

ALL-STARS

Throughout my soccer coaching career I abhorred the concept and selection of all-star teams. With the exception of objective standards used in picking such teams in swimming, track, and field, the process struck me as being purely subjective and political.

Why honor a few and hurt many? Why not play for the joys of the game and then go on to something else? How many non-all-stars have enjoyed happy productive lives while their counterparts wilted by the wayside? Why not just emphasize team concepts?

The principal knew my feelings well, but still told me he wanted two soccer team members taken to the city-wide, all-star team tryouts. He told me center forward Pete Askin and goalie Ken Walker needed a little "frosting" on their college applications.

I knew the school wanted to retain its reputation for placing its graduates in Eastern elite colleges, so I reluctantly acquiesced. My only condition was that Mike Abrams, whose record needed no "frosting", but whose season's play had been superior, be taken too.

It was a beautiful November day when we arrived at the tryouts. Twenty-five schools were represented. The players were assigned to various "pick-up" teams and a scrimmage began.

The play was exceptionally skilled and competitive. There wasn't a weak player on the field. Within four minutes, play was stopped and Askin was selected all-star center forward on the all-city Prep school team. Two minutes later, after displaying bruising offensive/defensive skills, Mike Abrams was equally honored as center halfback.

The scrimmage continued for another hour before the judges completed their selections for the first and second teams. That was followed by separate goalie tryouts.

It was to be a lonely and very challenging test. Each goalie, alone in the goal, would attempt to stop five random shots and five penalty kicks taken by a skilled professional player from the German-American Soccer League. They would all prove to be very hard, exceptionally well placed shots.

Walker was the third goalie tested. He stopped nine out of ten shots with beautiful quickness, extensions, blocking, and "tipping." After the competition, another goalie, who had allowed six goals in five minutes in an earlier game against our team and who stopped only four shots in his tryout, was picked as starting goalie on the all-star team. Walker wasn't even picked for the second team.

In utter disbelief, I raced up to the judges to protest.

"Wait a minute, wait a minute," I screamed. "What the hell kind of a pick do you call that? My goalie just stopped nine of ten shots and you picked a kid who stopped four? What the hell are you doing?"

A judge pulled me aside and whispered, "Look, Smith, you got two kids on the first team in six minutes. Now, you have to understand the papers covering this tryout want a diversified, geographical balance in the selections. It doesn't help newspaper circulation if three kids like yours, from the same school in the Bronx, make up one-third of the all-city team."

I went over to console a disappointed Kenny Walker, but arm and arm with Askin and Abrams he was walking away, towards my car.

I ran up to them and asked, "Hey, guys, how about the awards ceremony and plaques?"

They waved their hands in disgust and kept walking. I was left to think about how a good intention had gone sour. It proved to be the first and last all-star selection my teams ever participated in.

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Askin started and played four years on the Middlebury College team, Walker played for Brown University, and an indifferently disposed Abrams gave up soccer and swam for Cornell.

### REWARD

Frequently when I'm with my friends who are in their late 30s, 40s, and early 50s, it is hard for me to comprehend they were once 12 year olds in my grade school gym classes or adolescents on my high school teams.

They are all well established in life, and we still greatly enjoy each other's company.

It's at these moments that I have the ultimate satisfaction of my teaching career. The games are over, the trophies are on the wall, past championships are blurred memories; but, these enduring friendships remain as a teacher's greatest reward.

THE REUNION

This is a story I recount with mixed emotions because it involves my sister and me exploiting some weaknesses in our aging mother. But it was done with a profound feeling of love and a deep desire to bring her happiness.

At 95 she was residing in the Snug Harbor Rest Home and was in a fairly salubrious state. Her only problems were failing eyesight and confusion caused by memory lapses. Nevertheless, she retained a capacity for fairly rational conversations and an insouciant spirit.

We always went to visit her for two hours on Tuesday afternoons. During that time we'd indulge in her favorite activity - reminiscing. When we'd depart, mother would always extoll the joys of our visit. However, it was somewhat disconcerting to have her ask us "Who are you?"

But this latter failing became a blessing in disguise. On our way home, I told my sister we could vastly increase Mother's happiness by alternately entering her room at five-minute intervals. Doing so, we'd announce ourselves as various relatives and family friends

coming to visit her. Mother had forgotten they had died years before.

It worked perfectly! Tuesday afternoons my sister and I would exuberantly alternate entering Mother's room.

"Hello, Sonia, it's Aunt Harriet to see you", my sister began.

"Sonia, dear, it's Asa, your brother. It's so good to see you," I'd say.

"Sonia, it's your friend Sophie. How are you?" my sister would add five minutes later.

Extended conversations ensued with the "visitors" and were climaxed by my entrance pretending to be my father.

"Sweetheart, it's Hyde. You know I'm still in love with you! How about going out to dinner?"

Finally, Margery and I would jointly enter and announce ourselves. My mother would revel in joy, pride, and love. At the end of our visit, she would gleefully kiss us and exclaim, "what a wonderful visit. My life's wish has come true. My friends and family are

still together. Oh, what a wonderful reunion we've had!"

The three of us continued to reunite every Tuesday until at age 96, mother went on to join long gone family and friends at a perpetual reunion in the sky.



### THE CURE

My wife Crissy is an avid collector of and believer in the supernatural powers of large, polyshaped crystals. She becomes petulant when I refer to them as rocks.

To keep plants healthy, she buries crystals in their potting soil. She puts crystals in the medicine closet, believing they'll augment the power of the stored toothpaste, underarm deodorant, epsom salts, rubbing alcohol, and other over-the-counter elixirs. She hung crystals under all the lampshades in the belief they'd lengthen the life of the bulbs.

My arthritis, a malady I'd been suffering from for many years, seemed to be getting worse. A new nocturnal symptom caused severe pain in my spine. Even though I doubled my aspirin dosage at bedtime, I'd awake in the morning with unbearable, nagging backaches.

One morning, Crissy left the house early to attend a breakfast meeting at her office. I was left behind to make the bed. Doing so, I reached under the mattress to pull the sheet tight and felt three chunks of

"curative" crystals Crissy had left there unbeknownst to me.

I removed them and the next day my backache had disappeared. Immediately, I bought Crissy two rattles, a mask, a black conical hat and a crystal necklace; then I insisted she go elsewhere to practice her medical magic.

### TIME WARP

During one visit to see my mother in her retirement home, we had an extended conversation regarding family matters.

My mother was 94 and capable of tenuously lucid conversation. At the end of this visit, she leaned forward and with a beatific smile asked, "Alton, where are you these days?" "Mom," I replied, "I'm at the Fieldston School."

She suddenly appeared restive, and admonished me by saying, "You know, son, I think you better try to graduate. Your father and I can't go on paying that tuition forever."

#### Facts:

- 1) I had graduated from Fieldston 45 years before in the Class of 1943.
- 2) I was completing my 35th year on the school's faculty.
- 3) My father had been deceased 20 years.

LIBRARIES ARE NOT FOR READING

I always enjoyed the bountiful supply of zanies, fools and wags that permeated the student body of our school. Their inventive, endless antics provided constant mirth and folderol. In a sense, their behavior was also a paradox -- often, being both stupid and clever.

Two well planned pranks stand out as enduring contributions by these merry, misguided men of mischief. They involved the school library and its endless shelves holding 4,000 books.

At scattered moments during one morning, the merry men randomly placed 20 fully wound clocks, with alarms set at five minute intervals, behind the books on the shelves. At 12:30 p.m., alarms began ringing at one end of the library and then the other. They rang here, there, and everywhere, up and down the library shelves. It was impossible to stop the noise because no one knew when or where the next alarm would ring.

Pretending to study, our merry men could hardly stifle their laughter as the frazzled librarian ran around trying to locate the bells. She wasn't totally unsuccessful, because she located some clocks before

they stopped ringing. But others ran down too soon and couldn't be located.

The confiscated clocks represented a financial loss for the jokesters. Fearing they'd reveal themselves, they never could reclaim the captured clocks. The librarian gave them to the principal, who, in turn, awarded them to faculty members who had extensive records for lateness. It was not a positive experience to be awarded one.

Requiring no financial investment but far more planning was the scheme called "Book Day."

Of primary importance in this plan were recruits who would maintain absolute secrecy. It took weeks to organize 40 qualified participants.

Then, over a period of five days at specific times and intervals, each of the 40 people signed out a varied group of five books. They were told to make their selections seem plausible and carefully researched.

The climax came on a pre-arranged date and within two hours of the opening of school. That's when the 40 students returned their two hundred books. The pile on

the librarian's desk was an awesome sight to behold. The librarian was seen at 9:30 that evening still trying to get all those books back in place.

According to the Random House dictionary, a fool is a "silly or stupid person."

Our fools were both. They indiscreetly bragged about the planning, execution, and success of their "Book Day." The principal was the first to acknowledge the extraordinary magnitude of their deed. He assigned the zanies to several weeks of after school "employment" putting the daily book returns back in place.

The librarian always made sure there was an ample collection. In fact, some say she capriciously added a generous supply of unissued books to the pile.

COMMENTS OVERHEARD IN A FACULTY ROOM

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- This school should close on Freud's birthday.
- Our football team plays the most expensive game of stoop tag in town.
- The only thing this school's maintenance men can fix is their softball game against the faculty.
- The only progressive thing about progressive education is that it gets progressively worse.
- This is the only school I know of where the faculty has to volunteer for tenure.
- With this salary scale, the only people teaching here are ones who can afford to.
- In this progressive school, the kids ask if they have to do what they want to do.
- Of course, we have sex education. Aren't there six pregnant students in school?
- Teacher A: "I could straighten out this school in one day if they'd let me."

Teacher B: "How?"

Teacher A: "Expell all the students."

Teacher B: "Sounds good to me."

EVERYBODY PROFITED

My grandfather's years of hard work and perseverance in America were rewarded. He finally owned a movie theater in Westerly, R.I., that he literally ran day and night.

After graduating from college with a degree in architecture and honors in French, my father aspired to go to medical or law school. His father wanted him home to help run the theater. My father said "No," his father said "Yes," and my father went into the theater business.

He hated working for his father, who, in addition to other dubious traits, had the bearing of a tyrant. There was no end to major and minor tasks done by my father over fourteen-hour stints, seven days a week. Left with no choice, he carried on.

One day during a matinee, my father was standing in the theater lobby when two large men walked in. They were wearing garish pinstriped suits, wide ties, polished pointed shoes, and fedoras with the wide brims completely snapped down.

Approaching my father, they asked, "David Smith?"



"He's not here at the moment, can I help you?" my father asked.

Flashing badges of identification, one said, "I'm Mr. Washburn and this is Mr. Lincoln. We're from the tax audit bureau and we'd like to ask David Smith some questions."

"Well, I'm Mr. Smith's son. I help manage the theater, so perhaps I can aid you," he said.

"Mr. Smith," Mr. Lincoln began, "We've had this theater under surveillance and observed David Smith selling tickets as the cashier and then collecting them as the ticket taker. Now, that in itself is not a problem. The problem is, he's selling and collecting the same ticket ten or twelve times. I'm sure you can appreciate that practice has very serious tax implications."

"Very serious," my father replied. "Let me go in and see if he's watching the show. Meantime, make yourself comfortable in the office. It's the room in there where I see I've inadvertently left the safe open."

My father lingered in the auditorium for about five minutes, then returned to the office sans his father.

The tax agents were gone and so was \$2,500 from the safe. Neither my grandfather or father ever heard from the tax bureau again. Soon afterwards, and very sagaciously, my grandfather retired from the theater business on a generous pension provided by his son.

UPDATED

"The Place Where Men Seek the Highest is Holy Ground."  
(Felix Adler, founder of the Ethical Culture Society  
and Schools.)

From 1910 to 1984 this beautiful motto appeared in  
handsome gold-leaf, early English script, on the wooden  
arch over the speakers' platform in the society's  
Meeting House.

Annually, on the first Friday in May, the schools would  
hold an inspiring Founder's Day Ceremony. The entire  
student body, faculty, and many alumni attended the  
event. As a graduate of the school, I found it  
especially gratifying to join the celebration and  
reflect again on Dr. Adler's pronouncement.

While attending the 1985 Founder's Day, I looked up at  
the arch and realized Dr. Adler's statement had been  
expunged. I wanted to believe the old gold lettering  
had fallen into despair and was in the process of being  
redone. Half-true!

At the 1988 ceremony I looked at the wooden arch and  
was shocked to see plain, tacky gold lettering that

read, "The Place Where People Meet to Seek the Highest is Holy Ground."

Felix Adler had evidently been updated by a zealous group of misguided egalitarians and liberationists. Philosophical ardor sparked their desire to change Felix Adler's original motto. What they'd done was inflict a presumptuous revision on the classic, poetic statement of a defenseless, dead humanitarian.

"For historical purposes," Dr. Adler's original reflection is now engraved on a small plaque that's inconspicuously mounted on the side wall of the Speakers' Platform. The plaque seems to be an asinine afterthought meant to assuage wounded accuracy and nagging pangs of guilt.

### FUN AND GAMES

When I attended Springfield (Mass.) College in the 40's, it had a reputation for being the Harvard of physical education schools. That's the closest I ever came to getting an "Ivy League" education.

I was not an honor student. My undergraduate claims to fame were being captain of the track team and a features writer for the college newspaper.

Having enjoyed a long teaching and coaching career, I credit Springfield for much of whatever successes I've had.

The following three stories are exercises in contrition. One is an admission of guilt for cheating on a professor I truly admired. The other stories belonged on the personal resume I handed prospective employers. They certainly were entitled to know what they were getting.

#### Dancing

The practice course in dancing was broken into three semesters encompassing folk, ballet, and social dancing. The last, because Springfield was an all-male school, produced some hilarious performances. Coach Judd, who taught the course, was particularly fond of

the waltz and put an inordinate emphasis on teaching it. So that we could achieve his demand for excellence, we spent hours practicing how to glide, circle, and twirl.

I was a "klutz" and had no feel for the waltz's rhythm and motions. My practice partner was "Truck" Berard, a grizzly, massive linebacker on the football team. He was surprisingly graceful and light on his feet. He also had a covert desire for an "A" in the course, and I was putting his ambition in jeopardy. But he remained patient and kind as we struggled on.

The day arrived when we were required to dance for our final grades. Berard met me in the gym hallway, put a massive, hairy arm around my shoulder and pulled me close to him.

"Smith," he said in a deep, raspy voice that he considered a whisper, "we'll dance in the middle of the floor, away from the side where Coach Judd is sitting and grading. I hope you've got on a 'jock,' because when the music starts, I'm pulling up the back of your pants. Keep your left arm firmly around my neck and your right arm straight out with mine. When the music starts, I'm goin' to pull you up so your feet barely

skim the floor. Get the idea, sweetheart? Smile!  
We're gonna dance."

"Truck," six other "couples" and I were called into the gym to dance for our grades. Coach Judd sat well over to the side with his clipboard and pen. The music swelled and the great waltz began. I was swept up and away, smiling graciously at "Truck" as he whirled gracefully around the gym - left, right, and twirl. My toes barely grazed the floor.

Two minutes later the music stopped. "Truck" was exhausted and began massaging his neck while shaking his weary arms and shoulders. Everyone fell silent as Coach Judd entered our grades on his clipboard.

"Smith and Berard," yelled Coach Judd. "Yessir?" was our anxious reply. "You two men are the most graceful waltzers I've ever taught. It's obvious you have complete command of the skill. You're dismissed from any further tests and your final grade is an "A."

I never danced with "Truck" again. Come to think of it, he never asked me to.

### Football

Football Practice Course 101 was required. I hated the sport and had avoided playing it in high school. Now, I was "in the pads," being taught how to block, tackle, throw the ball, catch it correctly and run with it "tucked away." All these and myriad of other skills I had to practice did not ignite any love for the sport. The course was taught by Osie Solem, the varsity football coach. He was well into his sixties and had chosen to finish out his career in the unpressured Springfield College football program. He had enjoyed substantial coaching success during his days at Iowa and Syracuse Universities. In addition to coaching Marty Glickman, who became an Olympic sprinter, he developed a formation in which the man playing center would line-up facing his backfield. After "hiking" the ball, he effectively became a fifth man in the backfield capable of carrying out blocking assignments. After proving itself successful in five games, the NCAA ruled that the formation was illegal.

Ossie's second passion in sports was track. While at Iowa, he helped found the very prestigious neighboring Drake Relays. His love of track stayed with him through his final days at Springfield College.



Coach Solem planned a scrimmage that would end FPC 101. Because he knew I was a sprint champion, he made me the offensive running halfback. With my speed and high knee action he was certain I could quickly "tuck the ball away and hit the line or turn the corner." He viewed me as potential varsity material.

A day before the scrimmage, Coach Ossie realized that with only 16 men in Football 101, arranging competition would be impossible. But being an innovator, he announced the "101 boys" would scrimmage his varsity team. Think about the most frightening episode in your life, intensify it by 1,000, and you'll only scratch the surface of anxiety (read that "fear") the "101 boys" were experiencing. There was no way out - the football practice course was required.

Next day, the motley crew of 101'ers came out to the field for their slaughter. The varsity team was there too. They were huffing, puffing, pointing, and glaring at us and pawing the ground like a herd of "horny" bulls.

"OK, 101'ers," Ossie yelled, "take your team down to your 40 and run four plays."

We got back in a huddle and I looked up at the defense. There they were, eleven mean sons-of-bitches waiting to show the coach they deserved to start in Saturday's homecoming game.

Charlie Lentin was our quarterback. Ossie picked him because he had shown enough interest and resourcefulness to color-code all the X's, O's, and arrows in his playbook. I had lost mine.

"Huddle," yelled Lentin. "Awright, we're going 'Q,' hand-off right, three up the middle forty-five on two. Ready? Break!"

What the hell did that mean, I wondered? I quickly found out. The team lined up ready to go. One, two, three, and Lentin took the snap. He turned, ran back towards me, slammed the ball in my stomach, and disappeared. Instinctively, I took the ball but stood there transfixed. My entire God-damn offensive line, to avoid injury, collapsed on the ground in front of me. Those eleven mean, sons-of-bitches defensemen were stomping over them and coming straight at me.

Death? Perhaps. Reincarnation? Maybe so, as a tennis or croquet player, I hoped.

It is said that discretion is the better part of valor. Exactly! The solution was simple. I whirled around 180 degrees, tightly tucked the ball under my arm, and dashed 40 yards into my own end zone. I fell to the ground and banged the ball on the grass, screaming, "touchdown, touchdown, touchdown!!!"

Looking up I saw those grunting, defensive monsters circled around me, pointing and yelling, "chicken, chicken, chicken!!!"

I slowly rose. We all turned to go back up the field, and saw a severe commotion. Evidently, Coach Solem was having a stroke. He was lying on his back, flailing his arms and legs as his head rolled and his face turned beet red.

"Let's go," someone yelled, and we ran to midfield to help our stricken Coach. As we stared down at him, we saw he was only convulsed with laughter. "Help me up, boys. Help me up," pleaded Coach Solem. When he got to his feet, he was still shaking. Slapping his cap on his knee, and then putting both hands on my shoulders, he spluttered, "Smith, that's the best football play I've ever seen. Your judgement and speed were remarkable. Gentlemen of the 101 football practice

course, Smith just got all of you a passing grade. The scrimmage and the course are over."

Though the varsity was keenly disappointed, the "101 boys" screamed with delight as they hoisted me to their shoulders and carried me off the field.

"Hail the conquering coward," I thought.

THE PURSUIT OF SCIENCE

I had no real aptitude for studying science. When that shortcoming came face-to-face with a college requirement for a course in a physical science, my academic future looked bleak.

I had put off meeting the requirement until my senior year when the final choices became physics, chemistry, or no diploma. I had passed high school physics by giving a facetious presentation explaining why Ivory soap floats. The rest of the course remains a vague blur. I always felt the teacher passed me so he could get on to teaching more serious and gifted students. Passing me meant never having to endure my ignorance again. Face it, teachers like bright students because they make the job simple. I decided to sign up for chemistry, presuming a change in course study might bear meager but required (academic) fruit.

Disaster waited straight ahead. By the second week in the course, I was trapped in a morass of incomprehensible details and formulas. Professor Stewart, a man of scientific bent and humor, quickly caught on to my plight. He once amused the class by asking me what  $H_2O$  is?

"A telephone exchange in Brooklyn," I replied.

After much laughter, Professor Stewart dismissed the class. I lingered behind and approached him.

"Sir," I said, "this is impossible. I'm going to drop the course. It's futile."

"Smith," replied Stewart, "don't be a fool. The future is not bleak. Stay on. Show up once in awhile, look like you're trying, and I'll give you a final grade of 'D.'"

"A 'D'? Prof, what good is that?" I asked.

"It means you'll meet the semester hour requirement, but you just won't get any honor credits. Go get a 'B' in history and with this 'D' you'll average out to a 'C.' All you need is a 1.3 honor credit index to graduate. Now, add another 'B' along the line and you're up to 1.3 index or better."

That advice made a lot of sense, so I continued in the course. I went to class occasionally and was also able to keep up my participation in a continuous dormitory bridge game.

In the final week of the trimester, Professor Stewart explained the structure of the final exam. There would be 50 fill-in and multiple choice questions. Those would be followed by five chemistry problems of increasing difficulty. This last section would have heavy bearing on final grades. "Gentlemen," the Professor continued, "I believe in fun and competition. With that in mind, I want you to know I will be giving a prize for the best answer on this exam. It's a full set of German chemistry books I acquired during my graduate studies at Heidelberg. These books are collector's items that should belong to a student talented enough in Chemistry to understand them. Let the best answer win."

There are always grinding, grade-crazy nerds in every class and they were well represented in Chemistry 406. They had their books, multi-colored pens, chemistry tables, slide-rulers, and all the other paraphernalia needed to superbly perform in Chemistry. The Professor's challenge and prize catapulted the nerds into an august academic frenzy. Each one believed he would emerge as the class genius and win the books.

Me? I didn't bother to study. My 'D' was waiting. In the dormitory bridge game I bid a grand slam and spent

my time playing it out while drinking beer. Final exam day arrived and we all assembled at our desks as the Professor passed out the exam. It was impressive! A five-page test, with three hours to complete it. I skimmed it, completed one fill-in question, and was gone in 10 minutes. A low ripple of chuckles acknowledged my departure.

On Monday following the exam, the Chemistry class reconvened to get its grades and see who won the books. When the exams were returned to us assorted cheers and groans greeted the results. Then silence. Professor Stewart said he had an announcement.

"Gentlemen, I was gratified by the superior talent many of you displayed. I was impressed with the number of intelligent answers I read. Picking the winner of the German Chemistry books was profoundly difficult; but, I believe I have discovered the best answer on the exam. Our winner is...Alton Smith."

In unison and utter disbelief, the entire class screamed: "Smith?!!"

"Yes, gentlemen, Smith," the Professor said. "Turn to page 2, question 3. It's a fill-in asking what were



the men called who tried to change basic metals into gold? Smith's winning answer is: 'God-damn fools'!"

I won the books! I won the books! But, I couldn't understand a word of them; so, I felt it would be appropriate to donate them to the college library and let all the nerds enjoy them.

Back in the dorm, I never made another grand slam; but in an ensuing English class, I first heard and learned the meaning of the word "alchemist."

## OBSERVATIONS

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It was always my policy in college never to schedule classes before 9:00 a.m. or more than one flight up.

It appears New York City has decided to greatly enhance its revenues by ticketing the more plentiful, legally parked cars.

There is a direct relationship between my failing hearing and my improving marriage.

When my wife regularly began receiving "Victoria's Secret" catalogues, I cancelled my subscriptions to "Playboy" and "Penthouse" magazines.

Unless you can view the world through the eyes of children, don't become a school teacher.

I'm so "turned off" by lengthy, cute greetings put on telephone answering machines, I hang up without leaving a message.

Working as a pornographic movie-house projectionist, I was tempted to run the films backwards, thus creating endings in which the cast put ON their clothes.

I asked the manager of a drive-in movie where I worked why he kept shining his flashlight into cars during the movie. He said it provided him with better entertainment than the pictures on the screen.

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Asked how I was enjoying retirement after teaching for 41 years, I replied, "Great! I should have done it 40 years ago!"

My friend Niel insists politicians' only expertise is spending YOUR money.

I never worried about my atrocious grades in high school because I knew the diplomas awarded at graduation would all look the same.

My telephone answering machine provides me with the best personal protection since the advent of underarm deodorant.

A Pug's most redeeming feature is its demise.

My mother was asked by the director of her retirement home how she liked the place. She extolled the help, the comfort of her room, the food, the landscaped grounds, and her opportunities to play the piano at

socials. Her only objection was that "there were too many old people here." She was 89 at the time. 120

I have a 70 year old Italian friend who was born and raised in New York City's Greenwich Village. I asked him how the neighborhood Italians broke the Irish domination of the stevedore jobs on the West Side piers? Cocking his thumb and pointing his forefinger to simulate a gun, he said, "Very simply...Bang! Bang! Bang!"

Kenny, my wife's boss, asked how I liked the fact that she worked for him. "Terrific, I said, "I've never seen her happier to get home at night."

At 7:45 a.m. a traffic agent was ticketing my car. I informed him violations did not begin until 8:00 a.m. and that he was ticketing me illegally. "Sorry, mister," he said, "it's 8:00 o'clock." I pointed to my watch and three publicly displayed clocks in nearby store windows that all read: 7:45 a.m. "Hey, fella, I've got to have my coffee," he said. "Your coffee is going to cost me \$40.00," I yelled. "That's New York," he explained. In total disgust, I sold my car four days later. Now he can get his coffee at 7:44 a.m.

My friend, Peter Goertzel, parks his car in spaces reserved for handicapped people. He has no infirmities. When I asked him why he took such unfair liberties, he explained he was handicapped by an addiction to cigarettes!

THE BAR MITZVAH

My grandfather was raised by Russian peasant parents who fondly hoped he would become a Yeshiva bucher and eventually a rabbi. But the pogroms in Russia were so unbearable, that he emigrated to the United States at the age of eighteen.

With great effort, he achieved his American citizenship and began the tortuous climb up the American ladder of success. At the time of this story, he had made enough money in the theater business to retire. Thereafter, he spent most of his days officiously involving himself in family and community matters.

This story is not about a man's religious irreverence, but about his religious reflections and resultant transformations. He had wended his way through the practices of orthodox, conservative, and reform Judaism, and wearied of their dogmas. In latter years, he continued as a board member of Worcester's reformed Temple Emmanuel, serving as a fund raiser/administrator while eschewing its religious activities. Many of the congregants considered him to be a heretic at best and a heathen at worst. None of these sentiments bothered Zayde David.

As my thirteenth birthday approached, he called a meeting of my immediate family and announced that he would not allow me to have a Bar Mitzvah. He railed on about how Worcester Bar Mitzvahs had become disgusting competitions to see who would have the biggest and most expensive ceremony. He adamantly stated his belief that the religious primacy of the Bar Mitzvahs had been obscured in a morass of social climbing and ostentation. He refused to let his family join the chase. As usual, his position prevailed.

Before supper on my thirteenth birthday, Zayde, my father, and I were talking in the living room.

"Hyde," he asked his son, "do you still have the big gold watch I gave you after your Bar Mitzvah?"

"I think so. It's probably upstairs in my bedroom," my father answered.

"Go get it, while Alton and I wait here," Zayde ordered.

Minutes later my father returned with a big, gold, old fashioned Waltham railroad watch. He gave it to his

father who fondled it and studied my father's engraved initials on the back. Then he turned to me.

"Alton, he said, "I want you to have this gold watch and from this day on promise to be responsible for what you do. Think wisely before you act, remember who and what you are, and always cherish your family. Do you understand me?"

I did.

He put his arm around me, pulled me close, and handed me the watch. "Alton", he said, "congratulations, you've just been Bar Mitzvahed."

We repaired to the dining room where Mother, without the slightest intention of being perverse or irreligious, served Zayde's favorite meal - a delicious roast loin of pork with red wine and ice cream for dessert.

After dinner I ran outside to play with friends in the remaining twilight. My father and mother remained in the dining room talking and smoking. My grandfather made himself comfortable in the living room and started to read his favorite newspaper, "The Christian Science Monitor."



I still think of Zayde as the most direct and honest man I've ever known.

SATIATED

My early projectionist days were spent working in "porn houses." These jobs were assigned to me not because I had an overactive libido, but because projectionists with the least seniority were sent to theaters with the lowest pay scales.

My exuberant wife decided she would celebrate the end of my first week of work with a Sunday night "happening."

I arrived back at our country home after showing the double feature "The Iceman Came" and "Bananas Aren't for Eating." I pulled the car into our large pasture and parked. Crissy, who had seen the headlights, flung open the backdoor of the house and came running to greet me.

Her arms were waving as she shouted spirited greetings. In the bright moonlight I saw she was stark-naked. She pulled open the car door and with outstretched arms kept yelling, "Darling, darling."

I looked at her. She was laughing hysterically and was breathless from the run to the car. "Crissy," I slowly

said, "Go in and put some clothes on. I haven't seen a  
FACE in six hours."

PSYCHIATRY

One night I received a frantic call from the doorman at my mother's apartment building asking me to join him. Having sensed that Mother was in distress, he had let himself into her apartment and discovered his instincts were correct. She was wedged between her bed and a wall, the telephone cord was wrapped around her neck, while she was experiencing a frightening, dangerous fit. She was incoherent, bathed in fevered perspiration and her eyes were rolling back in her head. Her condition appeared to be terminal.

Emergency Medical Services was called and they promptly responded. The paramedics frantically applied first aid procedures and then rushed Mother to the hospital.

She was placed in intensive care for three days. It was impossible to tell how she was because of all the machinery hooked up to her 86-year-old body.

On the fourth day her condition improved sufficiently and she was moved to a regular hospital room. It was a miracle to see Mother sitting up in bed, enjoying all the attention being lavished on her. She believed she was in a very fine hotel, but had no idea how she had

got there. I called her personal physician and asked him to come see her. He explained he couldn't because he had no privileges at that hospital. I suggested Mother be moved to his hospital, but he demurred. He insisted it would be a bad move.

"Does Sonia carry more than Medicare insurance?" he asked.

"Everything money can buy," I answered.

"Listen to me, Alton," he said, "leave her there and she'll become an assignment case. Every specialist in that hospital will grab a part of her case. She couldn't get better care at the Mayo Clinic."

Boy, oh boy, was he correct!

Every day all kinds of doctors came to see Mother. There were cardiologists, radiologists, ophthalmologists, dermatologists, neurologists, pharmacologists, orthopedists, and many other specialists too hard to spell. They all huddled around Sonia's bed. Only pediatricians were missing.

In their long, white coats, the doctors all looked like something out of a scene from the movie "Zelig." They spent most of their time tossing technical medical

terms back and forth, seemingly wishing to impress one another. The medical chart that hung on Mother's bed dwarfed the text of "Gone with the Wind."

A few days later, Mother complained of being depressed and lonely.

"Of course, you are", said one of the four psychiatrists that arrived within an hour of Mother's complaint. They "cured" her loneliness by tying her to the bed. It seems she had disappeared that day looking for her enjoyable roommate who had been sent home. It was impossible to sort out what the doctors' priorities were: Mother's depression, or their desire to partake in her generous insurance benefits.

The group of four psychiatrists visited Mother every morning and in the afternoon, one would revisit her. Upon arriving, he would tell me to wait in the hallway, and slam Mother's door in my face. One day when he came out in the hall, I suggested Mothers' spirits would be lifted if she had another roommate.

"She needs to be alone," was his curt reply.

Something was amiss and I decided to investigate.

Sitting on the edge of Mother's bed, I asked her why she needed a psychiatrist. Was there some problem she

couldn't discuss with me after all the years we had spent together?

"Oh, darling," she explained, "it's not me, it's the doctor!"

"The doctor?" I asked.

"Yes, dear. He's such a fine, young man, but he's having a lot of trouble in his marriage. So, I've been giving him advice. He really appreciates it."

Wait a minute, I thought. Mother is being kept alone in a room so that the psychiatrist can have private talks with her. She was playing a very expensive role as "Mary Worth."

I went to the main desk and had Dr. Jacobson paged. He arrived within minutes and took me into an alcove.

"Doctor Jacobson," I fumed, "What is so wrong with my mother that you're keeping her here in isolation? What are you treating her for?"

"My dear man," he said in whispered tones while holding my forearm, "Your mother is a charming, sensible, healthy woman. I'm having marital problems and she has been giving me very viable, sagacious advice. Things

are going much better at home. Your mother is wonderful!"

"You mean my mother is well enough to go home and you've been keeping her here?" I demanded.

"Oh, just a couple of extra days," he said with a smile.

"Listen, doctor, you send her home by tomorrow or I'll send you a bill for Mother's services. How does \$150 a visit strike you?"

The following day, I took Mother home. She was handed a bill for \$57,000 for her 12-day stay. Insurance paid \$56,400 and Mother complained she was going to miss the place.

A month later she received a picture postcard from Hawaii with a message: "Thanks, from Dr. Irving and Mindi Jacobson." On the reverse side was a picture of the hugging, suntanned Jacobsons. They had on colorful native shirts and hokey leis around their necks.

I guess Mother's insurance paid for those too!



WHEN IT'S TIME TO LEAVE THE PARTY

I had an overwhelming sense of boredom at faculty meetings listening to the new, bright-eyed, bushy-tailed teachers expound on their new "innovative and exciting educational theories."

Invariably, I had heard these same ideas proposed at faculty meetings ten to twenty years before, and they were poor ideas then. In addition, these educational tyros superciliously referred to me as "part of the old guard that's afraid of change."

They were wrong...I craved change and facilitated it by retiring. It was time to leave the party.

THE END WAS THE BEGINNING

I hate alarm clocks, particularly mine. I hate being awakened by a buzzer that sounds like a killer-bee attack. An alarm bell is no better. Every time it rings, I mistakenly make a groggy reach for the telephone. There must be a better way. Why not try a clock radio?

At the appliance store a salesman patiently showed me a variety of clock radio styles and options. Monaural or stereo sound, a light-flashing alarm, tape-deck alarm, a buzzer/radio alarm, a "snooze bar," AM-FM bands, AFC, power aerial, digital clock, dimming dials, doze-off control, and dual speakers were some of the options to choose from.

"Something simple," was my request.

"How about the \$49.50, 10JX650?" asked the clerk.

He demonstrated its sound and tried to allay my fears of all the buttons and switches. It seemed that only simple logic was needed to operate it. In case procedures became incomprehensible, the fall-back position was a graphically illustrated manual.

I paid the \$49.50 and took my 10JX650 home. From the outset, I found it impossible to read the small print that identified each button and switch. It was necessary to use a flashlight and magnifying glass to make any adjustments. Many of the buttons were so small, one finger-tip push would often activate two opposing functions. I became overwhelmingly frustrated trying to follow the procedures in the instruction book.

"Hold down button 'A' while flicking switch 'T6.' Be sure switch 9 is off until the 'time calculator' ascends to the correct AM/FM day-of-week mode; be sure the 'seconds indicator' is flashing. Radio will not play in tape mode position 'X' or if the 'snooze alarm' is in the 'ON' position. Adjust volume with potentiometer nob 'C' while 'AFC' switch (Z) is in control position 'R6.' Install Type F106XRS black-out battery in receptacle 'C' on the bottom of the 10JX650 clock-radio to ensure power while in 'mode 2.' Be sure terminals are correctly positioned."

My mind was completely addled; I had the distinct feeling the clock radio and I were never going to be friends.

The next day, I put it back in its box and returned it to the store. The clerk was very understanding and demonstrated all the procedures once again on a similar floor model. He had me correctly perform all the procedures, then sent me and my 10JX650 back home. I left confident that I had mastered all the directions. I put the radio on my night table, plugged it in and set the systems to the functions I desired. At 11:00 p.m. I got into bed, turned on the 'slumber button' and tried to doze off to some Chopin waltzes. I also programmed in some cool jazz tapes to awaken me at 7:00 a.m. Then, I dozed and dozed and dozed and the Chopin waltzes played on and on and on. They never turned off as programmed. So, in the dark, I reached over and pressed some button. Lovely silence ensued and sleep followed.

At 2:00 a.m. the radio starting blaring. A strident voice was selling underarm deodorant and extolling the effectiveness of Preparation H. I pushed the first button I could locate and the radio turned off. In an hour, the buzzer went on, and the lighted dial panel was flashing: 'Wednesday, August 5, 1:30 p.m.' Everything ceased when I pushed another button. My calendar wristwatch correctly displayed: 'Tuesday, February 6, 3:30 a.m.'

Dawn was breaking when the radio went on again, the buzzer buzzed, the radio stopped, the cool jazz tape began to play, then the radio playing resumed while jumping from AM to FM to horrible static. I pushed the 'snooze bar' and was treated to 10 seconds of silence before the tape started again. Fortunately, it ended and all was quiet when I left for work. On my way out, I called the radio a "dumb son-of-a-bitch."

On my arrival home that evening, I was met at my door by a very irritated neighbor. He told me my tape player started up at 11:00 a.m. and had been playing "the same God-damn four songs all day." It was still playing when I entered my apartment. No button pushing this time! I gleefully pulled out the electric plug, picked up the clock radio and threw it in the hallway incinerator room. I had no interest in its guarantees, warranties, or collection of modern, electronic marvels. This end was the beginning of something better.

For years my old dog Brownie had the delightful habit of punctually entering my bedroom at 7:30 a.m. and putting her head on my pillow. She'd continue to stare at me until I awoke. If I failed to do so in a

reasonable time, she would start sneezing in my face and batting the bed with her paw.

It was a gentle, loving act and a far more reliable wake-up call than the clock radio would have ever provided. To celebrate her feat, I would lie in bed patting her head while luxuriating in my good fortune.

Only one problem remained...Brownie never knew when it was Saturday, Sunday, or a holiday.

TWO DOLLARS

My father loved to go to the track and bet on horseraces. He also had strict rules about doing so.

He only bet with money he earned as a Blue Ribbon Federal Grand Juror. He never bet more than \$2.00 on a race unless he had "their money," i.e. winnings. And finally, he never bet a horse whose odds were less than 4 to 1. He reasoned there was no sense or excitement betting to get back little more than one's own money.

As soon as Jury Duty was over, my father and his Juror's money were soon at the races. On a summer day in 1941 I was with him when he bet the daily double. What ensued was the ultimate test of his betting credo: Bet on horses for excitement and let winnings be a secondary pleasure to the primary thrill of competition.

The first half of his daily double was won by an incredible longshot, "Michigan Smart." I knew that was 'big doings' because my father was jumping up and down with a distinct gleam in his eyes.

"Sonny boy," he said, "take a look at the price of the double if my second horse comes in! \$4,500 for \$2.00, Jesus Christ!"

The wait for the second race seemed interminable, but it went off at exactly post-time. My father's horse sprinted into a considerable lead. Dad started jumping in place again, screaming encouragement, oblivious to all around him.

The horses came thundering off the final curve and into the homestretch. My father's horse swung wide and, on the inside rail, the second place horse took the lead. Dad's horse "went under the whip" and made a valiant challenge for first place. The horses drove across the finish line and the tote board flashed "PHOTO".

Dad kept muttering, "he did it, he came back."

After what seemed an endless five minutes, the tote board blinked, cleared, and posted the official order of finish. Dad's horse lost.

Laughing, while tearing up his bet slip, he gleefully said, "Now that's what I call a helluva good time for two bucks. Let's see what looks good in the third."



Incredibly, my father's bet in the second half of that daily double was a then unknown horse named "Stymie." Six years later, at the age of eight, "Stymie" retired from racing after setting a then world record of \$918,000 in winnings.

EYESTER UEBER ALLES

John B. Eyester was my high school German teacher. It would be more accurate to call him a martinet. He brooked no exceptions to his standards of workmanship or behavior, and no one was courageous enough to ever challenge him.

He forced us to memorize a German proverb daily and keep our German conjugation charts in impeccable order. At Christmastime he would lead his classes through lusty renditions of German carols and treat us to delicious kuchen. Ja, sehr gut!

Herr Eyester was also an avid sports fan. He claimed that while playing football at Wesleyan University, he was chosen for one of Walter Camp's early All-American teams. In addition, on his desk, he kept a picture of himself pole vaulting at Leipzig University. The picture had evidently been taken from ground level while focusing upwardly, because, with no ground in sight, it was impossible to ascertain the height of the crossbar.

Students admired the old, sepia photograph and would ask Herr Eyester the height of the cross bar he was soaring over. On any given day, his answer increased upwardly from ten feet. It was Eyester ueber alles. We finally lost interest when he answered "eighteen feet, two inches." His credibility was shattered by the fact that the current world's pole vaulting record was held by Earl Meadows at 14' 11 1/2".

We guessed that Herr Eyester's vaulting effort was probably no better than nine feet or possibly less.

Uebung macht den Meister.

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THE OFFSPRING

Mrs. Brown, my old fleabag Labrador, was 18 when this happened. In early June, we arrived for our summer stay in Great Barrington. It was her favorite time of the year, with ample fields to roam and the Green River to swim in. At the end of three weeks, I noticed she seemed a little bloated. Two weeks later it was far more noticable. I decided to have her checked-up at the veterinarian.

He gave her belly many feels and plumpings and diagnosed her condition as "gastrointestinal inflammation." He suggested she take two to three Roloids a day. Pregnant? "Not a chance at her age," advised the vet.

I took her home, wrapped a Rolaid in peanut butter and gave it to her. Within minutes she managed to eat the peanut butter and spit out the Rolaid. A half jar of peanut butter later, she had yet to swallow the Rolaid. No more games! I put a Rolaid in her mouth, grabbed her snout and stroked her neck. She swallowed the Rolaid. This procedure continued four times a day for three more weeks. Mrs. Brown kept getting larger, and three weeks later it appeared she was ready to explode.

I put her on her back and checked for gas by pressing her belly. I felt no gas, but to my astonishment, I noticed she was lactating. Obviously, she was pregnant.

A few days later she began tearing up newspapers and piling them on her bed and then, while lying on them, she began to heave. I gently picked her up, placed her into the car and drove her to the vet's. In the morning, he called to say Mrs. Brown had delivered three runty puppies. This ran her total production to eleven litters and 81 offspring. I had run out of sentiment and patience. I asked the vet to put the pups to sleep. He was told to let me know when I could bring Mrs. Brown home. It happened that evening.

It wasn't pleasant. She stayed on her bed whimpering. It was a very pathetic sound. It continued all night and well into the next day. I called the veterinarian who told me she was having breast pain because she had fed her puppies immediately after they were born. To relieve the pain the process should have continued.

With the puppies gone the vet suggested that I massage her breasts. He also suggested trying to get a breast

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pump to work. It was pitiful to hear her cry. I was plagued with guilt. In desperation, I went to the farmer's house down the road. His cat had kittens four days earlier. I asked for one and explained why.

Within minutes a kitten was snuggled into Mrs. Brown's belly. She lay on her side, lifted her hind leg, and gave the kitten its choice of ten nipples. The kitten kneaded the breasts and fed endlessly. Mrs. Brown stopped crying and became a devoted mother.

They became a classic example of symbiosis and their bonding was profound. Mrs. Brown would put the cat in her mouth and carry him wherever she went. When this ceased, the cat endlessly chased after Mrs. Brown. Nights became a horror. The cat became terribly obstreperous and would endlessly leap off chairs and land full force on the supine Mrs. Brown. This nocturnal nightmare didn't allow the dog nor I much sleep. "Henry," as the cat was now called, was growing at an innordinate rate. By the sixth week he had almost a full year's growth. He had developed teeth and Mrs. Brown had developed raw nipples. I'd put down a dish of cat food and another of milk but Henry persisted in breast feeding.

By the ninth week, Henry was the size of a small lion cub. It was obvious I had a mutant on my hands. Henry had to go! He was tiring Mrs. Brown by overtaxing her sense of motherhood and devotion. I brought the cat back to the farmer and assured him it would be the best "mouser" in his barn. He was impressed with the cat's size and was delighted to have him back.

Not quite as delighted, Mrs. Brown assuaged her loneliness with daily wanderings down to the farm to be with Henry. I never cared because she always returned for supper in a happy mood. Passing the farm, I'd always see Henry's awesome hulk running around in the pasture. Weeks later, I met the farmer and asked how Henry was doing catching mice.

"Mice?" he challenged. "God-damn, he killed four woodchucks in a week!"

Mrs. Brown's best total in an equal period had never exceeded two!

SALVATORE FAVATA, M.D.

I would make Dr. Salvatore Favata laugh by telling him I was the only Jew in New York with an Italian doctor. His office, which looked like one in a Norman Rockwell painting, was located in a working class neighborhood near Broadway and 97th Street.

His clientele was made up of young Hispanic mothers, plump menopausal women, pensioners, disability claimants, Medicaid recipients and recent immigrants. I asked Sal why he charged a ridiculously low \$4.00 for an office visit. He told me it was because he had committed his life to helping people and not to making easy, big money.

When he died, a mutual friend told me Dr. Sal's death was actually caused by a broken heart. He had worked himself to death. He literally became part of a dying breed of doctors known as General Practitioners in Family Medicine.

On the way home from work one day, I began to sweat, feel cold, dizzy, and nauseated. I went directly to Sal's office. Without having to wait, he took me into



his examining room and sat me on a table. He put a thermometer in my mouth, listened to my heart and lungs, looked in my ears, nose and throat, and tapped my kneecaps with a rubber mallet. Finally, he read the thermometer, which indicated I had a 102-degree fever.

"This won't be difficult," he said as he walked over to a counter. I remained seated on the table patiently waiting for the prescription I thought he was writing for me. When he turned around, he had a hypodermic syringe in his hand. It was pointed upward and he was testing the flow of medicine by making it come out of the needle. It was an exceedingly frightening sight.

He came to the edge of the table and said, "A little penicillin should do it, Alton. Just give me your arm."

I jumped off the table to the side opposite him. He started around the table and so did I -- in the same direction. I estimate we did four laps around that table until, still separated, we stopped and stared at each other.

"Dr. Sal," I begged, "please take my temperature again. If it's still 102 degrees, I'll take the shot."

He was amenable to any viable solution to the standoff. When he looked at the thermometer two minutes later it indicated my temperature was normal. With a shrug, he instructed me to join him at his old roll-top desk.

Sitting there, I asked, "Well Doc, what's your diagnosis?"

"Alton, for four dollars I can tell you that you've had an idiosyncratic hyperchondriacal episode."

"What does that mean, Doc?", I asked.

"It means you're nuts and I have better things to do. Go home!"

I felt fine at work the next day.

PLAYMATES

During my early childhood in Worcester, Mass., my father maintained only a small group of friends. It included (by choice) his brother-in-law Dan Asher, a profound intellectual, S.N. Behrman, a budding playwright, and Levi Olin, the city's reformed Rabbi.

Rabbi Olin usually came to our house for Sunday dinner. He and my father would have riotously funny discussions about what my father called the "God business." After lunch they would repair to the front lawn in their undershirts for the Sunday baseball catch.

Rabbi Olin had been the varsity catcher on the University of Cincinnati baseball team. My father had pitched for the University of Massachusetts. There would be exuberant laughter as the rabbi exhorted my father to "throw everything you've got." Followed by loud smacks as the ball hit the leather gloves, they would gleefully yell "yeh, yeh!, alright! or Yahoo!"

This was hardly a religious experience, nor what most neighbors considered appropriate Sunday behavior. My mortified mother remained indoors contemplating what

the neighbors might be thinking about "those athletic heathens."

Within an hour the catch would end and everyone would gather in the living room to hear my mother play the piano. The Rabbi would pay rapt attention and seem greatly entertained. But, beneath his veneer of civility, lurked a mischievous soul.

One musical was interrupted by a phone call for my mother and father. While they were out of the room, the rabbi asked me if I knew what a xylophone was. Being 5 years old, I had no idea what he was talking about. He explained that the xylophone was like a piano, but to play it one would use a mallet instead of fingers. Asking me if I'd like the experience, he handed me a hammer that was on the windowsill and told me to try it out on the piano. A musical cacophony ensued!

Returning to the room, my mother began screaming hysterically and my father was frozen in anger. The rabbi was boisterously laughing as I hammered out loud, discordant sounds. "Look," the Rabbi hysterically laughed, "he's playing a xylophone!"

The concert was abruptly terminated. My father grabbed me and was trying to calm my mother. But she raged on that her Steinway was a priceless wedding gift from her father, that the rabbi was childish and crude, and that my father should "do something about him." He did!

Months later, on a cold winter Sunday, my father took me to visit to Rabbi Olin's house. I was left on the living room floor listening to the radio while the rabbi and my father repaired to the kitchen to eat and talk. While the rabbi was in the kitchen preparing the food, my father returned to me. He quietly stooped down and softly asked if I'd like to play "barber." Quietly, he took a pair of scissors out of his pocket and pointed to the long, white fringes on the rabbi's expensive oriental rugs. He told me to give the rugs "a nice, big haircut." I had a helluva good time doing so.

There's no point in trying to describe the commotion that followed. It's just easier to report that, for a very long time, there were no more Sunday catches, dinners, concerts, or visits involving Rabbi Olin. Since then, and on a happier note, Mother became more serene and radiant whenever she played her piano and obviously loved my father more than ever.

### THE ENTREPRENEURS

"The chief business of the American people is business." (Calvin Coolidge, 30th President of the United States.)

Quite right. Those who venture forth with daring and imagination can soon own Boardwalk, Park Place, and six hotels. These are the entrepreneurs who will surface as the moguls of industry and finance.

While working as a projectionist in western Massachusetts theaters, I met several budding savants of business. They were not people in pin-striped suits, white-on-white shirted, and wearing Sulka ties. Instead, they were mostly teenage kids in sloppy outfits covered over by the red cotton jackets worn by the ushers and candy counter employees. They, like the captains of industry, were preoccupied with profits. Their one unique concern was to maintain matinee working hours.

Their modus operandi was to clean up the theater after matinees, retrieve as many used popcorn buckets as possible, wipe them clean, and surreptitiously restore them to the candy stand. That maneuver combined with refilling and reselling the popcorn buckets at night was the heart of their scam.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

By selling the buckets twice, they easily breached management's theft control procedures. The popcorn sale totals always reflected the correct income from empty buckets issued by management at the start of the day. The twice sold buckets provided the staff's illicit profit.

The ushers and candy sellers enjoyed a perfect business arrangement, i.e., no overhead, a free supply of product, and a 100% profit margin. I made \$6.00 per hour in the projection room while they augmented their \$2.00 per hour salary with a clandestine \$2.50 profit on every bucket of popcorn they resold at night. It's obvious who savored more from the burgeoning table of capitalism.

When I moved on to another theater, I soon discovered the cunning "popcorn scheme" was small potatoes. My appreciation for the word "profit" was astonishingly broadened.

My new theater was a "porno house." Nightly I could see the same small group of mostly older men enjoying

effete erotica. In the 300 seat auditorium, the audience rarely exceeded 15 people and that caused me concern. I could not understand how such meager attendance could pay the theater's film rental costs, electricity bills, cost of projection-room supplies, cleaning bills, and, most importantly, my salary.

At the end of the first week I expressed my concerns to the manager. He laughed and told me not to worry because the theater was also a laundry. Naively, I asked if there was a "Washateria" in the basement and what hours it was open? The manager was flabbergasted by my innocence and launched into an exasperated explanation.

"A laundry, Smith, a laundry" he began. "Do you see me sitting in the office at night tearing up tickets? Those are what I call 'laundry tickets!' The mob owns this theater. They pull a \$10,000 bank job in Florida. They then send me the money which I put in my vault in the town bank. Gradually, I withdraw it and deposit it in the theater's bank account. At any given time, the deposits never exceed the value of my torn-up tickets. The total of the theater's deposits finally reach \$10,000. We pay the tax on \$10,000 and the balance of the money has been laundered. The profits are enhanced



because the mob produces and owns the porno films. We have no film rental fees."

Business is business, and small towns are small towns. The local, civic-minded bank president told the IRS that the theater's account seemed far too large for what the townfolk knew about the theater's sparse attendance.

So the business of the theater became the business of the IRS. Its careful, furtive check of the theater's daily attendance, bank deposits, and reported dates and amounts of ticket sales resulted in grounds for prosecution.

The theater was closed, the old men and their libidos moved on, the union mercifully transferred me to an "art house," and the theater manager went to jail.

INVESTMENT BANKING

Would you play Monopoly with Ivan Boesky, Charles Keating,  
and Michael Milken?

THE SPORTS FANATIC

The Wannamaker Millrose Games, an annual indoor track meet held in Madison Square Garden, are one of New York City's premier athletic events. Due to their great popularity, admission tickets to the meet are hard to obtain. Fortunately, a friend gave me his two corporate ducats. I was extremely grateful because track and field is my favorite sport.

I told my wife, Crissy, we were going to one of New York's "in" events. She said she looked forward to seeing "a bunch of well-built guys run around in their underwear." The technical complexity of the events eluded her.

Our superb seats were located along one side of the track and afforded a full view of all the events. An indoor track meet is like a circus; there are many events simultaneously taking place in a confined area. No matter where one looks, there is action; and, Crissy's interest darted from one event to another.

Being a track aficionado, I concentrated on watching the specifically featured, highly talented athletes. To

truly appreciate their performances, I peered at them through my high-powered field glasses.

At 10:00 p.m. the competitors assembled at the starting line for the evening's featured event, the "Wannamaker Mile." You could sense the crowd's mounting tension as each competitor was introduced. The runners would negotiate eleven laps and finish on the opposite side of the arena.

The gun barked and the mile was underway. Seven tightly bunched, world-class milers were briskly competing for one of the sport's most coveted championships. The competition was strenuous. Barely 5 yards separated the imposing competitors as they began the final lap.

Being gallant, I gave Crissy the field-glasses so she could enjoy a better view of the finish. On the last straight-away, three runners simultaneously sprinted to the finish line, lunged for the tape, and crashed down on the track.

Rampant pandemonium enveloped the arena. Knowing Crissy had a better view, I asked her what happened.

"Who won the mile, Crissy?"

"What mile?" she replied.

"The one they were just running!" I yelled.

"I don't know," she said.

You don't know?," I fumed. "God-damn it, you were looking right at the finish-line through those glasses!"

"No, I wasn't," she innocently said.

"Well, what the hell WERE you looking at?," I demanded.

"I was watching the pole vaulter who's not wearing a jock," she replied, "and that's far more exciting than the race."

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF SUCCESS

My high school teachers were unable to explain to my parents why I was trapped in a morass of academic failures. They had no complaints about my enthusiasm, social skills, or athletic successes. But my failures gave all of them continuing concerns about my prospects for graduating.

Despite assigned study periods, a favorable IQ test score, a cut in my allowance, no radio playing allowed during evening homework hours, a chat with the school psychiatrist, remedial reading help and a host of other such aids, I did not round the corner and get on the road to academic success.

In final desperation, I was sent to be tested by the school's educational psychologist. When I arrived, she seated me at a table in front of a large, wooden black cube. The psychologist told me to turn my back while she disassembled the cube into nine asymmetrical pieces. Then, I was told to turn around and put the pieces back into cube form while being timed.

When I finished, the psychologist looked at her stopwatch, shook it and tried winding it. Then I was

asked to repeat the test. When I finished, she read the watch with an incredulous look on her face. She excused herself and moments later returned with a new stopwatch and cube. I was told to repeat the test.

After reading her watch for the third time, she picked up the phone and asked the principal to join us.

"Mr. Tate, Mr. Tate," she exhilarated, "I've just given Alton the 'Wiggly Block Test' and his performance times scored off the rating scale. His performances indicates he's a mechanical genius."

"Genius?" queried Mr. Tate. "Now what?"

The psychologist recommended a complete change in my course of study. Heavy emphasis was placed on mechanical and industrial arts courses, while only essential academic courses were retained.

The euphoria didn't last long. I became a "shop bum," experiencing little success. Within a month, the shop teacher refused to have me in his classes any longer. He complained that my "horseplay" around the machinery was intolerable, as was my total lack of mechanical aptitude. It was back to the old, futile academic

grind for me. But, God bless that school psychologist because she was really on the right track.

Years after graduating from high school and with no special training, I built, over a four-year period, a very complex HO model railroad, fixed a TV set that technicians had rated "terminal," made several repairs on my car that kept it running way beyond its reasonable life expectancy, fixed my parents' large cuckoo clock, made many successful household repairs, and, just last week, got my pooped-out popcorn popper working again. Just imagine, if that psychologist had had a valid test for measuring my social skills! I might have avoided two disastrous marriages. You know what I mean ... sort of a "Wiggly Personality Test."



LIFE AFTER DEATH

I have never believed in life after death. I once had a fleeting belief in reincarnation because my old dog was so kind, loving, gentle, and devoted that I thought she might be Albert Schweitzer redux.

Circumstances have given me reason to reconsider my position on the phenomenon of life after death.

When I'm confronted with an intractable problem, I quietly sit in the dark and wonder what my father would do in my situation. After moments of profound reflection, I clearly experience my father's reaction. Invariably, it's a viable solution and, in addition, a comforting feeling that he is still with me.

In a way, I have similar experiences with my mother. I'm sure she's still with me when I compulsively and immediately do dusting, clean dinner dishes, plump up couch cushions, clean ashtrays, meticulously keep the checkbook in balance, and promptly write "Thank you" notes.

It's been 30 years since my father went to watch  
eternal horse racing. Mother joined him 18 years later  
to continue her now eternal feather dusting.

They're there, but they're here.

GEORGE MARTENS' ADVICE

George Martens told me that while he was attending a Brooklyn vocational high school, the cops arrested him on a charge of delinquency. A compassionate judge offered him a choice of enlisting in the Marines where he could get a high school equivalency diploma, or a term on an upstate "work farm."

When George was discharged from the Marines he tried many different jobs. One was as a debt collector working on a salary plus commission basis. He hated that job. Often, after hearing debtors' great tales of woe, he'd collect nothing and gave them money from his own pocket.

There was a severe teacher shortage during the 50's and George was the only applicant for my school's football coaching job. He was hired and for many years augmented his salary by "moonlighting."

He worked as a short order cook, a basketball referee, a manager of a fleet of school buses, serviced the school's candy machines on commission, and toiled as a bouncer in a local bowling alley that he eventually bought.

George was solely a product of his life's multi-faceted experiences. People considered him "street smart." I found him to be sensitive and pragmatic.

MY wife was not only insisting on a divorce but was also intent on cleaning out my meager, hard earned savings account. It was difficult for me to accept that she needed my money to assuage her alleged feelings of unhappiness. I pegged her financial demand as quintessential greed and revenge.

I spent hours raging in my office. I delivered daily and hourly diatribes about her cupidity. I told George there seemed to be no end to my problem. MY PROBLEM! MY PROBLEM!

Pushed far beyond the reasonable limits of patience, George came across the office, sat on my desk, and offered me advice.

"Smith, you do not have a problem. I have a problem. My son was born totally deaf and unable to speak. There is no cure for his condition. Now, that's a problem. What you have is an aggravation that can easily be eliminated. Just give the God-damn broad the money, and she's out of your life - gone. Solved! You

see, Smith, you must always decide if you're being confronted with a problem or an aggravation. They're two very different things."

That was one of the best pieces of advice I ever received.

SERMON OFF THE WALL

My 69 year old Aunt Marcia could no longer tolerate having her 93 year old father (Zayde Smith) live with her. He was argumentative, demanding, and deaf. The sum of these problems caused constant domestic friction.

My father Hyde (Marcia's brother) was called to Worcester to intercede and resolve the situation. His plan was to put his father in the Jewish Home for the Aged. The problem was Zayde's generation considered such a placement an admission of a family's indigence, indifference, decay, or any combination of the three.

My father asked Mr. Beller, the Home's director, to meet with his father and talk about the Home. Once there, Mr. Beller told my grandfather he needed his assistance in running the place. He truthfully told Zayde that, because of his earlier fund raising activities on behalf of the Home, he had been elected to its board of governors. Given that viable rationale, Zayde decided to stay. He sent his son to Marcia's to fetch his personal belongings.

The entire family agreed the problem had been superbly resolved and pledged its everlasting gratitude to my father. Aunt Marcia cried in relief.

Zayde Smith adjusted very well and was allowed to continue daily meetings with his friends in a downtown Waldorf cafeteria.

The Home could only afford the ministrations of a Rabbi when celebrating the high holidays. To resolve this problem, Mr. Beller had a wonderful tradition. Every Friday night, a different resident was asked to lead simple Shabbes prayers and deliver a homily. Zayde Smith was eventually asked to do his part.

Within minutes after his Friday night service, our telephone was ringing in New York, It was Mr. Beller raging and insisting my father immediately come to Worcester and take his father elsewhere.

"For God's sake!" he bellowed, "get your old man out of here! Quickly!"

My father was in Worcester and at the Home within hours.

"What happened?" my father demanded of the director.

"Hyde, I know your father takes pride in the fact that he's a modern American Jew. But his speech tonight nearly caused a riot. After leading the prayers, he went into a diatribe about 'you old fashioned Jews should take off your hats and shawls in here. Don't you know the room is heated, and God will listen even if you're naked? Stop the Yiddish, speak in English. Let's reform ourselves and do important things.' Hyde, those people were highly agitated and angry."

"Where's my father now?" Dad asked.

"We put him in his room," the director replied.

My father went there and sat on the bed with his brooding father. He suggested his father might like to go back to Marcia's. Absolutely not! How about moving to New York for awhile? Never! My grandfather was implacable.

My father resolved the impasse by suggesting to the director that Zayde be served all meals in his room, continue to spend his mornings downtown, and never be asked to officiate another Friday night service. To



sweeten the pot, my father, a top executive at the Seagram Company, had a truckload of liquor delivered to the residents of the Home, courtesy of Zayde Smith.

Peace reigned again.

My grandfather continued to meet his friends for morning-long Waldorf cafeteria coffee klatsches. Once there, Zayde worked off excess energy delivering discourses and diatribes lasting into early afternoons.

GAMES ITALIAN STYLE

Mario Serini remains the most memorable student/athlete I had ever taught. A true gentilumo from Milan, he dominated my 1954 soccer team with continental charm, superior leadership and superb soccer skills.

The effectiveness of the team was built around Mario, who cherished his lovingly given nickname "Big Wop." The team used the classical "W" formation which put heavy emphasis on the play of the center halfback. Like a football quarterback, our soccer centerhalf (Mario) kept the team effectively deployed while he "set up" the ball.

I suggested to Mario that he teach the team and myself a few key Italian phrases that would direct our play and confuse our opponents' understanding of our strategy. "Big Wop" held post-practice, locker room instruction and had us fluently schooled in the following phrases:

<u>incrociare la palla</u>	-	cross the ball
<u>vai indietro</u>	-	go back
<u>vai avanti</u>	-	go forward
<u>palla in giu</u>	-	play the ball down

incrociare a destra - cross right

incrociare a sinistra - cross left

The results were astounding. Team play excelled and opponents' weaknesses were quickly exploited when Mario yelled his Italian exhortations. The squad always gained crucial advantage with the resultant timing and deployment of its plays.

The final game of the year was a very bitterly contested match against a large, city public school. Back and forth, it raged on for an hour and remained tied in the final seconds. Mario had the ball centerfield and the left wing was wide-open just inside our opponents' penalty area. "Wop," I yelled, "incrociare a sinistra!" Mario got off a beautiful cross to the left wing, but out of nowhere, a short, very fast defender trapped the ball, quickly dribbled down the field and confronted our goalie with a "one-on-one." He shot, he scored, we lost, and the game was over.

Mario was at midfield when I reached him. In his wonderful manner, he was scratching his head and laughing. "Coach," he said, "la commedia e' finita."

The players were all shaking hands when I approached the one who had scored the winning goal. Trying to be sportsmanlike, I told him, "Young man, that was a brilliantly timed play. Congratulations."

"Thank you very much, Coach," he said. "And, by the way, arrivederci."

\* \* \* \* \*

Mario graduated from Fieldston in 1955 and four years later (with honors) from Yale. He returned to New York and entered the banking business. Months later while walking on 40th Street, he was caught in a crossfire between the police and some gunmen. He was accidentally killed.

Son sicuro che se Mario fosse sopra vissuto avrebbe reso questo mondo migliore. Dormi bene, principe gentile.\*

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\*I am sure that if Mario had survived, he would have made this world better. Sleep well, gentle prince.

TERRY THE TERROR

Most of my family wanted a loving, docile Cocker Spaniel. My father wanted a dog with spunk.

"Terry" was the Wirehaired Terrier my father brought home. He had short, stiff legs, a saucy little beard, alert beady eyes, and a stubby tail that quivered more with excitement than joy. Spunky is an understated description of this furry bundle of dynamite.

His penchant for bellicose behavior did not win him any friends in the neighborhood. Because of Terry, neighbors' cats spent most of their time indoors or up in trees.

Our family installed a mailbox at the foot of the driveway, because the mailman would not approach our house to use the front-door mail slot. If he saw Terry outside, he skipped our delivery. Several times, my father paid to sew-up the mailman's bitten pants.

Terry's favorite morning and afternoon activity was walking to school with my sister and me. He would bound down the sidewalk, and dart in and out of bushes and yards looking for excitement and mischief. His

route was marked by toppled garbage cans and garbage strewn across lawns.

We repaid more than one friend for their ice-cream cones our dog snatched away. If he caught someone's baseball, Terry would immediately take it home and gnaw off its horsehide cover. We also paid for that.

Once that my sister and I went into class, Terry, with abundant bravado, would enter the school play-yard and immediately, provoke fights with every dog in sight.

Sometimes, he would simultaneously take on five or six bewildered pooches. He'd continue until he had fought, bitten, intimidated, or chased off every dog. There was incessant growling, barking and whining, until panting Terry had asserted complete control of the yard.

During and following these canine catastrophes, the principal would force my sister to go outside, grab Terry by the collar, and carry him home. My sister's academic work suffered from constant interruptions.

My father temporarily solved the problem by tying the dog to the front porch before we left for school. But

Terry responded by shredding the rope. Free again, he vigorously indulged his alternative tour-de-force - chasing cars.

Lurking in the bushes lining the curb, Terry would suddenly spring out into the street, and utilizing incredible speed and dexterity, chase passing cars. With fearsome belligerence, he'd run along by their sides, barking, growling, and snapping at the front wheels. Frightened motorists would blare their horns while negotiating adroit, dangerous swerves. The bigger the swerve, the greater Terry's glee! It seemed his modus operandi was kill or be killed.

Ultimately, he took on the mailman's delivery truck and lost.

Quite literally, nobody missed him.

THEY ALL GOT SHAFTED

Al Wilson told me that after World War II his college bought a surplus training shed from The Great Lakes Naval Station. It was shipped in pieces to the college's campus and resurrected. This shed, in addition to serving as an athletic fieldhouse, also was used during 'Finals Week' to simultaneously administer many exams.

In addition to track and field facilities, wrestling and gymnastic areas, and a huge locker-shower room installation, the fieldhouse also contained seven basketball courts. Desks for final exams were set up on some of these floors.

The building's temperature was always pleasant, because huge, square ceiling ventilators constantly sucked up and out shafts of stale, warm air. The only problem was that these columns of air being sucked up had sound voids in their centers.

It was a common experience for basketball players to find themselves vocally isolated when playing under the ventilators. Unless teammates were in the same immediate area, they could not communicate. Voices in



the upwardly surging air-columns sounded up through the ventilators in the roof.

No wonder students lined-up in front of the fieldhouse at 7:00 a.m. for an 8:00 a.m. exam. When the doors opened at 7:45, groups of students rushed to the four contiguous desks located under each ventilator. Once seated, these enterprising people were positioned to surreptitiously carry on seminars or collectively share their academic know-how.

At 7:55, proctors came up the aisles and placed exams face-down on each desk. At 8:00 o'clock a voice boomed on the public address system, "Gentlemen, start your exam. You have three hours to complete it. Good luck." Two-hundred students hunched over their desks to ponder challenging questions. The proctors stood at the floors' perimeter waiting to give any needed assistance.

About 9:20 a.m. an amiable conversation broke the silence.

"Charlie, what's the name of the muscle at the top of the scapula?"

"I don't know, Fred. Ask Al."

"Al?"

"I think it's the deltoideus, Fred."

"Nah, Al, it's the supraspinatus!"

"How do you spell that, Mike?"

"I'm not..."

The conversation abruptly stopped. Everyone in the place was looking at a proctor in a seersucker suit, a bowtie, and horn-rimmed glasses. He was standing in the midst of the four conspiring academicians.

He picked up their blue examination books, held them over his head, tore them into shreds, and let them flutter to the floor. "Congratulations, gentlemen," he announced. "You have just flunked Anatomy 205."

The unsuspecting foursome had been accidentally betrayed by a blown fuse that silently stopped their ventilator. Unbeknownst to them, their secure and serene shaft of air had ceased to exist, thus causing their public exposure. After the exam, most students agreed that much more than a fuse had been blown.

### DEMOCRACY FOR EVERYBODY

It was an annual requirement for all students in the Fieldston Ethical Culture School to take a course in ethics. The requirement played a pivotal role in fulfilling the School's commitment to humanism and the democratic process. These goals left a lasting impression on every graduate. Concomitant with these tenets was a profound belief that the best way to express group or individual desire or opinion was through the process of voting. Voting was considered the ultimate expression of democracy.

Twenty years after graduating from Fieldston, I joined my first wife for the summer in Santa Fe where she was singing in the local opera company. I found I was left with a lot of time on my hands which was augmented by abundant boredom.

By sheer chance I met seventy year old Laura Daugherty, who told me she was a retired school teacher currently running the Garcia Street Settlement House. She found it intriguing that I was a teacher from New York, and invited me to see the settlement house.

Actually, it was her home, located on the poor side of Santa Fe. Two large downstairs rooms had been turned into poorly equipped play rooms. On a small stipend from the city, she tried to run a program for underprivileged, neighborhood Chicano kids, ages 8 to 12. She had mastered Spanish and became a surrogate mother to the children. It all added up to little more than a safe place for the kids to "hang-out."

With no money to pay me a salary, Laura asked if I could help her out. I agreed, seeing it as a challenge to work with children far different than the bright, privileged ones I taught in New York.

I introduced a program of softball, swimming (at the Boys Club), soccer, hiking, square dancing, simple games, movies run on an old 16 MM projector and a sheet on the wall, cookie making and many other activities. Everything went well except for deciding what each day's activities would be. Arguments were common, but I finally fell back on my high school ethics education and decided we'd create democratic solutions, i.e., votes for activities would be taken each day.

To my astonishment, the children had no idea about what it meant to vote. In the simplest terms I explained

the whole process. I further explained how the activities could be nominated and then voted upon. I also explained the meaning of simple majority, consensus, and a preferential ballot.

The results were amazing. The kids couldn't get enough of nominating and voting. Then I explained campaigning and voting for group officers or team captains. The children became so engrossed in and enthusiastic about voting that they often consumed their two-hour morning sessions voting on choices for the afternoon.

They were thrilled to have their opinions recognized and, in a subtle way, were experiencing their first (and maybe only) course in civics. It had reached a point where voting was used to see whose dog had the best name. Democracy had arrived at the Garcia Street Settlement House.

In mid-summer I stopped to shop in the local package store. It was owned by Mr. and Mrs. George McConnell. Mrs. McConnell intently stared at me. Then she hesitantly asked, "Aren't you the Mr. Smith that works for Laura Daugherty at the Garcia Street Settlement House?"

"I am," I replied. "How did you know that?"

"Well everybody in this end of town has heard about you. Mr. Smith, could I ask you a favor?"

"Sure," I said.

"My son Tim is having a boring summer. All his friends are away. He needs something to do. Do you think the Chicano kids would mind if he joined your program? Well, I mean that by their standards we're all well-to-do Anglos. Oh, you know what I mean. And then, I have to tell you Tim is handicapped. He limps and has to use two canes. What I'm asking is, could he fit in? He's 14 years old."

"Mrs. McConnell," I replied, "if Tim is enthusiastic, he'll fit in. Send him over tomorrow afternoon."

The following morning I prepared the kids for Tim's arrival. I explained how he was "special," and they were to treat him like everyone else. I was extremely gratified to see them give Tim a huge welcome that afternoon.

But, it wasn't all wine and roses. The games were very hard for Tim. He couldn't really run, jump, or throw. But to his credit he laughed at his erratic performances and tried even harder to succeed. The kids respected him for being the oldest in the group. They also sensed his determination and cheered his efforts, no matter how poor his results. Tim was having a wonderful time.

The hot afternoons of August burned the enthusiasm out of the group. We did some swimming, watched a few movies, but boredom was setting in. On one of those afternoons, Tim brought in a model airplane he had made. The children were excited by its beauty, authenticity and Tim's knowledge about it. They marveled at the plane and insisted it be permanently displayed in the game room's empty bookcase.

Then a miracle happened.

Tim asked if everyone would like to learn how to build a model. The clamor of approval was deafening. Model building was unanimously voted in as an every day activity.

I gave Tim the title of Vice-President in Charge of Model Making. The next day I walked the group to a local variety store and bought each child a modeling kit. It almost created culture shock when the kids picked out their choices. Tim passed on the degree of building difficulty for each kit and judged its suitability for the age of the child who would build it.

We stocked up on glue, paints, brushes, and building kits for cars, planes, trucks, boats, dinosaurs, fire engines, dolls with clothing to sew together, and whatever. Then we walked back to the Settlement House.

I could not understand why the children were in awe of those models until Laura explained it was the first time most of them had something of their own. Some of the children just stared at the pictures on the box and got lost in some sort of reverie.

Tim took charge of the work tables and insisted the kids work slowly and accurately. He insisted on the sharing of common tools and would carefully explain the assembly directions for each model. Never in my life have I seen a more interested, cooperative, and attentive group of children. Tim was king of the room



and was loved for the gentle way he encouraged each child.

The only bad feature of the activity was that the children wanted to do nothing else. So I instituted a rule that modeling would only be from 1:30 pm to 4:00 pm each afternoon. The rule kept modeling enthusiasm high and balanced the activities program.

The children were protective of their models and took huge pride in building them. With Tim's help, it was astonishing to see the children develop skills, standards of workmanship, and a growing interest in reading directions. Three weeks went by very quickly and then we were in the last days of the summer program.

Laura and I planned "Display Day" when all the models would be put on exhibit in the empty bookshelves. Each child filled out a card stating his/her name, age, and facts about their model. On our final day, the display went public and very happy parents came to see it. Laura served ice cream bars to all.

Then I sat the children down in a group. I told them how I much loved them and how proud I was of their

group. To prove it, I gave each one a red T-shirt emblazoned with white block letters saying "Garcia Street Settlement House." The children were ecstatic as they put them on. Then we all went out and sat on the porch steps hugging each other, waving and laughing while Laura took a group picture. It was a sensational final day.

The following morning I came to say goodbye to Laura. Actually, we didn't really say much. We just quietly hugged each other for several minutes. I knew Laura sensed it was the last time I would see her and the Garcia Street Settlement House. I too knew it was over.

#### ADDENDUM

One day early in June, eleven years later, I received a phone call from a woman asking if I remembered a boy named Tim McConnell. I was thrilled to say that I did. She identified herself as Mrs. McConnell and asked me if I would give her son the happiest surprise of his life by joining her two days later at his graduation from Columbia University Law School. At the risk of indulging my feelings, I confess tears still well up in my eyes when I think of Laura, those kids, and (now) attorney Tim McConnell.

It's time for your shower.  
Once there, let your mind  
wander and enjoy the  
revelations, surprises,  
and joy. Peace,  
Alton Smith



ABOUT THE AUTHOR  
ON ALTON, BY JOSH KRAWITZ\*

I almost had to jog to keep up with him. He would stalk around the 1/5 mile track in deck shoes, no socks, arms swinging like pendulums. These walks had become more important during his love affair with Dunkin' Donuts, and he never missed a day. He never missed an advisory either, because he felt that ten minutes of free, uninhibited interaction with his students, his friends, was his most important educational function.

In tenth grade, for the second time, I was cut from the Junior Varsity Basketball team. It hurt, but he refused to accept any self pity: "You're too talented to waste time with that crap. I know, I've done it my whole life. Forget about it. And if you think jocks are the only ones who get laid ...," he digressed in typical fashion.

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\*Krawitz graduated from the Fieldston School. Written in 4/8/87 about the "most important person in my life," this essay was required for part of the application for admission to the Columbia University Graduate Film Division.

For months we had been hearing stories about Smitty's short-lived career as a journalist. "I'm telling you son, in a few years no one's going to remember how many points you scored against Horace Mann. Learn to write, express yourself. You've got a mind. Use it. If you can write, if you can write clear, concise prose, you'll have a place in this world." I didn't understand how a man could give up a profession to coach high school sports. He sensed my attitude: "Don't be a fool, Krawitz. Some people are born to run around in a slouch hat, scooping each other and busting their asses for a good byline. I wasn't one of them."

One year later I was the football and track reporter at school. The following summer I studied journalism at Northwestern University. I became Sports Editor of the Fieldston News, then continued my studies in a Freshman college course "Writing for the Mass Media," transferred and eventually took up creative writing. I credit Smith with being the first credible person (with a sense of humor) to recommend I exercise the power of my critical thought.

My most lasting memory of Smitty is straight talk. He never deferred to authority or pandered to supposedly difficult students. And what a voice! His bark

combined the New England bastardization "ah" of the "ar" sound, with a guttural New York delicatessen dialect.

Sometimes he would get carried away and spend an entire gym class pontificating. He hated cigarettes, particularly when smoked by smug teenagers wearing sun glasses, elbows cocked in car windows, thinking they're on television. "You might as well stick your head in the back of a bus. It'll kill you just as fast, but it's a helluva lot cheaper."

One morning I had the good fortune to walk up "the hill" with Smith. It was cold, the pace was brisk and we had the misfortune to walk by another 10th grader, who was smoking as he trudged up the hill. Smitty, without breaking stride, blurted out, "you're body is shit." It was meant, ultimately, in a positive, way but the sight of this pompous, disillusioned tenth-grader made him so sick it was hysterical.

Smitty reviled the administrators that had passively let Fieldston become "another goddamn expensive prep school." He was outspoken and volatile -- we could measure his anger by the size and hue of the vein bulging across his forehead -- and also pragmatic; he

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was the first (and only) person to stand on a desk and sing "three cheers for tenure."

The last time I visited, we walked through the quadrangle and passed some young students who were at play slap-fighting one another. Smitty said, "Aah, gentlemen! The art of Jewish fighting...no one gets hurt." They broke into hysterics. It was still a great line. Smith was his own person, and I credit him with helping me find an outlet for my energies and passion.