to zany.

Meet my mother whose keen wisdom dissolved into blissful senility at age 96 and my orthodox immigrant grandfather who became a minor movie mogul and then a heretic. Chronicled are episodes from the Fieldston Ethical Culture School and Springfield College, where my education constantly flirted with disaster. There are stories of days as a "porn" movie projectionist, experiences teaching and coaching, sketches of people who, in some small way, made life better or funnier, and a scattering of observations about varied facets of life.

These are true stories told in random order. Some of the names of people and places have been changed. When you've finished, go take a hot shower and enjoy your aquatic reveries. May the spray waterlog and shrivel your skin. May the rising steam peel your bathroom ceiling. May you find your thoughts from the shower more revealing than your hours on the analyat's couch.

Ali hail! Release the doves and let the stories begin.

A. S.

GREAT EXPECTATION

The first six grades of my schooling were spent in the Tatnuck Elementary School, a part of The Worcester, Massachusetts, public school system. It would have been euphemistic referring to me as an "underachiever." Tenuous would best describe my academic work and rebellious would adequately describe my behavior.

Had my family remained in Worcester, they would have had to beg the Worcester Academy to admit me. My public school days were over.

It was a happy day when my father announced the family would move to join him in New York, where he had been promoted to eastern division manager of The Seagram Company. Socially, this would be a quantum leap up for a naive New England youngster like me. My mother realized the vast, impersonal New York City public school system was not the place for a scholastically unmotivated child like me.

Some New York friends advised placing me in the Fieldston Ethical Culture School. It was a prestigious, experimental, progressive school that welcomed the challenge of teaching the "different"

child. My public school record didn't strike the admission director as a handicap. When taken for an interview, I fell in love with the place. Imagine a 14-acre campus, playing fields with lush grass, a room filled by a huge model railroad, a swimming pool, two gyms, desks that moved freely anywhere in the classroom, eight buildings devoted to specialties like shop, cooking, sewing, printing, painting, science, language, music, and other specialty areas. Best of all were the teachers who hugged you and took an interest in what you had to say. Paradise was the only way to describe it.

After a hefty \$750 (1937 dollar value) tuition payment, I was in. From the very first day, I had tremendous fun and lost complete track of my academic responsibilities. At the end of seventh grade, I was put on academic probation. At the end of eighth grade things were no better, but I was still very happy. My mother was summoned to a conference where she was told the school saw no progress in my performance and considered my chances for advancement to be hopeless.

My mother, a former school teacher, was not intimidated by such a dire prediction. She insisted she had seen progress in my performance. The principal wanted to

know how. "When Alton was in public school in Worcester," she began, "he cried when he had to go to school. Now, at Fieldston, he cries when he can't go to school. That's progress, and I demand that you keep him."

Mr. Tate reluctantly acquiesced.

At the end of ninth grade, my academic performance worsened. The principal called in my mother and told her my probation was over and so were my Fieldston Ethical Culture School days. Period! Punkt! Fini and Sayonara!

Mother put up a sterling defense and refused to accept the ultimatum. Using the word "refused" is a classic understatement. It was more like a cobra-mongoose stand-off with my mother refusing to leave the principal's office until he relented.

After several minutes of eyeball-to-eyeball glaring, the principal left his office and returned with a letter.

"Mrs. Smith, if you'll sign this letter, Alton can stay at Fieldston," he said with resignation. "What does the letter say?" Mother asked. "It says you waive any

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obligations Fieldston has to graduate Alton and place him in a college."

Without hesitation, mother asked for a pen and signed the letter.

"Mrs. Smith," Mr. Tate spluttered, "I can't believe this. You've signed your son's future away. I've never encountered anything like this in my thirty-year career. Mrs. Smith, I cannot believe you have done this!"

Using her polished New England propriety, Mother answered, "Mr. Tate, you say my son can't read, but I've noticed he has no trouble reading the highly technical model railroading magazines. Maybe Chaucer and Shakespeare bors him. You say he can't do addition and subtraction. I say let him get short changed enough at the store and he'll finally learn the skills. Where there's need, there's learning."

"I don't care whether Alton goes to Harvard, Yale or any other college. I don't care if he makes it into Phi Beta Kappa. Primarily, I want him to have a superb moral and social education. He can get that here at Fieldston, and that's good enough for me. My

only concern and expectation is that Alton grow up to be a decent human being."

I graduated on time with my 1943 Fieldston Class. In 1948, I graduated from Springfield College with a B.S. degree in Physical Education. Last year, after 41 years, I retired from a highly successful teaching and coaching career while on the faculty of the Fieldston Ethical Culture School. A framed copy of the letter my mother signed still hangs on my kitchen wall.

GOING TO THE MOVIES

When I was a kid growing up in the Kingsbridge section of the Bronx, everybody went to the Saturday matinee at the RKO Marble Hill Theatre. These were 15 cent extravaganzas that included a double feature, 10 minutes of previews, a newsreel, a cartoon and, everyone's favorite, another exciting one-reel chapter of a never-ending serial.

In addition, the refreshment stand sold oversized candy bars for 5 cents and a mountain of buttered popcorn with a generous cup of soda for 10 cents. It all added up to an afternoon in paradise.

Most kids enjoyed a bargain by going in at noon, sitting through two complete shows and going home for supper at 6:30 p.m.

Theatre policy reserved the left side of the orchestra section for children. It was presided over by a big, tough matron in a white dress. Her commands were direct and final. There was no mistaking she meant

"you" when she shined her ultra-bright, four-battery flashlight in your eyes and growled "you!"

The cacophony in the children's section was so loud the movie was often barely audible. Some of us would escape the noise by sliding off our seats onto the floor and crawling through empty rows to peace and quiet. The matron was so busy in her venue that she rarely noticed our departure.

Growing into adolescence our sophistication and tastes began to bloom. The temptation to explore midtown movies became our preoccupation. The Roxy, Strand, Paramount, Capitol, and Radio City Music Hall all offered a 75 cent matinee which included a first-run movie, a sing-along to organ music, and a stage show.

The 75 cent admission price vis-a-vis our 25 cent weekly allowance created a financial impasse. However, on some Saturdays we would compromise by treating ourselves to a 10 cent round-trip on the subway to midtown. We'd walk around visually enjoying the city, fill up on a Nedicks orange drink and a hot dog for 10 cents, and have 5 cents left for a candy bar dessert.

It was on our subway trips that we discovered a phenomenon we escalated into a theory, then into practice. That practice solved the problem of the 75 cent matinee price. The discovery was totally serendipitous. While riding the subway we watched trains rush by us in the opposite direction. That created an optical illusion that our train was standing still. We were snapped back to reality by a little twinge of nausea and a jolt when the other train finally passed. It was easy to formulate a practical application from this visual phenomenon. Radio City Music Hall's lobby would be jammed when the audience of 6,000 left the theatre at showbreak. In addition, there would be a line of people a block long on 50th Street waiting for the next show.

By calling ahead we learned the exact time a show would "break." At that precise hour, we'd arrive at the front of the theater and mingle with the exiting crowd. That's when we started doing our "subway shuffle." Ever so slowly, we would turn around and inch our way backwards into the crowd, through the lobby doors and then slowly walk to the men's room.

The visual effect was perfect. By inching our way backward in the exiting crowd, it created the

appearance that we were standing still. Our sojourn in the men's room was a cover-up; we were simply waiting others until the new crowd arrived for theater seats. Then, we proceeded upstairs to join them in the process. The huge staff of ushers in the Paramount, Strand, Capitol, Roxy, and Radio City Music Hall never discovered our ruse.

By our senior year in high school, our weekly allowance had increased to \$1.00. Enjoying our new found largesse, we concluded we were morally obligated to pay for the 75 cent matinees. Not long after that, theaters raised the matinee admission to \$1.25.

Some in our group saw us as pawns caught up in the greed of a capitalistic system. Others saw the theaters as ruthless. So we decided...

MY FIRST CAR

On the night before high school graduation, the family was gathered around the kitchen table for supper. My father was in ebullient spirits because I had risen above a very shaky academic history. Via a probationary admission status, I was on my way to college. If I failed to achieve a "C" average in my freshman year, the college would dismiss me.

But even such an uncertain future could not spoil the celebration of the moment. In an expansive mood, my father asked me what present I would like, to commemorate my graduation.

"A car," was my eager reply.

"What kind, son?" my father asked.

"A Chevy. Yeah, a Chevy convertible," I replied.

"What model, son?" he asked.

"A convertible," I eagerly repeated.

"Any particular feature? A radio, a heater, stuff like that," my father pressed on.

"Well, I guess a radio, heater and maybe two side view mirrors," I gushed.

"Let's do this first class, son. What else?"

"O.K. Dad, if it's not too much to ask, white wall tires would complete the list."

My father beamed, leaned forward, and told me, "you got it!" I was in a dither; no, make that delirious. My own car. The ultimate gift. "Dad," I spluttered, "this is sensational. When do I get it?"

After a poignant pause, my father explained, "as soon as you get a job and pay for it."

I suppose you think my father was cruel. No, he was very wise. With money saved from my first job after college, I bought my first car. I loved it because I could appreciate what it was worth; ergo, like all subsequent cars I purchased, it was driven with sensible caution and never above any posted speed limits.

NICK

My friend Nick is a six-foot, 200-pound, bearded, blue-eyed homophobic with a perverse sense of humor.

He delights in going to the movies with me. Once we're seated and the houselights are dimmed for the start of the show, he can't resist amusing himself by glaring at me while pulling back his shoulders and gruffly announcing in a loud voice, "get your hands out of my crotch, you fag!" Totally embarrassed and humiliated, I always move to another seat while smirking customers follow me with narrowed eyes.

On a subsequent trip with Nick, I reversed the situation by accosting him first using the same harsh warning. In utter dismay, Nick ran out of the theater.

At my insistence, our social engagements are now limited to dining in well lit restaurants.

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FAME

Many people can hardly wait to see their name in a newspaper article recording something they have said or done. This ambition cuts across the entire social spectrum: actors, athletes, lawyers, politicians, society people, street people, publicity seekers, et al. The balm of printers ink can massage almost any ego.

The publicity seeker's expectation is that an article will ply him with compliments and huzzahs. If that happens, the subject considers the writer to be an expert who "really knows his stuff;" otherwise the writer is considered a "hack with no taste."

While attending Springfield (Mass.) College, I was fortunate enough to get a night job in the Editorial Department of the daily Springfield Union. It was a respected newspaper serving a city of about 150,000 people.

My job was somewhat jejune. It entailed preparing death notices, obituaries, engagements, and wedding

announcements. On slow nights I loved to wander down to the sports desk where the action was far more fascinating.

Murray was my favorite sportswriter because he had a tremendous sense of humor and the capacity to tell wonderful stories. He was never dull. One night when I arrived to visit him, he was tilted back in his chair, twirling a pencil and staring at the ceiling. He seemed to be in a deep meditative state.

"Problem, Murray?" I asked.

"Yeah. I covered the basketball game up at the college tonight. I'm stuck. I don't know whether to call that kid "Buzz" Kelly playing guard good or sensational." Minutes more of silence followed and suddenly he sprang forward and started typing furiously.

"Well," I said.

"He was sensational," yelled Murray, "because that word makes the margin come out even."

Next day on campus there was "Buzz Kelly," sporting a highly inflated ego and proclaiming to all who would

listen, "that sportswriter Murray Stein sure knows his stuff!"

Fame, anyone?

SNAPSHOTSDining

Sidewalk dining in New York is a pastime which seems to appeal to "Yuppies" and limited upwardly mobile people who can't quite make it to the Champs-Elysees. But they are a hardy lot, capable of enduring any indignity to indulge in this pastime.

They will tolerate passing panhandlers begging for alms, while stealing bread and tips off tables. They are impervious to swirling, fetid debris from sanitation trucks loading at curbside.

They will eat, while dripping upper-floor air conditioners sprinkle rusty water onto their food. Omnipresent pigeons flying overhead, drop their special white "seasonings" on the table.

Later a large dog, tethered to the railing surrounding the tables, lifts his leg and sprays a topping on their dessert.

Pleased with such surfeit, New Yorkers pay their bill and walk away delighted by this cosmopolitan experience.

Hungry, anyone? Let's do lunch.

Plumbing

We worked with clay in seventh- grade art classes.

More than one lopsided vase or dangerous ashtray was completed there and taken home to exultant parents.

My classmates soon found less artistic, but more exciting uses for clay. They'd stuff it up into the tops of men's room urinals. It was packed in where the water would flow down after flushing. Their wait for the ensuing show was always rewarding.

An unsuspecting gentleman would come in, relieve himself at the urinal, and push the flush handle. The resulting spray all over the front of his pants was a thing of hilarious, hydrodynamic beauty.

Living Backwards

It would be wonderful to be born 80 and die at 0.

Consider these benefits:

- 1) it would end baldness.
- 2) your arthritis gets cured.
- 3) your highest paying job comes first and greatly enhances your lifestyle.

- 4) children would be born old enough to support themselves.
- 5) by entering college first, all ensuing education becomes simpler.
- 6) previous experience negates all adolescent anxieties about girls, pimples, sex, and masturbation.
- 7) toys and games become more fun.
- 8) at first, meals are served and then fed to you.
- 9) in your final moment, you die as an exquisite orgasm.
- 10) your funeral expenses don't exceed the cost of one condom.

Better Business

The "popcorn" reel in a drive-in theater determines the profit margin for the night. It runs for 10 minutes between features and entices the patrons to stock up on refreshments before the start of the second feature.

My first projectionist assignment was at a drive-in theatre that featured lusty, pornographic movies. It was just outside a small city which was surrounded by little towns. The patrons were horny locals who never were disappointed with the shows. However, the owner always bitterly complained that the break for the popcorn reel produced no business or profits.

One night after closing, I explained to him that nobody living in a small city or town would care to be seen at a brightly lit refreshment stand in a "porn" moviehouse. As the old song warned, it would be "the talk of the town."

"Go get some bimbos in tight T-shirts and hotpants and let them walk from car to car taking orders. Everybody eats and nobody is seen. You can even increase business by having orders taken during the show," I told him.

At the end of the following week, business was so good the owner gave me a \$100 bonus for my profitable suggestion.

To put this bonus in perspective, be aware the owner had built a proven reputation as the stingiest entrepreneur in the Berkshire Hills.

Religion

All through school we had to attend courses in ethics. It was in these classes that the heart of the school's philosophy was taught to us. This exposure was meant to teach us how to live within a democratic framework.

The process of voting was proffered as a sacrosanct expression of individual and group will.

One day, in the 47th minute of a 48-minute eighth-grade ethics class, there seemed to be no resolution to the day's heated question about the being of God. Passions were running high and time was short. The teacher suggested we resolve the question by voting. We did, and God lost nine to five.

True Love

My father fell in love with my mother at age nine. From that point on, he unfailingly adored her through grade school, high school, college, World War I service, a two-year engagement, and 48 years of connubial bliss. Yet in all that time, whenever he sent her love missives, Valentine, Christmas, and anniversary cards or letters while traveling, he always signed them: "Sincerely yours, Hyde Smith."

Wild Man!

Omnipresent bike messengers in New York show little regard for the sanctity of crosswalks, sidewalks, or pedestrians that use them. They weave in and out or whiz by in frightening silence. On the sidewalk, walking to work, I suddenly found myself on a seemingly

unavoidable collision course with an oncoming biker. I froze! He negotiated a quick, graceful swerve and yelled "excuse me" as he sped by. I turned and yelled, "Hey man, come here!" He jammed on his brakes, got off his bike, and swaggered towards me, glowering in a fashion New Yorkers call "the look."

"Man?" he menacingly queried. "Man," I said, "you're the first bike messenger in New York ever to say 'excuse me' to me. Wild, man!"

His scowling face broke into a broad smile and we exchanged a hearty "high five." We then continued on our separate ways.

"Adios"

As kids growing up in Worcester, Mass., we became infatuated with the word "adios." Our hero, the Lone Ranger, was always saying it to his trusted companion, Tonto. We had absolutely no idea what it meant.

We would say "adios" as a greeting, when stealing in baseball, when expressing thanks for sharing a candy bar, or on any other occasion we considered suitable.

It was late in the fall and the trees had shed their leaves. Jimmy Sherry told us to put a huge pile of these below the porch of the third story of his house. Having done that, we fetched umbrellas from our homes. They were to serve as parachutes when we jumped off Jimmy's porch and into the pile of leaves.

There was a heated argument about who could have the first jump into the plump, virgin mound. Because it was his porch, Sherry was given the privilege.

He climbed up on the porch-railing, opened his umbrella, and screamed "adios!" We yelled back "adios," and Jimmy jumped. His umbrella immediately inverted, causing him to plummet into the leaves. There was a thud and a scream.

"Adios" indeed, we called to Jimmy, as they carted him away with a broken leg.

BONFIRE OF THE INANITY

Friday nights I always left school by going down the backstairs, passing the track that circled the football field, and then on to my car in the parking lot. One fall Friday evening, I passed Harry the night watchman, who was standing on the track watching the sunset. In the same area there was a huge pile of about 50 old school desks.

They were the wonderful, old-fashioned desks that had a wooden book compartment, a hole for an inkwell and beautifully scrolled, adjustable wrought-iron legs. Carved in many of the desk tops were the innocent grafitti of days long gone by. A heart with "JH Loves RM," "I Hate Latin," a poor caricature of a detested teacher, the name "Mischa Auer" (a former student and movie actor), these were just some of the carved messages left for posterity.

It was obvious that these desks would make superb endtables with lampposts fitted in the inkwell holes. All that the legs needed were a coat of paint and a loosening of the adjustment bolt so the legs could be set at compatible heights. I wanted two desks.

"Hey, Harry," I asked, "are they moving these up to the study hall for use during exam week?"

"Nah, they're getting rid of 'em," he said.

"Can I have a couple?"

"Take what you want. Bring a truck and take 'em all. I don't care", Harry replied.

I managed to squeeze two into my VW Beetle and drove home. After parking the car I began the laborious job of carrying the desks four blocks to my apartment. On my way, I spotted a desk exactly like mine, only totally refurbished and prominently displayed in an antique store window. The owner came running out to see what I had.

"Hey, man," he shouted, "let me see your desks. My God, they're just like mine. They're real antiques." He circled and patted my desks. "You know," he continued, "mine is right out of a Vermont schoolhouse. It's an authentic piece and a steal at \$175. If I could match it, I'd get \$400 for a pair.

"Suppose I told you I have fifty more like the ones here?," I asked.

"Bring me all you've got and regardless of their condition, I'll give you \$75.00 for each one," was his exultant answer.

Saturday morning I borrowed a friend's pickup truck and raced back to school. I drove around the track and saw the football team warming up for the game. I reached the start of the 100 yard dash where the desks had been piled the night before. But, there were no desks. Instead, there was a pile of broken iron and charred, smouldering desk tops.

Harry the watchman, who was starting a Saturday overtime stint, stood close by.

"Harry," I screamed, "the desks! What the hell happened to the desks?"

"I told you to take them home yesterday, because last night, they made a bonfire out of them for the football pep rally," he said.

A \$3,750 bonfire!

THE INSPECTOR

My wife Crissy is a busy and curious soul. Never a dull moment for her. She spends hours walking and investigating bookstores, flower shops, fleamarkets, cut-rate dress outlets, specialty food stores, health food stores, bird stores, rock and crystal collections, the Farmer's Market, and patting dogs tethered to parking meters.

Her main problem is having been born in Argentina. She will often think in Spanish while speaking English. This leads her into speaking in malapropisms. Consider...she told me her father fixed the mandible in his boat (manifold). She asked who is Mama Roneck? (Mamaroneck). What movies did Donna Meche make? (Don Ameche). What instrument did Mahudi Yahootin play? (Yehudi Menuhin). Combines my wife's curiosity with her malapropisms and she's in peak form.

One day while walking on Sixth Avenue, she passed some bearded, black-coated Hasidim standing by a large house van. One of them in a low, polite voice asked, "Are you Jewish?" For fun Crissy said, "yes." She was

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promptly invited into their "Mitzvahmobile"* for a look at Judaica and large photographs of people enjoying life in Israel. She was also given a large stack of religious pamphlets. One Hasidim finally asked her "Well, vat du you think of our lufly display?" "It's lovely," answered Mrs. Malaprop, "I've always wondered what was in a Mikvahmobile.*"

Crisey's pamphlets were quickly taken back and she was briskly escorted out of the van. She didn't know why, but she did visit a Zen Buddhist bookstore on her way home. That went well.

*Tranelation:

Mitzvah - A divine commandment or meritorious act that may be the will of God.

Mikvah - A bathing place orthodox Jewish women use to cleanse themselves, especially after their menses.

Mobile - Capable of moving. Like a house van.

A DOG FABLE AESOP NEVER TOLD

Many millenniums ago, dogs were the highest form of life on earth. It was a joyous time for them - no required leashes, no collars, no tags, no curbing laws, no cars or trucks to contend with. Cats were unknown and the "Westminster Beauty Pageant" was sponsored and judged by dogs.

It was an egalitarian society in which every paw, tail, coat or ear was equally admired - large, medium, or small.

The king of the dogs was a kindly old Coonhound who sponsored a giant, annual ball at his castle, attended by every dog on earth.

Groomed to perfection, all the dogs arrived to enjoy an evening of dining, dancing, and good old-fashioned social intercourse. Dachshunds danced with Irish Wolfhounds. Bedlington Terriers came dressed as sheep. Great Danes and Mastiffs compared their leg lengths, and Pitbulls licked the ears of Cocker Spaniels, while all breeds frolicked the evening away.

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The castle had one house rule that was strictly enforced. Upon entering the castle, all dogs had to leave their tushies at the checkroom. No exceptions!

Lats in the evening at the very last party held, some drunken wag played a nefarious practical joke by loudly barking "FIRE!"

Pandemonium broke lose. Every panic stricken dog ran for the exit. On the way out they passed the checkroom, grabbed the first tushy within reach, and left.

And, today that is why whenever dogs meet, they immediately sniff each other's behinds. They are still searching for their own.

SEX

My second wife made it clear she wanted a divorce. I agreed and suggested we make it by mutual consent. We'd be able to use the same lawyer and save money. I left the details up to her.

Two weeks after she moved out, a lawyer by the name of Finkelstein called me. He told me my wife had retained him and that he could jointly represent us if the divorce was totally uncontested and devoid of complicated financial settlements.

I assured him those arrangements were acceptable, and I made an appointment to see him. This was to be the end of a relationship with an attractive, bright young woman with whom I once shared the highest hopes for a happy future.

Finkelstein's office was a shabby backroom obviously sublet from a well-established law firm in the large, opulent front offices. His office had an old wooden desk with kneeroom space front to back. Also, there was a squeaky old swivel-chair, a gooseneck lamp, and paper folders piled almost to the ceiling. In the corner was a metal file cabinet with two drawers

missing. His faded law school diploma was in a 5 and 10 cent store frame with cracked glass. His license to practice law was under the frame and scotch-taped to the wall. So much for the decor.

When you looked at Barrister Finkelstein, his appearance was no better than that of his office. He was a plump, balding, fiftyish little man whose clothes looked as though they came from a Salvation Army rummage sale. His vest was open and covered with flaked, white cigar ashes. His tie was stained with the remains of many meals.

"Mr. Smith," he began, "this divorce is going to cost you \$250 up front. I can get it over with in six months. The grounds will be incompatibility." I agreed to those terms and put \$250 on his desk.

His preliminary questions were about my age, address, place of birth, occupation, salary, social security number, years married, children if any, and agreement with the grounds for divorce.

The next set of questions covered many intimate details of my marriage. He told me he needed my answers so he could establish incompatibility. He further explained

he hoped the questions about my "extremely attractive wife" wouldn't embarrass me. The questions continued.

"How often did you have sex? Did your wife enjoy being nude? Did you help arouse her with breast stroking, cunnilingus, or inner thigh stroking? Did she always have orgasms? What lovemaking position did she like best? Did she provide fellatio?"

I was sweating, humiliated, shocked, angry, and in dire need to get the hell out of his office. Continuing to take notes with his right hand, he broached another question. I prepared for my exit by reaching for my coat which had fallen on the floor. While groping for the coat I happened to glance through the desk kneeslot. There I saw a mind boggling sight! Finkelstein had an exposed erection and was masturbating with his left hand.

I grabbed my coat, stood up, took the \$250 off his desk and ran for the door.

"What'sa matter, fella," he screamed. I didn't answer. I just ran into the hallway and down some stairs to the street. By taking back the \$250, I figured we were even.

He didn't pay me for the fantasy he was having, and I
didn't pay him for his professional time.

BILLY KANNER

Name: William Kanner
Age: 17
Height: 5'6"
Weight: 129 pounds
Hair: Uncombed
Appearance: Sloppy
Behavior: Capable of extremely funny antics,
 imaginative
Sports: Tough, competitive midfielder on soccer team
Gradee: Wretched

Because of his underwhelming grades and an inability to pay attention in class, his high school teachers had severe reservations about his graduating and getting enrolled in any college. To emphasize his academic plight, Billy bought a white sweatshirt which he emblazoned with large red letters proclaiming "NEVER,
NEVERLAND UNIVERSITY." He wore it ^{with} great pride. It boldly stood out amongst the Ivy League schoolshirts worn by his classmates.

I loved Kanner because he reminded me of myself in high school. And, like me, he never realized how much people liked him.

On one of his final days in school he sat eating in the lunch room. In a state of great exhilaration, the

principal approached him. "Great news, Kanner," the principal gushed, "we got you into Denver University!"

Putting down his fork and staring at his plate Billy replied, "I'm not interested. I want no part of it and I'm not going."

"Not going?" fumed the principal, "do you know how difficult it was to accomplish this? Just what is your alternative?"

"My alternative," Billy softly said peering over his glasses, "is not to enroll in a college that accepts my shitty grades without insisting that I explain them in a personal interview."

On his own, during that summer, Billy enrolled into and (four years later) graduated from New York University. Today he is a vice-president in a public relations firm where he is in charge of a prestigious Japanese electronics firm's account.

BILL ROOD

During adolescence Bill Rood was my idol. He drove the bus that gave free rides to the tenants in our Riverdale apartment house. All day long he'd travel to the 231st Street shopping center, and back.

I spent hours riding that bus having informative talks with Bill about his life's concepts. My parents and I would have found it mutually uncomfortable discussing these topics; but, it was easy to talk to Bill.

At 14 he bought me my first glass of beer in a bar. He explained to me what he did working as a "numbers man." He taught me how to drive his bus, double clutch, and "fan" the air brakes. He explained that the art of driving was in judging space and distance. For practice, he taught me how to park cars in the cramped apartment house garage.

At 15, he told me it was time to carry a condom. He showed me one, explained what it did, and rolled it on a broom handle to demonstrate how it was used. He gave me one and warned me always to carry it in my wallet. I did that!

At age 20, I had the chance to consummate my first real relationship. Naked and "erect," I reached for the packaged condom Bill had given me. The girl was most patient as I tore open the foil envelope. I put my finger inside only to find a sandy pile of deteriorated rubber.

In August, two years later at age 22...

THE SOLUTION

Two years after my ex-wife and I were divorced, we met unexpectedly. It was a surprisingly pleasant encounter, and gave us cause to believe we had mistakenly broken-up. Within a few days we decided to attempt a reconciliation.

She told me about extensive psychiatric help she received during the two years following our divorce and was still undergoing. Part of the therapy included taking many types of prescribed, mood-altering drugs.

The only condition I attached to the attempted reconciliation was that no matter how pleasant or promising it became, there would be no reconsideration of marriage until her therapy and medication had ended. She agreed and we embarked on revitalizing our relationship. All went extremely well, and we felt we were on our way back to happiness.

A year later, she returned from her therapist and announced that he would like to meet me. Anxious to abet our efforts, I agreed to do so.

The doctor's office was on the twelfth floor of The Knickerbocker Neurological Center. When I got off the elevator, all I saw was a long, white-walled hallway lined with institutional-type, wooden benches. I sat down and waited.

Way down the hallway a door opened and a downtrodden old man shuffled out. Leaning out of the same door, a man in a white coat called out, "Next." The summons was reminiscent of one used in old-fashioned barber shoppe. Being the only other person there, I assumed "next" was me.

The white-coated man said, "Smith, I'm your wife's therapist, Dr. Walters."

"Doctor, what about the famous psychiatrist's 50-minute hour? Don't you need a ten minutes interval to reflect on your previous patient's conversation?" I asked.

"A myth, Smith," he replied. "I hear a few key words in fifty minutes, remember them, and that gives me the total picture. Now, sit down and let me get to know you. How are you and Susan doing?"

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"Doing?" I replied. "Well, actually, things seem to be going quite well. Susan has her ups and downs, but everything seems manageable."

"You're a teacher, right?" he asked.

"Right, and very happy being one. And I want to share my happiness with Susan."

"Smith, I like that word 'share.' It's really the essence of a good relationship. I think Susan has the same desire," he said.

"I hope so, Dr. Walters. But there is one thing I can't share with Susan. That's her strong desire to have a child. We had agreed not to talk about marriage until she completed her therapy."

"So?" he queried.

"Well, Susan told me, married or not, she's going to let herself get pregnant."

"Mr. Smith, please, this is the twentieth century. If Susan gets pregnant, she'll have an abortion," the doctor explained.

"Doctor Walters, are you aware that Susan was raised as a devout Catholic? Suppose she re-embraces the faith and because of guilt or conviction, refuses to have an abortion?"

"Well," the doctor pensively said, "I guess we'd have a problem."

"WE'D have a problem? Doctor, we wouldn't have a problem. I'D have a problem! The only problem you'll have is wondering whether I'm going to pay your \$75 fee by check or in cash. Well, I'm going to solve that problem. Here's \$75 in cash. I'm tossing it in your wastebasket where your advice belongs!"

Leaving the doctor to rummage for his fee, I cut my fifty-minute hour by thirty-five minutes and left his office.

My attempted reconciliation lasted just one more day.

Case solved! Reconciliation dissolved!

MADELINE

For many, many years Madeline was the switchboard operator at our school. While reading a magazine, gossiping and stamping envelopes, she could pull the switchboard cordlines, flip the switches, and greet incoming calls with the cheery salutation, "Fieldston School, the best school in the city."

As with many old-time employees, her unique quirks and habits were tolerated. It was not uncommon having to warn incoming callers to be discreet with confidential messages because the switchboard operator listened into calls.

Often, this warning would be followed by Madeline's screeching on the line, "I do not!"

CHICANO AL

My good friend Alejandro proudly claimed to be a Chicano. If one were gullible enough he could convince you his family was steeped in Mexican history - like Pancho Villa, banditos, horses, dusty roads, sombreros and bandoleros. Well, sort of!

His father was a Mexican doctor who also served as a diplomat in Spain. It was there he met Al's mother-to-be. She was from a very established family in Madrid and her mother was a noted Spanish couturiere. No matter how heavily he touted his Chicano heritage and tried to emulate its lifestyle, no matter how often he wore a serape, Al oozed a middle class bearing.

He also told me he was worried about what it would be like to have children. I told him to practice by getting a dog. I suggested a Golden Retriever, a breed whose temperament remains childish forever. I suggested that if he could handle the dog, it would indicate he could probably handle parenthood.

He found the suggestion was viable. However, he reminded me that in Mexican culture when an animal no

longer serves any particular purpose or becomes useless, it is shot.

Viva, Viva "Peludo." That was the name Al gave his Golden Lab puppy. And, a son followed three years later. It was the perfect combination of a boy and his dog.

But the dog became "useless." All it did was wag its tail, jump on people, eat ravenously, bark at night for no apparent reason, shed hair all over the house, and cause Al's son to have asthma attacks. I kept waiting for Al to exercise his Mexican tradition and shoot the dog. By Al's professed standards, Peludo's fate should have been sealed.

When Peludo was 15, Al left him on a relative's upstate farm while he took his family on vacation. Upon his return, he found the relatives had destroyed his dog. They complained all Peludo did was "fart and not run fast anymore."

That was five years ago and ever since then, "Chicano" Al has been mourning his dog. Some Mexican!

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CHECKING IN AND CHECKING OUT

On Mom's 86th birthday she announced that she no longer desired to maintain her home or be responsible for her finances. She asked me to find her a "storage bin," have a lawyer give me an irrevocable power of attorney allowing me to administer her finances and sell her apartment. She was adamant that all these actions be quickly carried out.

The Snug Harbor Geriatric Center proved to be the most desirable place for mother. I went there and asked for an admissions application. I was told the waiting time for admission was unpredictable. However, Snug Harbor was very much interested in mother because she was a college graduate, a retired teacher, a widow of 15 years who had been very active in philanthropy, and most importantly, financially independent.

I mailed in the application, established my power of attorney, and followed-up on people interested in buying mother's apartment. I finally sold it to a couple willing to delay occupancy until Mom was in Snug Harbor.

Four months later, she was called for an interview and physical examination. She was very excited and could hardly wait to go.

Mother easily met the physical standards, and then, was sent to be interviewed by the home's psychiatrist. I was allowed to observe. The interview was chatty and amiable. Mother's penchant for total recall didn't seem abnormal to the doctor, nor was he disturbed by her inability to remember what she'd had for breakfast.

"Who," the psychiatrist asked mother, "is president of the United States?"

Mother bristled and brusquely replied, "I don't know, I don't care and stop asking me!"

Mother was uncharacteristically nasty. The psychiatrist was non-plussed. His eyebrows twitched upwardly several inches, his composure was shaken, and he hastily began writing notes on a pad. I knew something negative and terminal had occurred.

The doctor told me to take Mother home, and that the decision of Snug Harbor's admission department would follow in a week or two. I put Mother in my car and

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buckled her in. Leaning in the window, I said, "Come on, Mom, who's preeident of the United States?" Seething, she glared back at me and anwered, "Ronald Reagan, that senile, god-damn fool. I don't want to talk about him, his tacky wife or his horrible administration. Let's talk about Roosevelt, Truman, or even Jimmy Carter. They're worth remembering. Otherwise, don't waste my time! Do you understand?"

I certainly did! Locking Mother in the car, I ran back into Snug Harbor, past the receptionist, down the hall, and burst into the psychiatrist's office. I was in a breathless, agitated state. I'm sure he expected a psychotic episode.

"Mr. Smith," he pleaded, "calm yourself. Please sit down. What's gone wrong? Is your mother ill?" "Doctor," I panted, "you hit my mother with a 'button word.' Please, please, let me explain!"

I told him what happened in the car and he asked me to bring Mother back into his office. I ran out to the car and half-carried her back in. Mother was a mite confused, but managed an ingratiating, "Why, Doctor, how nice to see you again." In very gentle tones, the doctor asked her why shs didn't like Ronald Reagan.

with well chosen invectives, Mother made her feelings perfectly clear. Her reasoning was articulate and the doctor seemed fascinated by her impassioned answer. Then, I took her home. To my amazement, in an astoundingly short two days, Mother received her "invitation" to check-in at the Snug Harbor Geriatric Center. She flourished there and referred to it as the "Snug Harbor Hilton." She loved having her bed made, being served her meals, playing the recreation room piano and walking in the garden. She thrived for many years.

On her 96th birthday she enjoyed the Snug Harbor custom of giving the celebrating resident a fulfilled birthday wish. Her choice was a vanilla yogurt with a touch of chocolate syrup topping. The nurse told me she completely finished it and then asked to take her afternoon nap. Some time during the nap, mother peacefully checked-out to enjoy an eternal visit with my father.

Now, for an interesting fact about the psychiatrist who interviewed Mother. At the same time he interviewed her he was also president of a powerful West Side Democratic club.

MY FATHER TOLD ME...

(a la Jimmy Cannon)

- Never go to a race track with money you need to bring home.
- People who see psychiatrists should have their heads examined.
- God created the universe in a state of biological imbalance by providing more horses' asses than heads to go with them.
- Schools are designed to pass not flunk students. Anyone who flunks should re-examine their study habits and priorities.
- There is nothing duller or more unproductive than the post-mortem of a horserace.
- I don't understand guys who exhaust themselves running a mile in a track meet only to end up where they started from.
- The best way to improve one's vocabulary and master the correct use of the English language is to study the writings of H.L. Mencken.
- If half the education you get in college doesn't take place in the dorms, you've gone to the wrong school.
- Marriage is a wonderful institution, but it's ruined by the people who participate in it.

- I only stare at the very best looking women walking down the street, because it costs no more to windowshop at Tiffany's than at K-Mart.
- I love your mother so much that if the family were on a sinking oceanliner, I would get her to safety first and only come back for you if there was time.*
- Never get married to solve a problem. There will be enough of them when you do marry.
- A problem will seem far less formidable in the morning than in the darkness of the night, while trying to sleep.

* Years later, my parents invited my sister and I to sail to Europe with them on the Isle de France. We quickly declined their invitation.

KILLING TIME

After a number of years, the tedium of faculty meetings became unbearable. A colleague referred to them as "futility meetings." Once a month, all the megalomaniacs on the faculty would assemble for an assault on everyone's ears. I found it impossible to see any lasting or viable results from these meetings.

At one point, I suggested holding a nine-hour faculty meeting once a year in lieu of the soporific monthly detentions (i.e. faculty meetings). With my suggestion turned down, I invented ways to kill time at every meeting. The solutions were games played with a passive glaze on one's face, an occasional knowing nod or smile, and the appearance of rapt attention. If you're trapped in a boring meeting, try:

- 1) Department Store. Look at the people in the meeting and try to match them up with positions they'd hold in a mythical department store. Pick from: store detective, head of shipping and loading, a specific section manager, salesperson in a specific department, a specific product demonstrator, secretary, fitting

room lady, CEO, CEO's mistress, maintenance man, and a host of other classifications you dream up.

Be careful! You may break out in laughter when you make a very accurate assignment and/or realize how many of your colleagues have missed more appropriate callings.

2) Ford Foundation. In this game, you are in charge of building your own faculty or staff. The Ford Foundation has given you \$2,000,000 to start your own school or business. Look around the meeting and select the people you'd ask to join your future venture.

After many, many meetings of a 70-person faculty, I could never consider more than 9 people qualified to join me. I also experienced a lot of pleasure identifying those I'd leave behind.

Try these games! The worst that can happen is you'll appear very interested in the meetings while you're really pleasantly far, far away and stifling laughter.

MOM

My mother was born and raised in a "three decker" house on Providence Street, the heart of the Jewish ghetto in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Like many children of immigrants, she set her sights high and aspired to the loftiest rung on the American social ladder.

She graduated from Classical High School (a major achievement for a woman in those days) and the Worcester State Normal School and became a certified public school teacher. Soon after, her family moved to Springfield, Massachusetts, where she became a first-grade teacher in a very tough, immigrant Italian neighborhood.

Mom was only 4'11" and 100 pounds, but dauntless in her professional mission. She told me it was not uncommon to ask an Italian child's parents to come in and confer with her. The father would arrive in his best clothes holding his obviously bruised, crying child by the arm.

Once my horrified mother asked what was wrong. "You senta for me," the father answered. "I know eeza bin bad, so I giva him a whack."

"No, no," mother pleaded. "I sent for you to explain how well your son is doing in English."

Another whack, followed by more crying.

"Donta worry, now he'lla do even better" the father replied.

While working in this educational cauldron, my mother realized she was the only Jew on an otherwise totally WASP faculty. Mother admired her colleagues' manners and poise, which reflected the accepted social standards of the town. Mom was on her way to total assimilation.

Over the years she busily "WASPertized" herself, while acquiring the married name Smith. She was going into the "white man's world." She wore a white hat and gloves, had a soft voice, a self-imposed reserve, displayed exquisite manners, rode in an understated Ford, and allowed herself only to politely disagree but ~~never~~

argue - in short, she became a quintessential, middle-class WASP.

Long after this metamorphosis occurred, the family moved to New York City. Endowed with a beautiful home, my father's endless generosity, and her exquisite tastes, she fell in love with the city's cultural offerings. She became an avid patron of Broadway plays, the Town Hall Lecture series, the Metropolitan Opera, the New York Philharmonic Concert series, art movie houses, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art..

In addition, mother bore a striking resemblance to the actress Helen Hayes and that coincidence provided her with a heavy burden.

She told my father she was giving up her custom of attending Wednesday matinees with her lady friends. She found it tiring and embarrassing to continually explain to other playgoers that she was not Helen Hayes and would refuse to sign autographs. Before and after the show and during intermission, she fruitlessly pleaded and explained she was Mrs. Hyde Smith and not Helen Hayes. The fans thought that was a ruse.

My father was pragmatic. "Sonia, for Chrissake, sign the goddamn playbills 'Helen Hayes' and then go in and enjoy the show."

My mother did just that and doubled-up by going to Wednesday and Saturday matinees. When asked why, she confessed to my father that she was enjoying her new-found celebrity.

Mom had really arrived!

VIVA LA DIFFERENCE

One of the tenets of progressive education is to prepare students to live within the framework of a democratic society. Additional Fieldston School objectives were: learning by direct experience, the creation of a humanistic, ethical environment, and learning to maintain social partnerships for the betterment of society. It also taught that the essence of leadership is sensitivity to the feelings and ideas of others.

Joe Papaleo, a dear friend, insisted I visit him at his summer home during August in Truro, Massachusetts. He said I would delight in seeing all the New York "shrinks" vacationing there with their mistresses. He promised me a helluva show and two weeks of stimulating conversation with the doctors.

One beautiful afternoon, I joined them on the beach. Their curiosity was aroused when I told them I taught at Fieldston. Known as a progressive school, they wondered how it differed from its neighbor Horace Mann, a preparatory school.

"Gentlemen," I said, "It's simple to explain. At Horace Mann when the football team huddles, the quarterback calls a play. Then he shouts 'Ready' and in unison, the team claps and yells 'Break.' Then they strut up to the line of scrimmage and run the play. At Fieldston, the team forms a huddle, the quarterback calls a play, then the team votes on the acceptability of his decision."

THE WEDDING

Having been through two divorces and one failed reconciliation involving two wives, I had lost any desire to date or marry again. Following those disasters, I found tranquility by sharing a Greenwich Village lifestyle with my 18 year-old Labrador/Shepherd Mrs. Brown.

After being together all day in school, we'd come home to watch TV and share baloney sandwiches. Mrs. Brown loved to sit on the couch with me and intently watch baseball games and "Lassie." On other nights, she'd sleep under the train tables while I worked on my model railroad. It was a blissful existence for both of us.

A friend called me one evening to say he had met a girl he thought would be perfect for me.

"Describe her, Jim," I asked.

"Well Smith, she's very cute, 20 years old, and lives on 89th Street between 1st and 2nd."

"Jim, there are two problems! She's geographically undesirable and for God's sake, she's twenty and I'm forty-five. I'm not a child molester!" I slammed down the phone.

Two weeks later, I received a call..."Hi, this is Jim Rein's geographically undesirable friend Crissy," she said. "I'm down here in your neighborhood, near your apartment. Am I now geographically desirable enough to take to dinner?"

Good God, I'll go along with it, I thought, and said "Come on over, but I'll have to feed Mrs. Brown first." "Jimmy didn't mention you lived with someone," she said.

"Oh, yes! Come on over and meet her," I replied.

Moments later my bell rang. I pushed the buzzer and went out on the landing. Up the stairs came a pert, 5'2", 115 pound nymphet, dressed in a pretty cotton summer dress.

"Crissy? I'm Smitty."

This was followed by a warm handshake, an introduction to Mrs. Brown, and giggly chit-chat. Crissy needed more Village-like attire, so I gave her one of my old track team sweatsuits to wear. Then we were off to an 8th Street Chinese restaurant.

I can't recall the content of our dinner conversation, but I do remember it was very pleasant. She was

interested in knowing all about Greenwich Village; so after dinner, we went on a neighborhood tour and returned to my apartment around 10:00 p.m.

I suggested she change back to her dress and I'd help her get a taxi to get back home. As she pulled down the sweatpants I had lent her, the elastic top also pulled down her underpanties. Trying desperately to act very blase I commented, "you do have cute buns." "You think so?" she giggled, "Do you? Gawann and show me."

) The next morning, she left for work while I remained behind feeling furious with myself for breaking my rule never to "bang a teenybopper."

Crissy called again in two weeks to say she was disappointed by not hearing from me, and that she'd like to see me again. I agreed that would be very nice, but I was leaving for my summer job as projectionist for the Mahawie Theater in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. Believing there was little chance of her ever being in that area, I suggested she call me if she ever was.

Two weeks later, I was three reels into the 9:00 o'clock show when there was a knock on the projection-room door. I opened it up and there was Crissy. And she continued to show up every remaining weekend of that summer. Those weekends were joyous. I was spending time with someone who was cheerful, making no demands, totally accepting me, and preparing sumptuous meals for Mrs. Brown. I began waiting anxiously for Fridays. It also seemed that Mrs. Brown was giving me some sort of social message by sleeping on Crissy's sneakers during the week.

On Labor Day, because of large crowds, I showed "The Godfather" at 7:30 and 10:30 p.m. Crissy and I planned to drive back to New York after the last show because I had to be at an early Tuesday morning faculty meeting.

Crissy, Mrs. Brown and I arrived in New York at 4:30 a.m. Rather than wake up her roommate, she decided to stay at my place. And stay she did! Except for a return visit to her apartment to collect her clothes, a jigsaw puzzle, and a plant, she never went back.

Alton Smith and Mrs. Brown had acquired a roommate!

There were some minor problems. My mother told me she was tired of explaining to neighbors that Crissy was my girlfriend and not my daughter. Her solution was for me to find an older companion or marry Crissy. Because she loved Crissy, she pressed hard for the latter.

Crissy's very middle-class, suburban parents heard she was living in Greenwich Village with a gym teacher. They envisioned a long-haired hippie with a "joint" in his mouth, a guitar hanging off one shoulder, and driving a psychedelically painted VW Beetle.

None of these reservations interfered with our having a great winter.

In June, Crissy quit her job and we all left for a splendid summer in Great Barrington. The days were blissful. Long bucolic walks, swimming in the river, watching Mrs. Brown chase woodchucks, dining out on my night off, lots of laughs, and bountiful free movies made it seem we had arrived in Nirvana.

Awakening one morning, I looked at my nubile friend and said, "Crissy, I really don't need a lover. What I really need is a tax deduction. Would you care to marry me?"

Crissy seemed somewhat interested but definitely not overwhelmed by the offer. She suggested we get a marriage license in Williamstown, good for 60 days, and use it on a day when we had nothing better to do.

At the Williamstown Town Hall, the licensing clerk kept leering at Crissy's stomach as we filled out the necessary forms.

"Are you in a rush?" he asked her with a wink and a knowing smile.

"Oh, not really. I don't expect the baby for an hour or two," was Crissy's sarcastic reply.

At 9:30 a.m., three weeks later, the day was overcast and soggy with drizzling rain. There didn't seem to be much to do but stay indoors and fill the day with endless work on our jigsaw puzzle.

"Lousy day," Crissy commented, "and nothing to do. Why not fill it up by going back to Williamstown and getting married?"

I went in town to buy a ring while she called to make an appointment for the wedding. When I returned Crissy

announced it would be a 3:30 p.m. ceremony. Wonderful! I could run the 7:00 p.m. show at the Mahawie and she could see the new movie. Romantic? Certainly! Mrs. Brown and Crissy went out for an hour. When they returned, I saw that she had made the dog a beautiful collar of daisies. Crissy explained that she had Mrs. Brown all dressed up to act as her bridesmaid.

I put on a cord suit and sneakers and Crissy wore the same dress she had on when we first met. At 2:00 o'clock, we all went out to the car, but the dog then ran off into the woods. We left without her.

Punctually, at 3:30 we were facing the town clerk in his living room. His wife, in a dowdy polyester print dress, was to act as witness to the marriage. The ceremony was very short and simple. I took my vows first and then was asked if I had the wedding ring. I took it out of my pocket and Crissy gasped when she saw it. Circling it were green gold leaves, pink gold rosebuds and yellow gold ferns etched between the roses.

"It's gorgeous," she screamed. "Let me see it! Let me see it!"

"In a moment, my dear. Please, in a moment," the clerk reproved her. "First, let me ask you, Cristina, if you take Alton to be your husband and to love, honor..."

"Stop!," said Crissy.

"The wedding's off?" asked the clerk.

"No", she laughed. "Never mind the questions. I'll do whatever Alton wants."

After several moments of clearing his throat, the clerk regained enough composure to instruct me to put the ring on her finger.

"Oh, look, isn't it just beautiful. It truly is gorgeous," Crissy ecstatically cried, as she rotated her hand left and right.

"Well, that's it," the befuddled clerk announced, "You're man and wife, and I'm late for a meeting down at the Town Hall."

Crissy and I went to the beautiful old 1896 House ^Restaurant for our wedding feast. We made it back to the theater for the seven o'clock show. I was in the projection room, and Crissy was eating popcorn in the balcony. It could not have been a simpler honeymoon.

After the show, we returned to the house, and met Mrs. Brown who was having a sneezing frenzy that always denoted her feelings of great joy. Her daisy collar was completely tattered. Then, I remembered! She probably missed the wedding because she was in heat and had run off to enjoy an assignation in the woods.

It had cleared and become a beautiful, starlit Berkshire Hills night. I suggested to Crissy that we strip and walk up the pasture to the top of the hill and enjoy the romantic view. She took off her clothes and the remains of Mrs. Brown's daisy collar, insisting the dog be naked too!

It was a heavenly walk up the hill. Once there, the sight was of a million stars and a panoramic view of moonlit hills.

As I kissed Crissy she asked in a loving voice, "I'm now your wife. What can I do for you in our lifetime?"

"Just always stay as you are," I whispered.

"NAKED?" was Crissy's incredulous reply.

We laughed then and have been doing so for the past
twenty-three years.

REVENGE

My nickname in high school was "Wacky." I was proud of that name because it was loving recognition by my classmates for the mirth I always provided them. I loved them, they loved me, and no ridicule was ever intended.

I'm sorry to report that spirit did not touch some of the supercilious upper classmen. To them, the name "Wacky" was a chance for ridicule and derision. Albie Stanton and Oscar Greenbaum were two seniors who loved to taunt me. The tone they used when saying "Wacky" made me recoil into deep feelings of personal stupidity and inferiority. I pined for revenge.

My prayers were answered during the summer of my sophomore year when I was hired as an usher at the Globe Theater in Times Square. It was the flagship theater of the now defunct Brandt Theater chain.

One sunny, summer afternoon I saw Albie and Oscar stride up to the ticket taker and come in for the show. They came straight to my post at orchestra, center aisle.

Having spotted me they said in a most patronizing way, "Look who we have here wearing a monkey suit and carrying a flashlight."

"Wacky, young man," Oscar deigned, "could you give us two seats, center orchestra?"

I cringed in embarrassment but carried out my duty.

It was during a very exciting part of a Nazi war movie called "Underground" and the audience was paying rapt attention.

As we went down the aisle, Oscar and Albie's eyes had yet to make a complete adjustment from the brilliant outdoor sunlight to the darkness of the theater. They were groping at each other, blinking and shuffling on the floor to be sure of their footing. I swung my flashlight, pretending to look for two seats, but in the same motion quickly shined it in their eyes causing them even greater visual distress.

"O.K. guys", I whispered, "go in this row. There are two seats in the middle." They slid in. When they reached the middle, Greenbaum sat down. Stanton told him to move over a seat so he could do the same.

"Move where, Albie?"

"Move in one more, Oscar!"

"Where?"

"Over one seat, Oscar!" Albie said in irritation.

"Sit down!" someone yelled.

"Shut up!" warned another voice in the dark.

"Albie!"

"Oscar, for Chrissakes, move over," pleaded Albie.

Now, they were both standing, groping for the second seat.

"Take your hands off me, you queer!" warned a very angry voice.

"Sit down or be knocked down!" came another warning.

A major altercation was in the making; Oscar and Albie were lapsing into a severe panic.

I don't know what finally happened. I hastily retreated and hid in a closed section of the balcony. There, in the peaceful, quiet darkness, I exulted in my wonderful revenge. I had sent my two tormentors to sit in one vacant seat.

guys who carry abundant family pictures in their wallets are usually having extramarital affairs or fantasizing about them?

if there are billions of people on earth, sex is reputed to be a very complicated aspect of life?

I always miss my bus on a rainy day?

with a surfeit of trees on my street, dogs always choose to relieve themselves on the one in front of my house?

guys selling hot dogs from pushcarts continually pick their noses between serving customers?

I have never been able to carry a freshly filled ice cube tray from the sink to the freezer without spilling it?

in the supermarket I always get the shopping cart with broken wheels that will veer off in only one direction?

after an operator has put me on "hold" and I'm forced to listen to endless, innocuous "elevator music," my

call is directed to the wrong extension or reverts to a dial tone?

when I'm on a supermarket check-out line with ice cream, the person ahead of me is always cashing abundant discount coupons or waiting for the missing manager to "OK" their personal check?

in Kingston, N.Y., they refer to downtown Kingston as "uptown?"

people with haliotosis insist on whispering secrets directly into my face?

when using pay phones, I always dial the wrong number with my last quarter?

PORTRAIT OF AN EXECUTIVE

ALTON SMITH, VI

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Two years ago I took a job in a theatre, but not because there was a financial shortage in my home. Instead, I wished employment for social experience. For nine weeks I plodded up and down the aisles, showing seats, and checking those who thought they could sneak a smoke. At the end of the nine weeks, I handed in my uniform and left with some vivid memories.

The purpose of this article is to reveal one of these memories, Vincent Ferrari, Head Usher. Vinnie always came to the job in his cheap, dry-goods-store clothes; but the way he arranged them on his lean, wiry figure made them take on the appearance of apparel of a higher price. Like many Italians he had a native yen for corduroy, and many of his shirts and pants, with their bold, conspicuous colors, seemed to reveal his arrogant personality.

In the morning, he strode into the lobby like an actor arriving at his first-night preview. Throwing his feet as he walked, he would sing his "Good morning" to the manager as he passed the office. After the morning show had started, Ferrari would come out in what is jokingly called, in theatres, a "monkey suit." His suit was the best of all, for it fit fairly well and had a full set of brass buttons. Vinnie was vain about his suit and was known to brag that the management let him take it home to be cleaned by his "personal cleaner."

Ferrari always wore a bow-tie to be different, and was constantly picking and fixing the printing on his jacket that announced his capacity as head usher. He was no fool and took best advantage of his position. One way of doing this was to get the lunch-hour that coincided with the manager's. I had speculated that Vinnie tried to advance his theories on display methods, which he had forced on me several times. They were run-of-the-mill stuff and a direct imitation of the advertising used by the dime movie houses on 42nd Street. He was sure that these ideas would get him a spot in the sign department, but, when I left, there was no change in his status.

Vincent was not the kind of a boss that did a lot of hollering to get things done. Instead, his tone was cruel and menacing, and to us it seemed to be the Bundist technique. We had always gotten this "Bundist" idea from the ruthless Nazi that was playing the lead in the current movie. Ferrari was the first to go on his relief at the end of the day, but he always remained to see that we boys "got the hell out" without getting lost. No trouble ever came at this time, as everyone wanted to leave.

When Vinnie went striding out of the lobby, he always bade the night ticket-taker a sarcastic "so long" in his thin, high-pitched voice. As Vinnie reached Broadway, and the colors of his bright sport-jacket mingled into the crowd, he became only another New Yorker on the way home.

This story originally appeared in the 1943 issue of "New Inklings," a publication presenting the best undergraduate writings of the year at the Fieldston School. Smith was 17 when he wrote it.

THE TROPHY

The 1965 track team was the worst squad I ever coached. It amassed a dismal record of no wins, ten losses, and a very distant last in the league's championship meet.

I would not be surprised if some of its milers are still out there on the track trying to finish their races. The shotputter once distinguished himself by stepping onto the throwing circle and while hefting the shot, tipped over and out of the ring. The lead-off man on the relay always got a magnificent start, but negated it by leaving the baton behind on the starting line. Our pole vaulter struggled to equal the winning height in the high jump.

There's more, but why heap on derision?

At the athletic banquet that followed that track season, team captain Andy Blumenthal came to the dais with a heavy, tall trophy. At its top was the figure of a big gold dog supported by four marble columns. Another gold dog stood at the base between the columns. It was an impressive trophy.

Standing at the lectern, Blumenthal began, "Ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the track team I would like to

present our coach the first 'Annual Mrs. Brown Track Achievement Award.' In perpetuity, this trophy will commemorate the horrible record we amassed this season. Now, you ask, why would the trophy be named for Smitty's old dog? Well, it's because our track team like his dog has achieved nothing of note, but had glorious fun doing it."

After keeping the trophy at home for years, I took it back to school and put it in the trophy case. Using a red, white and blue presentation ribbon, I hung a large gold medal depicting a dog off the top of the trophy. Engraving on the back of the medal read: "The Annual Mrs. Brown Track Achievement Award." I had many copies of the medal made and stored them in my desk.

From then on, at every Spring sports banquet, the award would go to that member of the track team who tried the hardest, but never won a medal, scored in a meet or qualified for a letter award. To my surprise, the medal became the most coveted award in the school.

Two months ago, I met Danny Sedlis who, in very commendable time, had won the 1972 championship mile. I asked him if he still had the medal he'd won in that event.

"No Smith, and I don't even care where it went," he replied. "Aah, but I still have my Mrs. Brown medal. Remember in my sophomore year how I got my mile time down from eight minutes to six? That's when I won that award and it remains the most important thing I've ever won. I still wear it to all family functions and school reunions. By the way, what became of Mrs. Brown?"

I told him that after eleven litters totaling 81 puppies, she died at the age of 21, knowing she had "achieved nothing of note, but had glorious fun doing it."

KICKING THE HABIT

Dr. Hyman Spotnitz is a psychiatrist who graduated from Boston Latin School, Harvard, earned an M.D. from Wilhelm University in Berlin and obtained an Sc.D. from Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons.

I have always assumed he was a fine psychiatrist because, over the years that I taught the children of such doctors, his were the only ones I remember being extremely well adjusted.

His three sons played on my track or soccer teams or both. Over a period of twelve years he came to many of the games and meets. He explained that no matter how busy he was, he deemed it of paramount importance that he show his sons he cared about all their interests and efforts.

One day he was waiting for one son to dress after a game. I told him I was having trouble giving up a three-pack-a-day cigarette habit. I asked for his advice.

Moving directly in front of me, he stared straight into my eyes. His face was inches from mine. With enormous intensity in his voice, he explained that nowhere in the annals of medical history was there a record of anyone surviving without water for a month or without food for two months. With somewhat less intensity and a more soothing tone, he further explained there were no medical records of anyone ever dying from a lack of pleasure.

A smile curled the corners of his mouth and with a grand flourish, he pulled a large cigar out of his breast pocket. He drew it under his nose so he could appreciate its bouquet. Then, lighting a match, he puffed furiously while billowing smoke. He shook my hand and turned to walk to his car.

I thought then that psychiatrists might be inclined to give more advice than they take. But, I haven't smoked since that day 35 years ago.

ADDENDUM

Since captaining my 1958 track team and graduating from Fieldston, Dr. Spotnitz's son Henry has become a

lasting personal friend and a highly regarded heart surgeon.

It has become a tradition for Henry and me to meet at the Old Homestead restaurant for our annual December dinner. There, he will order the over-sized steak and a huge serving of French fried potatoes. He'll slather the steak with butter and generously frost the potatoes with salt. His dinner becomes a cholesterol/sodium bomb.

"Hey, Henry," I asked, "what about all this stuff I've been reading about dangerous eating?"

With knife and fork at the ready, Henry smiled and looking me straight in the eye, said, "Smith, nowhere in the annals of medical history..."

THE ADVISORY

As a faculty advisor I met my advisees for a daily 10 minute "advisory period." We would rush through the administrative announcements and use the remaining time for spirited, freewheeling discussions.

The students valued my movie suggestions. Because they were too young to have seen the protest movies of the 60's and 70's, I suggested that they rent some that were available on cassettes.

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After they saw them, we had wonderful discussions about "Doctor Strangelove," "Alice's Restaurant," "Joe," "Seven Days in May," and "Putney Swope."

One Friday in May of 1988, I suggested they see "Carnal Knowledge." I heightened their interest by explaining that the movie had originally been threatened with an "X" rating.

When they returned the following Monday, I started the advisory by asking how they liked "Carnal Knowledge?"

Silence permeated the room. Their eyes and heads dropped and there was an embarrassed shuffling of feet under their desks.

"Come on, gentlemen," I said. "Somebody must have an opinion. Are you embarrassed? What's the problem? Couldn't you handle it?"

Finally, one reluctantly looked-up and softly said, "Smitty, no guys ever acted that jerky over getting laid. It was a ridiculous movie."

Never before that moment did the term "generation gap" have such a profound meaning to me.