From 14 to 21

How I grew from a 14-year-old runaway to a 21-year-old university student

By Ronald James Brown

I left home at 14 and struck out on my own. With the help and guidance of key people along the way, I eventually enrolled in university and made a professional career for myself. The story begins at the Salvation Army Men's Hostel in downtown Toronto in 1960 and ends in Montreal at Sir George Williams University in 1967.

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Every year tens of thousands of young people leave home. Many succumb to the demands of difficult circumstances for which they are not prepared. Some succeed. Many people, on learning that I was one of those who left home at a young age yet built a successful career and family, make a number of assumptions about why I succeeded when so many others do not.

I tell my story both to refute their assumptions, but also to pay tribute to the people along the way who made me the person that I could become.

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01. My First Mentor: Mac Belt

I first met Mac Belt in late October 1960. He was a counselor with the Big Brothers in Toronto and he worked out of a grand old mansion on Jarvis Street. My appointment had been arranged by the Salvation Army. I had spent my first night away from home at the men's shelter on Sherbourne and Queen Streets after a couple who owned a small convenience store gave me a bus ticket and a twenty-five cent coin when I showed up in their store in suburban Toronto asking for work. Not knowing what else to do when I found myself homeless in a strange city at 14, I had gone to small businesses along the street, asking if they had any work for me. My inspiration for that was the novels by Horatio Alger I had read a few years before. You know, honest orphan acts responsibly and is adopted by an older single millionaire who recognizes his innate goodness. When I arrived at the shelter, lining up behind the other men awaiting my turn, I listened to what each said to the man in the cage. They'd exchange few words, a coin would slide across the counter, a ticket would be returned, and then a loud buzzer would sound so the man could open a door beside the custodian's cage.

When my turn came I slid my quarter across the counter and said, in imitation of the men before me, "Bed and breakfast." Instead of automatically issuing me a meal ticket the man looked closely at me and asked, "How old are you?" "Seventeen," I answered bravely. "What's your name?" I had already thought of that. At home I had been called Jim, though my first given name was Ronald. I knew it best to stick to a name close to my own so I'd have no trouble remembering it. "Ron White." He slid a sheet of paper and a pencil across the counter and asked me to write out my full name. So I wrote, "Ronald James White." He took the paper then gave me the pink ticket. "You'll be in the Snake Pit tonight. Down the stairs and to your right. Be careful. Sleep with your jacket on and keep your shoes under your pillow." The buzzer sounded.

I did not sleep well in the room filled with a half dozen silent men on steel-framed single beds and was embarrassed by the dirt my shoes left on the sheet. Breakfast was porridge and toast with watery tea, milk and sugar already added, served in a dining hall filled with men intent on scraping up every bit of their gruel. As I was leaving with no plans of what to do next a teenager offered me a cigarette and asked me how old I was. When I said, "Seventeen" he said, "Me too." He then explained to me how to get to the Salvation Army's Social Services Centre and said I should tell them a good story and they'd give me some more meal tickets. I wandered westwards along Queen Street in the bright cold sunshine, marvelling at the amazing height of the skyscrapers that came into view as I approached Yonge Street. I estimated that some of them were more than 10 stories high, maybe as much as 15. North along Yonge Street, past stores I knew from their commercials ("People's Credit Jewelers" whose jingle I could not get out of my head). A short block east on College Street and I arrived at the Salvation Army Social Services Centre and waited my turn on a wooden chair, marvelling at a box filled with eyeglasses with a sign inviting everyone to help themselves or to donate. I could not imagine wearing eye glasses previously worn by someone else.

A man in a Salvation Army uniform invited me to his office, took down my information (all of it false) and then asked what he could do for me. I hadn't thought ahead that far and blurted the first thing that

popped into my head. “I want to go to school.” That, apparently, was the right answer. He asked me to wait in the waiting area. Ten minutes later he called me back and told me to go back to the Men’s Hostel and ask to see the Major.

Back at the Sally Ann, as I was learning to call it, the man in the front cage directed me to a different door, this one not requiring a buzzer. The Major was a steel-grey-haired gentleman in full dress uniform who told me that I could work in the kitchen in exchange for room and board while they worked things out. He also told me that there were regular worship services that I was expected to attend. I had an appointment at the Big Brothers in a few days; the man in the cage out front would supply me with streetcar tickets and instructions. He directed an employee, in street clothes, to take me to the kitchen to meet the head cook and then show me the cubicle where I’d be staying. It was a large industrial kitchen with massive machines. It was quiet at that time of day and the few men dressed in whites and aprons looked at me curiously as the head cook explained that I’d be working from 6 am until 1 pm, and then from 3 pm until 6 or so. Someone would wake me in the morning. “And don’t give me any grey hairs!” he admonished me. My cubicle was a tin-enclosed area, open at the top of the six foot high walls, and against a brick outer wall. There was a window that looked out on another brick wall about two feet away. I had a single bed, a cot really, a small wardrobe, and small dresser. I was given a toothbrush, comb, and a few pairs of underwear and socks neatly folded.

In the morning I was directed to dress in white pants, shirt, and a white apron, all of which hung on hooks in a small dressing room beside the kitchen. Half a dozen men worked in the kitchen, all intent on their tasks. I was given the job of clarifying butter, a completely new process to me. As cubes of butter melted in a sauce pan I had to scoop out the curds as they formed and floated to the top of the liquid. I was then shown how to operate the toaster, a contraption on which one placed the bread on a moving tractor feed that hauled the bread up and around a heating element. The toast would then fall out of the bottom of the machine. I had to swipe each piece of toast with a paint brush that I dipped into the clarified butter. The entire procedure was foreign to me, but I marvelled at the technical ingenuity of it, even down to using a paint brush to spread butter.

The men to be fed lined up single file, took a tray from a stack, and pushed it along a narrow counter that separated the kitchen from the dining area. An employee would dollop a ladle of porridge into bowls and the client would select one then place it on his tray; the man would move to the next station where he’d receive two pieces of toast that I had painted with clarified butter. Tea was served from a large caldron with sugar and milk already mixed in, ladled into cups. They’d shuffle off to long tables, most eating quickly with their faces close to their bowls. When finished they’d bring their trays with used dishes and utensils to a window where I was assigned to collect them, scraping the remainders into a large garbage can that I was told would be sold to famers as pig slop and stacking items into trays prepared for the automatic dishwasher. I’d shove trays as they filled into the maw of the dishwasher and then sort and stack items as they emerged at the other end. I learned that cutlery fresh from an industrial dishwasher is hot enough to burn.

When all the men had finished and shuffled off to hang around before the mission, smoking and gossiping, before starting their daily routines, I had to wipe down the tables, stack the chairs on the

tables, and then mop the floor. It was time to start the preparations for lunch. After lunch (usually soup and sandwiches) had been served, I'd again clean the dining hall, finish sorting and stacking dishes and cutlery, then mop the entire kitchen floor. Dinner would already be slow cooking in the massively-sized caldrons, and I'd achingly return to my cubicle for my two-hour break. Back to work for the supper shift and then final cleanup of everything, leaving the kitchen and dining room sparkling clean awaiting the next day's repetition. My first evening the youngest member of the staff, a chubby young man in his twenties invited me to his room. It was not much bigger than mine, but at least it had regular walls. He let me chose a tie from his collection and gave me that day's Toronto Star so I'd have something to read before going to sleep.

So, there I was. I had left home only 48 hours before and I had already a room of my own and had put in a long day's work.

Next day I did it all again. My main tasks were the simple menial jobs that had to be done, like feeding the dishwasher, mopping the floors, minding the toaster, scrapping dirty dishes into the slop pail. But I did it all without complaint. My fellow workers pretty much kept to themselves. They were friendly enough, but distant. The head cook was in his mid-thirties and talked in a loud commanding voice. He gave orders curtly, fully confident in what he was doing. He called me "The Kid," and so that's what the others called me. I didn't mind. He'd order someone, "Joe, show The Kid how to clean the meat slicer and don't let him cut his fingers off." "You!" he'd shout at me, "Do it right the first time—and don't give me any grey hairs!" The order regarding the grey hairs was one I'd hear several times a shift.

Thursday was my appointment at the Big Brothers and I had to leave the lunch shift early. All the other staff members seemed to know about my appointment and wished me luck. The man who had given me the tie suggested that I wear it and so I did. The Big Brother offices were in a Jarvis Street Victorian mansion converted into offices. A large stone staircase led up to the main door, heavy oak with leaded stained glass for windows. A Dutch door, the top half open, marked off the receptionist's area. Mac Belt's office was on the second floor, up a long curving open staircase. He was waiting for me at the top of the stairs. "Well, Ronnie White, welcome!" he beamed, hand out for a handshake. "Right this way." He led me into his office. It could have been a sitting room at one time. It was very large, his desk before a large bay window had two chairs before it. "Have a seat," he indicated, and asked if I had had any trouble finding the place while he circled his desk and sat in his office chair.

He was a short man with thin white-hair and a rotund belly. He offered me a cigarette and we both lit up. He pulled out a writing pad and took down my particulars. Name, age, where I was from, how I wound up homeless. I had chosen 17 as my age, knowing that if anyone knew my real age, I'd likely be hauled off to a police station and packed off home. Seventeen seemed old enough to be on one's own, yet not too old as I knew I'd never be able to convince anyone I was older than that. I thought it unlikely I'd be able to convince them I was 17, but it wasn't so far from the truth as to be totally unbelievable. My story was I was orphaned. I had been living with an aunt and uncle in Sarnia who had recently died. Again, fact interwoven with fiction. I did have an aunt and uncle in Sarnia, but they were very much alive. I knew enough about Sarnia's streets and general layout to be able to create an illusion that I knew the city well. When he asked what school I had attended, I didn't hesitate to name "Sarnia Collegiate." I

didn't know if there was actually a school by that name, but cities tended to name their schools after themselves.

Preliminaries out of the way he asked how I was making out at the Sally Ann and if they were treating me well. I didn't know what "well" meant in that context, so I shrugged. He asked about my work there, how I got along with the other men. He seemed satisfied with my one-word "Okay" replies. Did I have enough clothing? I explained that they had given me a few basic items. He asked where I got the tie and I told him that one of the men who worked in the kitchen gave it to me. He asked me if the man had asked for anything in return. I was surprised because I thought that Mr. Belt understood that I had nothing to give in return. I never realized until I was writing this that Mr. Belt had a way of asking about sexual exploitation in such a way that I never realized that that was what he was asking about. If he had have been more explicit I likely would have refused to answer. Even if the man who gave me the necktie had wanted anything in return, it was too subtly expressed for me to pick up. In any case, I simply could not talk about anything remotely related to sex with an adult; it was unthinkable to me. Sexual interest was something hidden and shared only through hints, bad jokes, and suggestions with peers.

He then got up and laid out a table-top hockey game, with push-pull rods to control the players, on his desk and challenged me to a game. He won easily. We played a few games, always with the same result. He did that for my first few visits and then switched to checkers. He continued to challenge me to a game of checkers every time I met him over the next several years and I don't recall ever having won a single game against him. Also, at the end of every meeting with him he gave me two street-car tickets. One to get home on and one for the next visit. We made an appointment for a week from my first meeting. He gave me a cigarette "for the road" and shook my hand as we parted.

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That evening after the dinner shift was over all the men who worked in the kitchen, except for the head chef, filed into a room next to the dining room that was set up as a chapel. The folding chairs filled up with "customers" as the men who relied on the Salvation Army mission were often referred to. A woman in a Salvation Army uniform sat in a bench before the upright piano and the Major led the service. We sang hymns like "The Old Rugged Cross" and "Amazing Grace" while the woman pounded out the chords with a military meter. The Major read a few short passages from the Bible, mainly from the "Gospel of John" and "Revelations." The men in attendance were encouraged to testify. One especially decrepit-looking man stood to announce that he had fallen into a gutter, so drunk he could not stand, when an angel from heaven came down and "lifted him up." The Major and the pianist muttered "Halleluiah. Praise the Lord!" and the congregation rumbled something in reply. After service the men filed into the dining room where cups of pre-sweetened tea and a small slice of carrot cake was served to each of them.

Friday, I was told, was pay day. After the lunch shift the kitchen workers lined up in the dining room waiting their turn with the paymaster who was seated at a small table. He had a leger book and envelopes with each man's name on them. Each man was solemnly handed his envelope and I could see that each contained cash that the employee would quickly count before heading off to the street or to

his room. The paymaster looked surprised when I stood before his desk and told me he was sorry, but he had nothing for me. “But I work here,” I protested. There was nothing he could do, he told me. Later that day I was told that the Major wanted to see me. I sat across from his desk.

“I thought you understood,” he told me. “We are providing you with room and board.”

“But I work like everybody else,” I told him. “I don’t have any money.”

He reflected for a moment then said that he would give me a dollar a day in addition to my room and board. That seemed reasonable to me and I agreed. He took four dollars from his wallet and handed it to me as my pay for the four days I had worked so far. From then on, each Friday the pay master had an envelope for me containing seven dollars, one for each day I had worked that week. As I recall I was not docked pay for missing work due to appointments with Mr. Belt or other authorized absences.

Other than cigarettes which, in those days, cost about twenty-five cents a pack (the same as the cost of a bed for the night and breakfast at the Sally Ann), I had no need of any money. There was a small used book store on the other side of Queen Street where I would buy copies of The Toronto Star. I also bought used comic books for five cents each, sometimes two for a nickel. So, the money began to accumulate in my pocket. The kitchen workers warned me that the women who loitered in front of the book store were prostitutes and that I should stay away from them. None of them bothered me, as I was just another kid in their eyes. In any case, I would have had no idea what to do with such a woman even if I did have enough money to purchase their services.

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On Monday I was called to the Major’s office after the breakfast and lunch shift was over. He told me that he had been pleased to see me at the evening service and asked me how I was getting along. I told him that everything was fine. He then told me that he had a special job for me. There was a woman staying at the Royal York Hotel who needed a man to carry her display cases for her whole she went on sales calls. Was I interested? I shrugged my consent, curious. I had to be clean and polite. Could I manage it? Sure. He told me to be cleaned up, dressed in a tie, at 11:00 am next morning and the man in the front cage would give me directions.

“What about my work in the kitchen?” I asked.

“Work the breakfast shift until 10:30, then get ready. You can go back to the kitchen when you get back.”

Of course my fellow workers already knew all the details when I returned to the kitchen, teasing me about working for a woman at the Royal York, hinting that I’d be doing more than carrying her cases. The Royal York was the ritziest and most expensive hotel in Toronto and a visit to its august premises was something far beyond the dreams of the kitchen workers. Next morning, after I had combed my hair and knotted the tie about my neck, the man at the front desk gave me two streetcar tickets and told me how to get to the Royal York. He warned me to be polite and respectful.

The opulence of the Royal York was overwhelming. I politely inquired after the woman I was told to meet at the front desk and stood awkwardly to the side until a stunningly beautiful woman emerged from an elevator and approached me, hand outstretched. “You must be from the Salvation Army,” she said, shaking my hand. “I am pleased to meet with you. And you are called?” I told her my name. An almost gentle exotic perfume enveloped her. She was dressed in a skirted business suit, a white blouse with some lace work at the front, and highly polished black high heeled shoes. She had a soft French accent. “You will do,” she said after looking me over. “Come with me.” And she led me back to the elevator. We rode to her floor in silence. Once in her room, I stood awkwardly while she gestured at two small suitcases. “I will require of you to carry these for me. Can you manage this?” I agreed that I could. “Bon. Let us go then,” she said. I picked up the two cases and followed from her room back down to the lobby and out to the street before the hotel where a taxi was waiting for us.

I kept one case at my feet, the other on my lap. She explained as we rode that she was from Montreal and represented a watch company. Our first stop was the People’s Credit Jewelers store on Yonge Street. I carried her cases to a small office at the back of the store, and then sat in a chair just outside the office and waited while she conducted her business behind the closed door. Half an hour later she emerged, I jumped to my feet and retrieved the cases from the office while she chatted with the manager. Another short taxi ride to another jeweler further north along Yonge. As I waited outside the manager’s office this time, I fell asleep, then came to with a start. A large clock on the wall showed it was 3:30. I jumped to my feet, assuming I had slept the entire afternoon and evening away. In a panic, I rushed out to the street, wondering why she had left me there and why there were so many people on the sidewalk in the wee hours of the morning. My head finally cleared and I realized that it was actually late afternoon. I returned to my chair and waited.

When she completed her business, we took a taxi back to the Royal York Hotel. As I followed her through the lobby I felt dirty and out of place. Though I had been at the Salvation Army Hostel for only a week I felt as though I had become one of the grubby and shabbily dressed men. Once in her room she opened her purse and took out a five dollar bill, holding it out to me. “You have done a good job for me,” she said and then sat while I stood unsure of myself.

“So tell me,” she asked. “You look like a nice boy. Why are you resting at the Salvation Army?”

Her use of the verb “rest” momentarily confused me, but I understood the intent of the question. I told her my story of being orphaned and then my aunt and uncle dying. I was now on my own.

“So, have you the plans?” she asked.

“The Salvation Army is working on getting me back to school. The Big Brothers are helping,” I explained.

“Ah, bon. That is good. You must go at the school.”

She then told me she was returning the following week and asked if I would be available to help her again. I assured her that I would be.

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Back in the kitchen the men asked about my date, implying that I did more than carry the woman's cases. I was embarrassed. There was a man I hadn't met before working that dinner shift. His name was David. He was, perhaps, in his early sixties, a soft-looking and apparently gentle man. He had lost his thumb in the meat slicer the day before I had started work and this was his first day back, a large bandage where his thumb used to be. He was shy, but friendly, and told me he was having trouble rolling cigarettes, could I help him out? After work, we went back to his room, which was a little larger and better furnished than the young man's room I had been in the day I started. He showed me his cigarette rolling machine. I'd lay a twelve inch long cigarette paper the length of it, fill it with tobacco, lick the adhesive and then roll the paper and tobacco through the machine which produced an even tube. There were slots in the machine marking where I could use a razor blade to cut the super cigarette to produce three king-sized cigarettes or four regular-sized ones. I rolled enough cigarettes for David to be able to fill an empty commercial package and then rolled another half dozen for myself.

Over the next few days I spent a lot of time with David. Each evening I'd roll a package of cigarettes for him and he'd ask me questions about my background. One evening he told me that when he met me it was as if he had been digging in a mine, in the black muck, and had found a diamond. He sometimes hugged me when he told me things like that. I stood passively while he clutched me to his chest. Otherwise, he never touched me.

The other men in the kitchen had never been overly-friendly with me. They were polite, but distant, as if they sensed that I did not belong there. There was a very fat man who kept to himself working quietly in a corner of the kitchen. I never knew what he did and I don't think he ever spoke to me. There was a very thin, intense man, who did not seem to like me and kept his distance. The chubby young man who had given me a tie the first day was more distant with me after David returned to work. He later told me that this was deliberate on his part, as he saw how friendly David and I had become and said he "didn't want to interfere." I did not understand what he meant and didn't ask.

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One evening after I had rolled David's package of cigarettes, I decided to go for a walk. Though it was early November, it was a pleasant evening. As I stood on the sidewalk outside the Sally Ann, lighting a cigarette while deciding which way to head, a young man said hello and asked me my name. He was maybe in his 20's, a bit better dressed than most of the men at the Sally Ann, and definitely chubby—something out of place where most of the men were raggedly thin. We started talking and he said he was going for a walk as well, could he join me? Why not? We cut across the park across the street from the hostel, then meandered along the streets. He pointed to a restaurant with an awning over the front door and said something about it being a fancy place. I thought he meant to enter it and turned, but he stopped me saying it was far too expensive for us.

As we headed back towards to Sally Ann along Queen Street he stopped before a restaurant and said, "Come on." I assumed he wanted a coffee or snack and so followed him into the restaurant. "Come on," he beckoned, heading towards the back of the restaurant and to a set of stairs that led downward to the restrooms. I had no idea what was going on but I followed obediently. A man behind the counter looked

alarmed. At the bottom of the stairs my companion turned so that he stood close to me and started manipulating my genitals through my clothing. He had a strange glassy look in his eyes and was breathing heavily. I was 14 and immediately responded with an erection to his attentions, but I tried to back away. I had a very small pocket knife that I grasped in my pocket and opened.

“Stop,” I said, as confidently as I could, starting to draw the knife from my pocket.

He looked puzzled. “What’s wrong?” he asked. “Don’t you like it?”

“Just stop,” I repeated.

Fortunately he stepped back and said, “I just thought you might like it.”

I stumbled up the stairs and walked quickly through the restaurant. Once outside I walked away from the Salvation Army as I was worried he’d follow me. I circled around a few blocks and checked carefully to make sure he was not in sight when I slipped back into the safety of the Sally Ann.

I said earlier that David never touched me inappropriately, but that it not quite true. One day he had me lay on his bed next to him while he hugged me. As usual, I lay stiffly and unresponsive as he hugged me and went on about what a beautiful jewel I was. Suddenly he reached down and quickly touched my genitals saying, “Has Ronnie got a hard-on?” I definitely did not and would have been frightened if I had, but his touch was very brief and he immediately drew his hand away. Otherwise, he sometimes hinted that he’d like to do more than hug me but he never went any further. Looking back I can see that he was deeply conflicted. He liked and respected me enough to keep his desires under control, but it must have been very difficult for him. He told me he was seeing a psychiatrist and said that the doctor had advised him not to touch me. Remember that homosexuality was seen as an illness then and homosexual acts were against the law. That also might have been playing a role in David’s restraint, but I never thought of him as a “dirty old man” and he never repelled me the way that the chubby young man had in the restaurant restroom. Even in my naivety I saw David as a lonely person fighting a silent battle with demons I did not understand.

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At my next appoint with Mr. Belt my story unravelled. He had a writing pad before him on his desk and told me that it was necessary to contact my former school to get my records if they were going to get me back to school. “Let’s see,” he started, “Sarnia Collegiate, I think you said. Right?”

I knew there was no point to further lying. I could not look at him. “No,” I whispered. “I didn’t go there.”

He waited quietly while I struggled to find the right words. I looked out the window, at the walls, at the table hockey game leaning against a wall in the corner.

“I didn’t live in Sarnia,” I said in a strangled voice, having to force each word.

He waited.

“I’m not 17.”

He waited.

“My parents aren’t dead.”

He waited.

“I don’t want to go home,” I said in a rush.

“No one is going to make you go home,” he said quietly.

“But I’m only 14.”

He repeated himself, “No one is going to make you go home, Ron. That is your name, right?”

“Sort of,” I said, and then explained about how I had been called Jim at home, but that was really my middle name.

“Do you prefer Jim or Ron?” he asked.

I paused for a moment and then, deciding that if this was a new life I was choosing for myself, I was going to use the name I preferred.

“Ron.”

“Okay, Ron it is.”

He then proceeded to write down the correct information about my name, school, and background, including my former address and telephone number. He never once asked me why I had left home and in the six years I knew him before he died he never once asked about my home life. I had said I didn’t want to return there and that was good enough for him. That is how I wanted it and I was grateful that Mac Belt, and the other mentors I got to know in the coming years, respected my right to choose my life’s path.

“I hope you realize,” he said when we were finished, “that I am going to have to contact your father. There’s the matter of school taxes to sort out if you are going to go to school in Toronto.”

When I heard that I was going to go to school in Toronto I felt a momentary elation. It was something that could actually happen. If contacting my father was the price to pay, so be it. I trusted Mr Belt and the Salvation Army major to protect me. They had made it clear that they were on my side.

Mr. Belt then told me he was working on a plan and that he would let me know when he had something definite to share with me. And then he pulled out his checker board, which I learned was his way of saying that the working part of our meeting was over and that I could relax.

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When I returned to the Sally Ann the man in the front cage told me that the major wanted to see me. The major, as always, was seated behind his desk. He curtly told me to sit down and then stared at me for what seemed a long time.

Finally he said, “Well, I hope you have learned something about lying.”

I had no idea what I was supposed to have learned but I agreed with him.

“Fine. Go back to the kitchen.”

Of course all the men in the kitchen already knew what had transpired. David, especially, looked stunned.

That night in his room he kept shaking his head, “Fourteen! Fourteen! My God.”

I was deeply embarrassed and for the next few days was wary about possible fallout, but, when nothing happened and things fell back into routine, I relaxed.

At my next weekly meeting with Mr Belt he showed me a letter he had received from my father. I read through it quickly. “I will not be held responsible for the actions of an immature child.” read one of the lines. I gave the letter back to Mr Belt.

“What do you think?” he asked.

“He thinks I’m a child,” I complained.

He then told me that he had made arrangements with a home so I could go back to school. He described it briefly as a home for troubled boys in the city’s east end. Its managers, Mr and Mrs Strickland, were dedicated people who had established the home in response to what they perceived as a need. After studying several such institutions they had settled on a form that they thought worked best. If interested, I had an appointment to meet them the next day. Of course I was interested, so Mr Belt gave me some streetcar tickets and careful instructions on how to find the Toronto Boys’ Home on Queen Street East behind the Greenwood Community Centre. “Wear your tie and be polite,” were his final words of advice.

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I sat at the front of the streetcar, nervously watching the street signs as I rode east along Queen Street. I marvelled at Parliament Street with its gaudily painted wooden houses with curly-cue decorated balconies. Then Sackville and Sumach Streets with more slum housing. We crossed the Don River, bordered by decrepit buildings overlooking a foul-smelling oily slick with dead fish floating belly-up. We passed old factories, warehouses, railway tracks, and bars and convenience stores in crumbling brick buildings. At Logan Avenue I disembarked and walked west past WoodGreen United Church to Booth Street. The boys’ home was the first house on the west side of Booth. It was an ordinary-looking two story semi-detached home with no sign or indication that it was anything other than a working-class family home. A high fence separated it from the WoodGreen Community Centre and its driveway was

fenced off with a high chain-link gate. Four wooden steps led up to the roofed porch and the front door. A very short, intense man with slicked black hair greeted me enthusiastically and invited me into his home where I was to live for the next eighteen months.

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The woman from the Royal York hotel sent me money orders for twenty dollars each for the next two Christmases. She phoned once when I lived at the Home and I took a streetcar to the Royal York where we shared a coffee at the bar and she asked about my school life. I received a wedding invitation from her, but I did not know what to do with it. At 15 I could hardly be expected to go to Montreal for the weekend. Still I kept the ornate card for a few years.

I saw David once again shortly after I started living at the Home. He told me that he missed me, but wished me luck. He hugged me for a very long time. I never saw anyone that I had known at the Sally Ann again.

I continued as one of Mac Belt's clients over the years. At first we met weekly in his office and played checkers. When I was hospitalized he visited me weekly and worked with the Ontario government to get me a full scholarship for Upper Canada College (which I turned down). He got me jobs over the years and expressed disappointment when I messed up. He would sometimes invite me to his home that he shared with his wife, for dinner and to watch the hockey game. He showed score of a composition I had written to a member of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and reported back that it was thought highly of and that I showed a lot of talent and potential. For several months when I was 18 he met me weekly for lunch near the Big brothers office. But once I settled down into a job that I held onto and moved in with a girlfriend, I no longer kept in touch…and then, in June of 1967, six and a half years after I had first met him, I called the Big Brother office to share the news with him that I had been accepted into university.

The woman who answered the phone sounded startled when I asked for Mr Belt and passed the phone to a gentleman who asked me what my call was about. I told him it was personal. He then said that Mr Belt had passed away about a year before. He had always believed in me. I've always regretted that he never found out that his faith had been justified.

01. My Second Mentor: Roy Strickland

Roy Strickland was short and had a high-pitched voice but he commanded attention with an intense forceful manner. We sat in two winged chairs in the tiny sitting room before a black and white television set and an uptight piano. The room opened directly to the dining room which was filled with two long tables set in an open V. He introduced his wife Irma, a tall woman with a nervous air. She offered me tea which was served to me in a china cup and some cookies. Mr Strickland told me that his wife was from Prescott and said, as he repeated several times over the nearly forty years that I knew him before he died, "You can take the girl out of the farm, but you can't take the farm out of the girl." All the time that I lived at the Home he called her Mrs Strickland when speaking to us boys.

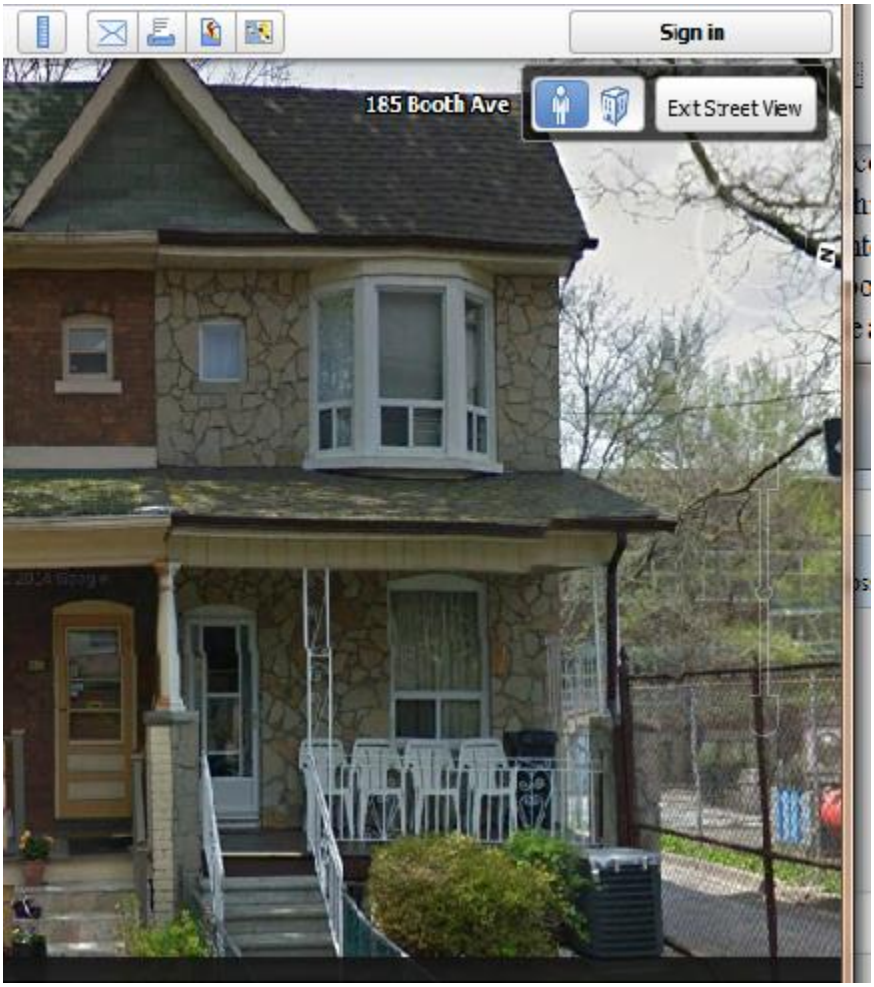
He told me that they had studied different ways of helping out troubled young men and had even visited The Boys' Town in Nebraska made famous in the movie starring Spencer Tracy and Mickey Rooney and had concluded that the best approach was to create a family-like atmosphere. The boys were all part of a family and had chores and responsibilities like the boys in any normal home. I had no idea what a normal home was, but I took his word for it.

He repeated what Mr Belt had told him about my background and said that they had reports that I was an excellent worker in the Salvation Army's kitchen. He asked what subjects I enjoyed in school and I was particularly interested in. When I told him I enjoyed choral music and taking part in productions of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, he said, "Mrs Strickland and I saw 'The Gondoliers' just two weeks ago, right Irma?" He was delighted when I told him I had a part in the chorus of that work a year earlier. He then picked up the phone and dialed, saying, "Mac Belt, please" when someone answered.

"I think young Mr Brown here will do just fine," he announced. "He should fit right in. Yes, very polite and articulate."

When he hung up he asked me when I could move in. I thought about my work back at the Salvation Army and thought it only fair I should give them some notice and said so. "I think three days should be okay," I offered. "That will be fine," he replied, shook my hand, then offered to show me the premises.

The kitchen was small and was dominated by a rotund young woman named Miss Kelly, the cook. He showed me two of the upstairs bedrooms each of which contained a pair of bunkbeds. He and his wife shared the third bedroom, but he didn't show it to me. Then out the back door and onto the yard shared with the house on the next street, Empire Avenue. The driveway continued along the side of the property adjoining the two buildings. It was also fenced off at the far end. We entered the Empire Avenue house by the rear door and met Mrs. Jones, an elderly obese woman with a sad air, who was the house mother. The kitchen area had been opened up to make a common area with the former dining room. Mrs. Jones had the front sitting room as her private bedroom, curtained off from the rest. The whole time Mr Strickland kept up a constant chatter about how they had been lucky to acquire two houses back to back and how they had fought the city to have the lane way adjoining the properties closed off. He told me about the Delveccio family who occupied the other half of the semi-detached



1 The Toronto Boys' Home: 1957 - 1967

building on Empire Avenue. He didn't think much of them, referring to the father as a drunk and their kids as a dirty gang of ragamuffins. He advised me to stay away from the 13-year-old daughter who had a very "bad reputation." The second floor had a bathroom and three bedrooms. The rear bedroom was small and held a single bed. The fire escape door led off of it to a steel staircase that the city had insisted on. The middle bedroom had two single beds side by side. The front room had a single bed along one wall, and a single under the front bay window.

"I recommend that you claim the bed by the window," Mr Strickland told me, which is what I did. I looked out the window overlooking the street. Empire Avenue was mainly semi-detached two story homes, run down, with a warehouse at the intersection where it joined Queen Street. In the distance to the southwest I could see a large oil storage tank.

We shook hands and I returned to the Salvation Army men's shelter, anxious to begin my new life, nervous, but determined to make the best of it.

I celebrated my 15th birthday at the Boys' Home a week or so later.

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The history of the Toronto Boys' Home is somewhat confusing. I can find no mention of the home on Booth and Empire Avenues in whatever mention of the Home I can find on the web. A Toronto Boys' Home had been founded in 1859 as a refuge for homeless and abused boys. It was managed by a board of directors and funded through philanthropic donations. I know that when I was resident there a group of elderly gentleman appeared one day in chauffeur-driven Bentleys and Rolls Royces for a brief visit. I was told that they were the board of directors. The Stricklands had run the home at the location I knew

since about 1957 and were still there in 1967, the last time I visited it. Shortly after my last visit Mr Strickland began a career as a school teacher, a job he held until he retired.

What history I have been able to glean is that the Children's Aid Society took over running the Home in 1967 and it apparently moved to a larger location with a larger staff. Today there is an institution called "The Toronto Boys' Home" located on Logan Avenue (about a block from the Booth Street home that I knew), but I can't find any information on it. Both Mr and Mrs Strickland are now deceased.

I had the front room with the view of Empire Avenue to myself. There were three boys, all much younger than me, in the other two bedrooms. There were four boys in the main house all about my age. Jack was to remain my friend for many years. He bunked with Michael, a very troubled boy a year younger than me. Michael was moved in with me after about a year. We were never close and last I heard he was going through the juvenile detention-prison system for armed robbery, among other offenses. I didn't take to Jack at first, but started chumming with one of the other two boys. Kyle was my age and he and I would go for long walks in the evenings, smoking and talking about girls. The local elementary school held a dance every Friday that anyone under 16 could attend and Kyle and I would go together. Afterwards he would tell me about the girls he had felt up during the dance. I was far too shy and inhibited to be that aggressive with girls and I listened to his descriptions enthralled. One night we encountered the Delveccio girl that Mr Strickland had warned me away from. She was with a friend. Kyle whispered to me that we should put our arms around them as we walked and talked, but he never made a move.

Two days before Christmas the Children's Aid Society moved in to take Kyle and his roommate away. They were being transferred to a foster home. They were in tears, protesting, "But this has been our home for the past two years and Christmas is only a few days away." Mr Strickland argued forcefully with the officials, but nothing would move them. Kyle was loaded into a car, crying loudly that he didn't want to go.

Meals were always taken together in the dining room in the main house. We all had pre-assigned seats. Mr Strickland sat at the head of one of the wings and the cook, Miss Kelly, would sit at the head of the other table nearest the kitchen. Mrs Strickland sat to Mr Strickland's right and I sat to the right of Miss Kelly, the house mother, Mrs Jones directly across from me. The younger boys sat at Mr and Mrs Strickland's table. Meals always began with Mr Strickland leading a short prayer; the rest of us bowing our heads respectfully. Miss Kelly prepared the mid-day and evening meal with Mrs Strickland, and made preparations for breakfast which Mrs Strickland completed in the morning, breakfast being served before Miss Kelly began her day's work. The food was always excellent and plentiful. During meals Mr Strickland would lead the conversation, often commenting on social issues, sometimes asking individual boys their opinions on different subjects in the news, then lecturing us from a moderate conservative viewpoint. He would sometimes talk about the history of the area, telling us about Dr McClure who had been responsible for building GreenWood United Church and the adjoining GreenWood Community Centre. Mr Strickland himself had come from a family of butchers and had worked in his brother's shop for several years before beginning the Boys' Home. Sometimes the director of physical education at the centre and his wife would join us for lunch, and every Sunday a teacher from the high school I attended,

Denis Bolton, would join us after church and stay to chat for an hour or two afterwards, mainly with just the Stricklands and me, and sometimes one or two of the older boys. Denis had come from a broken home himself but I never knew what his connection was with the Stricklands beyond the Sunday lunches.

Every Saturday morning was given over to chores. The boys would sweep, wash, and wax all the floors in both buildings. The boys in the Empire Avenue house that I lived in had a bathroom in the basement (the main bathroom was reserved for the house mother) and I remember scrubbing out the shower stall with an abrasive cleanser. Most floors were linoleum and we would smear them with paste wax, then buff them with a floor polisher. Sunday mornings we all attended GreenWood United Church; the older boys like me staying for the entire adult service while the younger ones were hied off to Sunday School. Otherwise, except for time set aside for homework, and for fixed bed times, we boys were on our own, coming and going much as we pleased. Jack and I would spend hours in the basement of the main house listening to Rock n Roll records over and over again, often with Mr Strickland pounding on the floor over our heads to remind us to keep the volume down.

Early in the New Year, after I had been at the Home for about a month, my father appeared on the scene. We knew he was coming to "straighten everyone out"—my father often had to straighten people out. The meeting was scheduled to take place in the offices of GreenWood United Church. Mac Belt stayed with me while my father shouted abuse at Mr. Strickland. Though embarrassed by my father's display, I was somewhat used to it after seeing him berate my teachers over the years for daring to suggest that I had some talent that should be encouraged and other similar offenses. What seemed to anger him today was that Mr Strickland had said something about my being intelligent, which prompted a scornful dismissive reaction from my father. Why I was so stupid, he shouted, I had misspelled two words in a letter I had sent home (which Mr Strickland had encouraged me to do). When he was finished shouting at Mr Strickland, he had a round with Mr Belt while Mr Strickland tried to reassure me.

Once he had shouted himself out about all the disgrace and embarrassment that I was to my family, it was my turn. Roy Strickland gave my arm a squeeze as I entered the room and whispered at me not to worry. The angry and much grieved man my father had presented to my two champions had changed into a calm and concerned father. He asked me quietly if I was happy at the Home, and asked about school. He wanted to know how I got to school, so I described the route I took, along Queen Street to Pape Avenue, then along Gerrard to the school at the corner of Jones and Gerrard. He then told me that when Jewish boys in New York City ran away from home their families held a funeral and never spoke of them again. If this was a threat of some sort it did not move me. The meeting was then over. The men all shook hands and my father left, leaving me in the care of these two men.

A few years later my father kept his promise, if that was what it was. My sister sent me an interview with my father that had appeared in a local paper. In it my father bragged about his children's achievements, including the children of his mistress (who were not his, as far as I knew), but never mentioned that he had another son—me, though I was a straight A university student at the time.

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As for school, I attended Riverdale Collegiate Institute, Mr Strickland's alma mater. I began just before Christmas enrolled in grade 10, the grade level I was in when I left home in early October, but by the end of January I went to Mr Strickland to ask if he thought it okay for me to ask to be put back to grade 9. I had missed so much of the school year, and Riverdale had started Latin classes a year before I had. It was simply too much for me to catch up from my 5 or 6 weeks of Latin with students who now had a year and a half. He agreed that it was probably a good idea, so I approached the principal at the school and he, too, agreed with my request. I completed the year with reasonable enough grades.

When I had left the Salvation Army I had a small sum of money and I used it to purchase a cheap guitar. I learned the basic chords for current popular songs. I was especially fond of The Everly Brothers' "Dreamin'," which I played over and over. Near the end of grade 9 I was sitting in the front row of the auditorium during a performance of the school orchestra, a few feet away from the first violin section. I watched fascinated as the violinists all moved their hands in precise uniformity from one position on the fingerboard to another. During a break I asked one of them how he knew where the notes were. He laughed and said, "Practice." I wanted to learn how to do that. The guitar had fixed tabs that marked where to stop the strings to get specific pitches, but the violin fingerboard was devoid of any such guidelines. I asked the orchestra teacher if I could join the orchestra class in the new school year if I took violin lessons during the summer. Baird Knechtel agreed. I asked Mr Strickland and he agreed to pay for lessons. He arranged for lessons with an older jazz musician who had a shop filled with pianos, guitars, and various percussion instruments. He rented me a violin for the summer and, not only did he give me sheet music and show me how to finger the notes and move the bow, but he let me experiment on other instruments in his shop after the lesson was over. I liked the electric guitars and would pick out tunes on the piano for hours. He never complained, and even let me take guitars home. In the fall I joined the orchestra class.

I should explain that Riverdale Collegiate was an academic school. Children headed for the trades or early marriage were routed to, in the boys' case, Danforth Technical School, where they studied auto mechanics, welding, and other useful trades, while girls attended Eastern Commerce, where they studied shorthand and typing, enabling them to get temporary jobs in the business world before settling down to being wives and mothers. The students at Riverdale were headed towards university and whatever careers that would lead to. Girls would likely become teachers, a career they would be expected to give up once they married. Boys would be expected to be business leaders and engineers. Accordingly, we concentrated on Latin, with exceptional students studying Greek. We would also need a good grounding in British history and British literature. Classes were divided into streams, depending on the options one selected, or, more likely, were selected for them. The least talented students studied art; the middling students took vocal music; and the more elite took instrumental music. The instrumental music students were further sub-divided into band and orchestra; the string players, especially the violinists, being the crème de la crème of that class. That is why in grade 10 I joined the class of the brightest and best students that Riverdale housed.

Before I get too far into my Riverdale experience I should talk about what was going on in the world around the Boys' Home. While I was taking violin lessons and working a paper route, my companions in and around the Home were living in one of the toughest parts of Toronto. The East End, especially

around Queen Street, could be described a poor working class area at a time when there were actual jobs for the unskilled and semi-skilled. As such jobs disappeared, the area became more violent, but, at the time, most men worked in warehouses or factories, women as waitresses or hairdressers. Most boys attended Danforth Tech and the girls Eastern. Jack was my link to that world as he had an easy manner that led others to trust and befriend him. In a sense he was my mentor. He regaled me with stories involving local gangs and the tough kids, seemingly knowing all their activities. When Jack visited with one of the locals he usually took me along, though I tended to hang out in the background, keeping quiet and observing.

We spent a lot of time during the summer months simply walking around the neighbourhood, talking. A popular hangout was the paved playground of a local elementary school. One time Jack had discover a cache of old 78 rpm records and between the two of us we cooked up a scheme to force firecrackers into the spindle holes, light them, then fling the records high across the school yard, laughing hysterically when the firecrackers exploded, causing the records to wobble in their flight and crash to the pavement. Then we discovered how to make simple zip guns. We'd block off the end of a pipe, then drop a lighted firecracker down the resulting barrel and a marble on top of that, aim, and fire. A few of our guns were so powerful that they blew holes through the doors of the portable classrooms. I designed a lighter gun, fashioned from television antenna parts that used lady finger (very small) fire crackers and BB's. This gun would easily fit in a pocket, was quick to make, and could be more accurate than the cannons some boys created.

One evening Jack, Michael, and I had taken our guns to an alley between rows of houses, firing at lighted windows. We then saw two shadows coming down the alley towards us. When they drew near, one of the men said, "Which one of you has the sling shot?" We turned to run, our route blocked by a third man we hadn't seen coming from the other direction. Michael was collared while Jack and I ran. We walked the streets for an hour or two and then crept into the yard between the two buildings of the Home. Jack threw some pebbles at the window of the room he shared with Michael. When Michael appeared, Jack loudly whispered, "Did you tell?" When Michael nodded we knew the jig was up and walked into the main house to face the music. Mr Strickland dismissed me with a curt, "You should know better." So, I went to my room to wait further action. Michael and Jack were grounded (forbidden to leave the house except to attend school and church), but Mr Strickland never said a word on the subject to me.

In a way I was a moderating influence on the other boys. One evening I discovered Michael and Jack in the process of trying to hang a cat from a branch of the small tree in the yard between the homes. I didn't show how upset I was. Instead I convinced them that it would be more fun if we put the cat into a mail box. "Can you imagine the mailman's surprise when he opens the box?" and so they carried the cat to the corner where they dropped it into the parcel slot, laughing hard at the thought of the mailman's reaction when he picked up the mail in the morning. I figured that the cat would be fine after a night in a nice roomy steel box.

During that summer I was fifteen a local man in his thirties befriended me. He was a youth organizer for the Orange Lodge. I had no idea what the Orange Lodge was and knew nothing about its history. The

man, I'll call him George as I don't recall his real name, would talk to me about music and play recordings of classics, especially Handel, on his record player which had the amazing ability to play stereo recordings. He had a recording of a train that sounded as though the engine were passing through his living room. He invited me to lodge meetings which were held in a store front on The Danforth. I didn't pay much attention to contents of the prayers to defeat the Roman Papists and the stories of heroic young Irishmen loyally fighting for their king and country. George did warn me that I should not get too close to a French Canadian girl from North Bay visiting family that I was hanging out with because the Pope would take my children away from me. Again, I did not pay it any heed. The girl was visiting for only two weeks and I was too shy to do any more than hang out with her and her friends.

George played records for me and took me to the Canadian National Exhibition for a day of eating junk food, riding fairground rides, and going through the spook house which ended in a viewing pit where one could watch people emerging from the disorientating dark, with a sudden gust of air blowing the women's dresses up over their heads. I was thrilled at the brief sight of stockings, garters, panties, and some bare bellies as their women shrieked pushing their dresses back down into places.

George talked to me about becoming a drummer for the Lodge, an idea I found appealing. He then invited me to march in the annual parade, carrying a banner through downtown Toronto, orange streamers attached to my shirt shoulders. I suspect, on reflection, that at this point Mr Strickland must have stepped in and warned George off because he stopped calling on me. I was busy with my paper route and violin lessons and practicing, as well as hanging out with Jack and didn't notice his disappearance from my life.

In the fall the old tired woman who was our house mother retired and her place was taken by a thin intense woman, Mrs Hall. While the previous house mother sat in her little room most of the time, Mrs Hall was an active woman who took an interest in her charges. She gave her opinions in a sharp voice in short sentences. Meanwhile, Mr Strickland started classes at the University of Toronto where he had been accepted as a student studying towards a degree in psychology. He would sometimes joke at the dining room table about being the only 40 year old in his classes, older than some of his professors. He also started studying the violin and a few years later loaned me his instrument on the understanding that if I ever gave it up I would return the instrument to him. I did just that when I saw him at the Home in 1967 as I was preparing to move to Montreal to attend university myself. He was, at that time, just beginning his new career as a middle school teacher.

In the first few months in Grade 10, in the elite class, I was accepted by the predominantly upper middle class students who generally lived to the east of the school, towards Scarborough. It was a sharp contrast to the slummy Queen East where the Boys' Home was located. I was invited to join a string quartet as I read music easily and could switch from first to second violin, or even play viola if called upon. We met weekends at the homes of members in relative comfort, being given soft drinks and cookies by the mothers of the students who tolerated our scratching discords. Our music teacher, Baird Knechtel, approached me saying a former student was willing to provide music theory lessons for free. Was I interested? I was, and every Saturday morning I went to a young university student's home where he taught me the rudiments of harmony and counterpoint, playing excerpts on the piano of different

classical works to illustrate his points. Like all students, I'd put off doing my exercises until the last minute, then dash off a few lines, plucking out the lines on my violin or guitar.

I also started dating a classmate. I accompanied Jennifer to school dances and we often went to the movies. She was a bit overweight and I was her first serious boyfriend. She was also regarded as the class brain. She'd listen to me for hours, it seemed, as I described an opera I wanted to write. I'd phone her after dinner, using the phone in Mrs Hall's room, and we'd chatter away, sometimes deciding at the last minute to dash off to a movie or to meet for coffee. Despite all the time I spent with Jennifer and the readiness she showed in meeting me, I never touched her. Even holding hands was something I could not work up the courage to attempt. Well, we danced, but did not press close together like some other couples.

At the same time a shy Chinese girl in our class took a liking to me. She wouldn't look me in the eyes when she addressed me. On a whim I invited her to join me for one of my theory lessons. She sat quietly while my teacher and I sat on the piano bench. He talked to me exclusively. The next Monday Mr Knechtel took me aside and said that the lessons were for me, not for my friends. I never said anything to the girl about it; I simply did not invite her to join me again. But, in the spring, a retiring music teacher announced that it was a shame our school song was set to the tune of an American military march ("The Battle Hymn of the Republic") and offered a $50 prize to the student who could write a new song, as selected by the school's music teachers. I hadn't thought anything of it, but the Chinese girl approached me and asked if I'd write something with her. I went to her home on a Sunday and sat at her upright piano where she showed me what she had written. It was a horrid mess. She had no concept of how to put together a tune, let alone notate it. She had five quarter notes in a 4/4 bar, for example, and the melody made no sense; it simply wandered randomly. I tried to work with her on cleaning it up and finally said I'd work on it at home.

I took the score home and tried to put something together from it that wasn't so profoundly embarrassing. After I was done, I was very unhappy. Then Mr Strickland came to my room and belted out the beginning of a rousing piece. "Why not something like that?" he asked. I took his fragment and in a short time had a full-blown song, chorus and verse, that moved strongly and authoritatively from beginning to end. It was cheerful, uplifting, everything a school song should be. I handed in both scores; the one with my and the Chinese girl's name on it, and the one inspired by Mr Strickland with only my name on it. It won. I remember in the assembly when the song was introduced to the student body while I stood on the stage and was presented a cheque by the departing music teacher, I saw her in her seat, a look of hurt and betrayal on her face that I have never forgotten. I knew in that moment that she did not realize that the winning song was not the one we had worked on together. I didn't know what to say to her and I was embarrassed by the entire situation.

The Stricklands approved of my relationship with Jennifer. They invited us to join them for theatrical revues at amateur theatre groups, for a professional performance of Treasure Island, and for a performance of Mendelssohn's brilliant Violin Concerto in E minor played by Yehudi Menuhin with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. I was supposed to be in by 11:00 pm Friday and Saturday, but when I took Jennifer to school dances I ran into a problem with that. The dances would end at midnight and by the

time I had accompanied Jennifer home by streetcar, then made my way back to the Home, it could be 2:00 am. Yet, Mr Strickland never said anything, even though Mrs Hall would stay up until I was home. When I wanted to take Jennifer to the school prom, the Stricklands took me to the home of one of Mr Strickland's rich brothers so I could try on and borrow a tuxedo for the event.

And so throughout that school year I led two lives. There was the life at school in the class of bright musicians and friendly upper middle class values, and the life in the tough Queen Street East territory. Michael, Jack, and I stole records and magazines regularly from the local small stores. We were all good at the quick slip something under one's jacket routines. One hot sultry day I loaded a gang of young kids into a small confectionary and we emptied the freezer of its treats while the kids milled around creating a distraction. We all shared in the booty in the school yard. But I had my limits. One night Jack and Michael had decided it would be great fun to break into the Riverdale zoo, but I wanted nothing to do with it. I had no problem with stealing small items, but senseless vandalism never made sense to me. I begged off saying I had homework to attend to. When they were out of sight I telephoned the police and left an anonymous tip. Later Jack and Michael told me that a cop walked through the zoo while they were there but they hid, waiting him out. They told me they had a riot chasing an ostrich, and I thought that they were lucky it didn't turn on them and eviscerate them—which an ostrich is perfectly capable of doing. One night they broke into a shed. The only way I could think of to stay uninvolved was to act as lookout. After ten minutes or so the two of them scrambled out the door they had wedged open, a wall of flames visible behind them. As we quick marched away from the area, we heard fire engine sirens and could see black smoke billowing skyward. They had found a can of gasoline and Michael had poured it on a bench and set it ablaze.

Michael was deeply troubled. He bought a rifle that he kept hidden in an alley not far from the home and one night he used it to hijack a taxi, joy-riding to Sudbury. He did not return to the Home after that escapade. Eventually he wound up in adult prison. Jack had some more sense than that. Generally, he managed to avoid getting caught for the petty criminal acts he was involved in, and once Michael was gone he, as far as I know, kept his nose clean. In the spring of the year I was in grade 10 Jack left the Home to move in with a young socialist couple we knew through the church, John and Jean Lee, who were to assume a large role in my life.

I don't remember why I gave up the paper route. I had a part-time job in a local supermarket for a while, and for a short time worked at GreenWood Community centre handing out towels for showers and cleaning up the gym, but, in the spring I was working after school and on Saturdays for a small shop on King Street near Bay. The shop sold prizes for church bingos and rented bingo equipment to them. Walk-in customers were very rare. Usually a priest would show up by appointment and make his selection of prizes: stuffed bears and small plastic trinkets. I looked after the stock room and would be tasked with putting together the orders, packaging them up in boxes for shipping. The shop was in a basement, but I enjoyed the privacy and quiet of a secondary store room on another floor in the building reached by freight elevator.

With the money I made from my jobs I bought clothing, usually following Jack's advice, and paid for dates with Jennifer. On days off Jennifer and I would hang out with another couple from our class, Guy

and Carol. The girls were experimenting with making new-fangled foods like pizza and we'd laugh at comedy albums by new comedians like Bob Newhart. Guy and I would play guitars for the girls and sing the soppy love longs I was writing. We picnicked on Toronto Island where I finally asked Jennifer to go steady with me (even though we had been dating for more than six months, it was not official until the question was asked and answered). And I dared to kiss her quickly on the forehead. The Stricklands agreed I could throw a party for the entire class towards the end of the school year.

And it all ended.

This is very difficult to write. It was more than 55 years ago and I was in the midst of the turmoil of adolescent hormones, confused, and struggling to make sense of my life. There was a disconnect in my life I could not describe. In school we were studying the crowning achievements in English literature, namely Charles Dickens, every year another of his novels. At the home, Jack was giving me copies of books by Ian Fleming. Dickens wrote sentences that could be several pages long with subordinate clauses imbedded inside other subordinate clauses, burying themselves deeper and deeper, obscuring subject and predicate. Fleming's sentences were short, crisp, and to the point. I wanted to go to school and do well, and the idea of attending university eventually was in the back of my mind, but something wasn't right.

In my life before I left home I was often the subject of ridicule. When I wanted to attend a concert put on by the Kitchener-Waterloo symphony orchestra, my father scoffed at me for liking that "long-hair nonsense." As I was becoming aware of the world and trying to articulate it, my sister laughed at me, calling me a conceited stuck-up. My father punched me in the head at the dining room table, sending me flying from my seat because I remarked that one could circle the globe in 90 minutes as the satellites were doing (this was before anyone had actually done it). I was "too big" for my "britches" and "a smart-ass." When I referred to my friends at school as "bourgeoisie" my father punched me in the head. If I quoted a Latin phrase I was a "show-off." One time he knocked me unconscious because I said that I didn't believe that Steven Truscott had killed Lynne Harper (the courts eventually agree with me). I obviously thought I was "smarter than the police." In the summer before I left home several times I took every pill I could find in the house and swallowed them down mixed with apple-sauce. No one ever questioned where all the pills were going. At the start of the school year in grade 10, I'd go home with a classmate whose family was immensely wealthy and we'd get drunk on his father's liquors. It was a 5-mile walk home for me that sobered me up enough that I could sit through dinner without anyone catching on to the fact that I was so drunk I could barely sit straight. I had already run away from home twice. The first time it was winter and I fell through the ice while crossing a creek and wound up being treated in hospital for hyperthermia. The other time I broke into a cottage where I spent the night, but when a farmer offered to buy me a bus ticket, the police showed up at the terminal. The third time I was smart enough to head for the closest highway and stick out my thumb, getting far enough away before anyone realized I was gone. Years later, a therapist told me that the smartest thing I had ever done was to leave home when I did; that it had likely saved my life.

And those same uneasy feelings that I somehow wound up living on the wrong planet were starting to overwhelm me, only this time I had an out. Jack had moved out of the home and was living with John

and Jean Lee. I often visited with them, sitting in the garden behind their house while John talked to me about philosophy and politics. He had calculated what percentage of the federal budget went towards supporting the military and so withheld that percentage from his income tax returns. He thought that capital punishment was barbaric and that nuclear weapons should be banned. He had travelled to China and told Pierre Trudeau about his adventures, convincing the young Trudeau to make a similar trip. But, mainly I was interested in philosophy. John told me about Kant's thesis of the "Prime Mover" an idea that haunted me for years. I was slowly becoming aware that we were being prepared in school for a world that was rapidly disappearing. Something new and exciting was in the air. The American president, John Kennedy, was talking about sending men to the moon. And, meanwhile, we were studying Latin declensions at school.

I broke up with Jennifer, walked out of my job with the bingo supplier, and packed my belongings while Mr Strickland watched silently. Jack helped me carry my stuff the few blocks to the Lee's home. It was the summer of 1962.

02. The Third Mentor: John Lee

In the spring of 1962 while I was in grade 10, Jack left the Boys' Home and moved in with a local couple, John and Jean Lee. Jack had a lot of enthusiasms. I recall once he described in great detail the vetting process Leonard Bernstein went through to become conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. Another time he described Joe Frazier's hands before he fought Cassius Clay. On my 18th birthday, a few years later, Jack bought me a book written by one of Picasso's mistresses, Françoise Gilot. Jack had a self-depreciating humour and a love of detail. John Lee became, that spring, another of Jack's enthusiasms.

John and Jean were radicals. They were openly socialists and strongly opposed to the Viet Nam war, still in its nascent stages. They opposed the death penalty, still in force in Canada, and fought for nuclear disarmament. They believed in sexual openness and Jack reported actually seeing Jean's "bush" as she worked about the house dressed carelessly only in a robe. He told me that they allowed him to cover the walls of his room with Playboy pinups and that John once told him that he and Jean had made love in his room inspired by the posters.

While my world was falling apart, I sat in their luxurious garden talking with John. He told me of the philosophies of Emmanuel Kant and his concept of a prime mover. They were both devoutly United Church of Canada at that time, though John later converted to Quakerism. At that time John had a master's degree and was working for Ontario Hydro, but he eventually received a PhD and taught sociology at the University of Toronto and York University, wrote books, and became an outspoken champion of gay rights. Jean was employed as a social worker, later to become head of Social Services of The Hospital for Sick Kids. They had two small children: Ruth, aged 18 months then, and Peter, a newborn. Their house was filled with art works, records, and literature, especially magazines, like Paul Krasner's "The Realist," Pierre Trudeau's "Cité Libre," and other "socialist" material. They were educated, disciplined, and passionate in their beliefs.

Jack had moved in with them at a time when they had taken in a troubled boy, Philip, and were attempting to modify his behaviour to help him adjust to the world. John kept a detailed journal about Philip for about two years. I met Philip and found him to be aloof and withdrawn. I learned many years later that he was imprisoned in Spain because of involvement in the drug trade. Philip left the Lee's home shortly after Jack had moved in and Jack invited me often to their home.

As my world of upper middle class musicians and disappointed caregivers was melting away, I found welcomed relief at the Lee's. They had a large painting in their living room that John told me had been executed entirely with a trowel. They had recordings of the music I was discovering and I spent hours listening to Beethoven's piano sonatas. But, mainly, they treated me like an intelligent being and spoke to me on their level. They knew about my emotional difficulties and, if they were concerned, they never let on.

At Jack's urging, I finally asked them if I could move in. They agreed. Mr Strickland said nothing. I packed my belongings into a few cardboard boxes and Jack helped me carry them the few blocks north to the quieter residential area where the Lees rented an older three-story house. The Lees and the children occupied the top floor. I don't recall ever being up there. The 2nd floor was for me and Jack. I had the front room with bed, bureau, and desk with chair, and Jack occupied the middle room. The 3rd room was the bathroom for the entire household and jutting off the back of the house was a small sunroom built over the rear porch. It housed a comfortable old couch and TV set. The Lees never watched television, so it was my and Jack's rec room.

The Lees soon packed their kids and Jack and I into their car and we headed off to a campground for a week. The camp itself was owned by the New Democratic Party, itself a new organization recently developed out of the old Canadian Confederation Party, or CCF. It was used for retreats and regeneration of party workers. This particular week it was being used by members of the Student Christian Movement, a campus-based national organization that set up summer work camps across the country where students would live together and work on community projects or study different social issues, such as mental health or unionism. John and Jean were active participants in the organization which was to assume a much larger role in my life in a few years.

There was a bunk house, but most of us stayed in tents, some large enough to include cots for half a dozen people. Meals were prepared co-op style, which meant that everyone in camp had certain specific tasks to perform throughout the week to ensure that everyone contributed. We ate indoors at long tables and discussions of the current political situation were animated. Of primary concern were the Bomarc missiles that the Americans had installed at North Bay, Ontario and in La Macaza, Quebec. They were meant to carry nuclear warheads to thwart any Russian bomber attack on the United States. The missiles would be launched into a group of bombers and their nuclear warheads detonated to destroy all aircraft with the massive percussion wave. They would also destroy anything that happened to be on the surface below them at the time, as well as poisoning everything for hundreds of miles downwind from the radioactive fallout, but that was dismissed as collateral. Far better to fight a nuclear battle over sparsely-populated northern Ontario and Quebec than over American soil. There was good reason that the policy of the Cold War was called MAD: Mutual Assured Destruction madness. John Diefenbaker said no to the nuclear arms, making the Bomarcs almost useless, but Nobel Peace Prize winner Lester Pearson, leader of the opposition Liberals and soon to be Prime Minister, was in favour of giving in to the demands of the Americans. The students were angry and talked about setting up a sit-in to blockade the missile sites. They did so the next summer and I was there with them. They made the cover of MacLean's magazine and a picture of me alone holding a sign graced the cover the Student Christian Movement's national newsletter in the fall of 1964. But I had a lot of life story to experience before then.

In the fall of 1962 I entered Grade 11, charged full of determination to make a success of it. I practiced my violin long and hard. I had always been made to feel ashamed of my hand-writing, so I went through the alphabet determining how to form each lowercase and capital letter so that it was clear and easily makeable by my clumsy hands. I discovered a combination of printing and cursive that worked for me. I created my signature—with a stylized uppercase R, J, and B overlapping each other and the rest trailing

off into indecipherable squiggles. I had a study schedule that I followed rigorously, trying to make sense of Latin and French, my sorriest subjects in high school. And, on the weekends Jack and I watched science fiction movies on the old black and white set, while toasting entire loaves of bread that we slathered in peanut butter. We were both inspired and enthralled by "The Forbidden Planet," accepting its premise, in keeping with popular interpretations of Freud, that humans harboured a dark and violent secret nature that had to be controlled by the intellect. One evening when I was out Jack told me that a group of students gathered in front of the house and sang the new school song I had written the spring before. When I asked him what he did he said he just stared at them until they left.

In September, the school principal set up an appointment for me to meet a sociologist at the University of Toronto who was doing a study of juvenile delinquency, which was the popular term then to describe any youth who did not fit the approved stereotypes of the times. I met the young woman in an office on the main campus. She told me she was doing a study of the causes of juvenile delinquency and had a few questions for me.

After jotting down my background profile, she began by asking me when I first started to notice signs that I was delinquent. Was I deliberately acting in socially unacceptable ways, or was it something beyond my control? How often did I feel like striking out at society? Why, she wondered, did I think I had such a deep-seated desire to trash the norms of the civilized world about me? Did I secretly admire gangsters? Did I sympathize with the criminals in detective stories?

I was humiliated into virtual speechlessness and could only grunt non-committal answers. But when I returned to the Lees, I lashed out, vehemently and sarcastically repeating the questions, shouting them at John, demanding to know when he first noticed signs that he might be a delinquent and did he secretly admire gangsters. He telephoned the grad student conducting the study and told her I would not be returning for the follow-up session in a week's time. She was upset, saying she needed the data to complete her study, but John was firm. He then suggested that I go to my room and calm down.

John and Jean were members of the New Democratic Party, whose provincial branch had been formed just a year previously. At their urging I attended a meeting of an NDP youth group and was selected to represent them at the upcoming convention. Jean was attending as a delegate, so we went to the convention together, sitting at a table littered with pamphlets and studies. I had no idea what any of the issues were and even less what the various speakers were talking about, but I rose to vote as Jean did trying to look like I knew what was going on. The youth group was expecting me to provide them with a report on the weekend's activities, but I kept making excuses not to attend meetings. I had no idea what I could tell them.

Otherwise, life was starting to be good again. And then…

…the grade 11 classes took a train trip to Stratford for a performance of Shakespeare's "The Tempest." On the trip there an attractive young woman I didn't recall seeing before in the seat before mine. She reached up to the overhead stowage compartment, arching her back so that her breasts jutting towards me. She saw me and blushed. When we left the train I asked friends what her name was and ran after

her, asking for her phone number, which she gave to me, still blushing. I was besotted with this dark-haired young woman.

Meanwhile, the Lees were also supporting a troubled young woman who had just been released from a reformatory. Sarah visited them on weekends and one weekend she and Jack spent the night on the couch, she lying atop him. He told me later than they had "done nothing." But the next weekend on a whim I asked her if she wanted to go to a movie and she agreed. We saw "Phantom of the Opera." As a gentleman I accompanied her home, a trip involving several streetcar and bus changes. I walked her to her door and she suddenly turned and kissed me full on the mouth. I was stunned. No one had ever done that before. It was now so late that the streetcars had stopped running, so I phoned John from a telephone booth and he came to fetch me. It was after 2:00 am.

The next weekend I had my first date with the girl from the train. Her name was Letitia. She told me she hated the name and preferred to go by Lee, but I loved it, the way it rolled around in one's mouth. We took the streetcar to a movie theatre and decided to walk home. I stopped at the Lee's on the way back to her place, thinking it funny to introduce her as "Lee" to "Mr and Mrs Lee." I babbled non-stop about my new-found passion for socialism and the New Democratic Party and when Letitia told me her grandmother was a member of the Conservative Party, my energy and passion-levels accelerated as I denounced conservatives. At her door, now emboldened by Sarah's kiss the week before, I moved in and kissed Letitia hard, long, and passionately. Her arms snaked around my neck, pulling me closer. After what seemed like forever, she pulled away and dashed into the house.

She told me later that she thought I was a dreadful bore until I kissed her, but had fallen in love when I did.

At school a few days later she asked me to walk her home. She lived with her parents and grandmother but from after school until about 5:30 or 6:00 we had the house to ourselves. The first time I visited her, her girlfriend from next door was there. Letitia sat beside me on the couch, took my hand and draped it around her shoulder. Her girlfriend left the room for some reason and Letitia took the hand I had around her shoulder and placed it firmly on her breast. I could hardly believe what was going on and squeezed her breast, kneading it, until her girlfriend returned and I quickly withdrew. Her girlfriend left soon afterwards and we started necking in earnest, entwined full-length on the couch, kissing passionately while I explored her breasts. This became our daily after school routine. By the second day I had worked up the nerve to unclasp her bra and nuzzled and kissed her breasts until a few minutes before her parents were due home from work. I was enthralled, completely.

Her parents seemed to accept me and often invited me to stay for dinner. When I would call John he'd ask about my homework. I'd tell him I'd do it there. I'd glance at my books briefly, skim through any homework questions, then resume my necking sessions with Letitia on the cot in the dining room while her parents watched TV in the living room. Letitia had a male cousin, maybe five years older than me, who sometimes visited and would encourage us to get married, saying that one should either marry at 16 or at 60.

While I was wrapped up in passionate love for this girl, world events continued. President Kennedy and Chairman Khrushchev were engaged in a war of words over Russian missiles housed in Cuba. Khrushchev sent warships to accompany supply ships heading to Cuba; Kennedy sent warship to blockade the island. As tensions increased, the Toronto Board of Education decided to do its part by asking all it students to cower in school basements. I had access to a lot of information about nuclear war and concluded that where our school stood there would be nothing but a 200-foor deep crater if a smallish 5 megaton bomb detonated over downtown Toronto. The day of our civil defence exercise I wore my "Ban the Bomb" pin to school and took a number of pamphlets urging a little sanity regarding the insane situation of nuclear armament. Letitia was furious with me when we met just before class, tearing my button from my shirt and throwing it down the hall. When the announcement came that we were all to head to the school basement, I sat in my seat. The teacher smiled and left the room, never saying a word to me. Jack had also defied the order to slink away to the basement and was hauled into the principal's office where he was threatened with suspension for his insubordination. Apparently the vice principal backed Jack to some extent and the threat was not carried out.

Otherwise, I spent every waking moment with Letitia, other than going to school and sleeping at the Lee's. John was getting concerned and started to insist that I be home for dinner school nights to ensure that I spent time on my homework. But my desire to be with her overrode everything else in my mind and I stayed at their place for dinner, despite John's directions. John could not leave such a direct challenge with no response and told me that I was not allowed to leave the house the next weekend. But, Letitia and I had a date. Her parents and grandmother were taking us to a reception and she had been looking forward to going with me for weeks. I told John I'd stay in the rest of the weekend, but I was going to the reception. He said no. He and Jean were going to be away that weekend, but he was going to phone Saturday evening. If I didn't come to the phone, I'd have to move out.

There was no question in my mind that I was going on the planned date with Letitia and her parents. I told them about John's ultimatum and they told me I could spend Saturday night, after the date, at their home and that they would arrange something for me. The hall where I went with Letitia, her parents, and grandmother was directly across the street from an old stone building signed, "The Toronto Psychiatric Hospital." I had no inkling, of course, that that would be my home in a few weeks. We had dinner, there was music and dancing, and Letitia's grandmother kept sniffing my glasses of soft drink to ensure there was no alcohol in them. The next day, Letitia's mother drove me to the Lee's and waited in her car while I packed boxes of my belongings under John's watchful eye. I don't think we exchanged a word. She then drove me to a rooming house where she said she had paid the first two week's room and board, but after that it would be up to me to raise the $18.50 a week.

My school work was all but forgotten. I was obsessed with Letitia and now dependant on her. After school we'd walk to movie theatres hoping I could get a job as an usher, but no one was hiring. I didn't know what else I could do at 16. Our love-making intensified, as my hand started creeping up her inner thigh. Above the top of her nylons on her bare flesh, less than an inch from that magic centre I was so afraid of yet drawn to, was heavenly. I started to tell classmates that I was getting married. And my hand edged ever closer, brushing the edge of her girdle. One afternoon, sweater and bra pushed up around her neck and her skirt riding high she whispered, "Go ahead, do what you want to do." I stopped, not

knowing what she could possibly mean. After all, girls were not really interested in sex; they had to be cajoled, bribed with gifts, and overwhelmed before they would submit; and, even at that, nice girls simply didn't. At least, that's what I had been taught. A few days later she was planning to spend the night at her girlfriend's. As I walked with her, she carrying an overnight case, she said, "Why don't we go to a hotel?" I laughed, thinking she couldn't be serious, and said, "They'd throw me in jail."

The next night she called me at the boarding house and said it was over.

I couldn't believe what she was saying. After all, we were in love. She wanted to spend more time with her girlfriends, she said. Okay, so we compromise and see each other less often I countered. Besides, she continued, I was a pervert who was probably queer. "What?" Whatever I said didn't matter because I was a liar. Then she laughed and said, "So what are you going to do?" And, just as casually, I said, "I guess I'll have to kill myself." "Don't make a mess," she said and hung up.

I did not know what to do. There was no way I could come up with $18.50 a week to pay my landlady and the initial two weeks that Letitia's mom had paid for was nearly up. My one lifeline, Letitia and her parents, had just been yanked away. Looking back from a perspective of more than 50 years I realize I had a number of options, but I could not see them at the time. I was surrounded by people: Roy Strickland, John Lee, Mac Belt, my teacher Baird Knectle, Denis Bolton, the teacher I knew through the Boys' Home who would all be willing to step in and help me out, and they all did so at various times in the future, but that moment, that night, in my room, isolated and bewildered, my ex-girlfriend's last words ringing in my ears, I took the blade out of my safety razor and held it in my right hand poised over my left wrist. After a few moments I realized that if I was going to do it, then just do it and get it over with. I slashed, dropped the blade and clutched my injured wrist. After a few moments I went to the bathroom and wrapt my wrist in a towel, but the blood quickly soaked through it. I stood in the hallway called my landlady's name. She screamed when she came out of her room in her nightgown and raced to the phone to call the police. I sat slumped in the hallway, blood seeping through the towel until a policeman arrived. When he asked what had happened, I said I had cut myself while shaving. He drove me to the emergency room of a local hospital where they stitched the wound closed and wrapt my wrist in a thick bandage. I was taken back to the Pape Avenue police station and put back in a cell. In the morning I was loaded into a paddy wagon with the drunks and petty criminals they had picked up during the night and taken to court in the old city hall where the magistrate released me into the custody of the Toronto Psychiatric Hospital for a 60 day evaluation period. The next time I saw Letitia she said, "I didn't think you'd really do it." And after she left the hospital ward I cried like a baby whose heart had been broken while a nurse held me telling me that everything would be alright.

Forty-five years later I was visiting the now-retired Professor John Lee and he asked me why I had left his home so long ago. "You threw me out," I said simply. There was a pause and then he said, "I sincerely and fully apologize for that." I shrugged and said, "We were both young and stubborn." We hugged a long time when I was leaving and it was the last time I saw him. Somehow, after that apology, something had been completed.

03. I learn something that contradicted everything my father ever told me about myself

The Toronto Psychiatric Hospital no longer exists, having been replaced by the Clark Institute of Psychiatry in 1966. It was an ancient three-story L-shaped stone building. The men were housed on the second floor. One wing, facing the street, was where the nursing station and private rooms were located. The other wing had two open wards and a recreation room. A large bathroom, with sinks, showers, and toilet stalls, was in the crook of the L. The women were housed on the first floor. Though I never visited it, I assumed it was the same layout as the men's floor. The third floor was for doctor's offices, treatment rooms, and meeting rooms. In the basement was a recreation room with stage and piano, as well as the kitchen and laundry facilities.

I was first assigned a bed in an open ward. There were nine single beds, with night stands and elevated trays much as one would expect in any hospital ward of the time. There was a low wall separating the ward from the hallway where two or three orderlies would lounge during the day, occasionally making notes in ledger books. The men were kept in pyjamas and housecoats all day, meals served bedside on trays delivered by the orderlies. Though we were provided with tobacco and papers, the men in the open ward were not allowed to have matches or lighters and so would have to ask the orderlies for a light. We were also provided with powder for brushing our teeth.

One's first impression would have been that the men housed in this ward were not sick. They spent the day playing cards, talking, rolling and smoking cigarettes, or listening to small radios. My first few weeks in the hospital were spent in that "observation" ward. One man, a truck driver, was in the process of being divorced because his wife caught him with another woman too many times. He kept us entertained with ribald tales of his exploits. Another man, a taxi driver, had broken into his ex-wife's apartment and cut up all her bras and underwear. He told us stories about exploiting drunks who had passed out in the cab, putting the car on a hoist while running up the meter. There was a young gay man who was dragged screaming by the orderlies from another young man's bed one night. Six years later I recognized him in a restaurant on Ste Catherine Street in Montreal, despite the intervening years and thick makeup and mascara, and we chatted over coffee. There was only one man who was out of it: a fellow who sat on his bedside chair all day muttering things like, "There's blood everywhere." And "The police are under the stairs." He was soon removed to go to the real looney bin: 999 Queen Street West.

After a few weeks I was moved to the other open ward, this one not watched by orderlies taking notes. It was seen as a step upwards. I spent my days in the recreation room, learning card games like Hearts and Bridge which we played with the nurses. The nurses were students at the nearby University of Toronto; they'd do a 6-week stay on the men's ward, and another six weeks on the women's ward as part of their student training. The arrival of the young women each morning was like sprigs of fresh flowers bursting into bloom. They were chatty, friendly, and attended their charges with a loving

kindness. They were each assigned three or four men as their special charges. One of my nurses was from northern Ontario and had a soft French accent. She called me her petit choux—little cabbage head.

My first doctor was a Chinese fellow with an accent so thick I could barely make out what he was saying. Early on he told me that they were going to give me a pill that would make me very sleepy for the first few days. I assumed he was talking about the sleep therapy practiced by Dr. Cameron at Montreal's Allan Memorial Institute. It turned out that he was talking about the standard anti-psychotic of the times: chlorpromazine. Almost every patient in the hospital received chlorpromazine and, because one of its most common side effects was dehydration, each bedside held a container of sweet juice and a cup. Some of the men received electro-shock "therapy" and they'd usually be bed-ridden for a day or two after each "treatment." I knew of one case of a patient receiving insulin shock "therapy." But, generally, we were left alone with our student nurses, pills, and weekly consultations with our assigned doctors.

Shortly before Christmas my doctor took me to a room on the third floor where he had me lay down on a medical examination table. He injected me with what he described as a truth serum. I believe it was sodium thiopental, used in lethal injections in the USA and for euthanasia. It was also used by psychiatrists as a "truth serum" to help patients relive uncomfortable memories. The manufacturer of the drug, Hospira, stopped manufacturing it a few years ago to prevent it from being used in state sanctioned executions. I very quickly entered a state where I felt I had no control. The doctor asked me a few questions that I answered without thought—the words just flowed out of me with no volition on my part. He then asked me, "What is your problem?" I answered, unable to think or to censure, "Nobody loves me." He left the room shortly afterwards and I, determined to shake off the effects of the drug, got off the table and tried to walk across the room, even though everything was tinged a brilliant green hue and was distorted. It was like walking through one of those rooms in science museums where perspective is disturbed so much that you wind up staggering like a drunk. After making it across the room, I returned to the exam table and lay down again, embarrassed by the "confession" that the doctor had elicited.

After the Christmas holidays my doctor was gone, replaced by a man I regarded as something of a friend for the next six months or so. Dr. Clark (I no longer remember his name) had me moved to a private room and started giving me batteries of tests, and gave me permission to take part in the occupational therapy classes held in an adjoining building. During those first few months, John Lee visited once, sitting cross-legged, his arms folded across his chest, looking smug and smirking. A group of students from my class visited me one time, bringing a tin filled with cookies, cakes, and tarts. They did not return. Mac Belt visited a few times, and after Christmas it became a regular weekly visit, as his brother was a patient in the room next to mine. Once I was in my private room Roy Strickland visited, bringing his violin which he gave to me on the condition that I return it to him if I ever gave up the instrument—a promise I kept a few years later. Some of my teachers from school started visiting, giving me homework assignments. I made new friends with the patients in the wing, including a medical doctor who had ALS and was being treated for depression. We called him "Doc." Another new friend was a young fellow about my age who suffered severe epileptic seizures, and a man a few years older than me, an artist and teacher at the University of Toronto, who later went on to found one of Canada's most celebrated

printing houses and publishers. Stan and I were to be friends until one of my adolescent rages alienated him, much later.

Those of us housed in private rooms wore regular street clothing during the day and had more freedom of movement than the men in the open wards. I would sometimes slip down to the basement where I worked out chords and rhythmic patterns on the piano. A few times a week I went to occupational therapy accompanied by my assigned nurse. I loved working with oil paints on canvas and, when I left the hospital, the head of the hospital asked if he could keep my efforts. They were, as I remember, mainly swirls of colour with images of women in chiffon fairy-princess dresses floating through the chaos. Instead of playing cards in the rec room we usually gathered in a small sun room at the end of the corridor. Bridge was the standard game. Patients were sometimes given permission to leave for the day and one of the older men spent his days at the race track. I spent an afternoon shopping at Eaton's with a twenty-dollar gift certificate that the woman from Montreal whose cases I had carried while at the Sally Ann sent me care of the Boys Home.

A life-changing discovery came when a fellow patient said he saw my folder lying open on my doctor's desk and circled in red ink was a number on the cover of a Sanford-Binet IQ test that the doctor had given me. He told me that the number was 147. Finally, an explanation as to why I had always felt so different and alienated from those around me. I suddenly understood why so much of what others did and said did not make sense to me, and why some things that seemed patently obvious to me seemed to be beyond the grasp of others. A new image of myself started to struggle to emerge. Maybe I was not the incompetent weakling that my father had shouted at me for years. Maybe the reason that I could not pass some subjects in school was because I was operating on a different plane than my classmates. Maybe that's what men like Roy Strickland, Mac Belt, and some of my teachers recognized when they reached out to help me. A group of medical students visited the hospital and wanted to interview me. "What is it like," one of them asked, "to be so smart?" How could I answer him? I didn't know what it was like to be anything other than what I was.

When spring started to appear my doctor put it to me that the government of Ontario was prepared to pay my full tuition, at the time about $7,000 a year, to attend Upper Canada College. I would live at the school and all my expenses would be covered. I never knew but I suspect that Mac Belt and possibly Roy Strickland had a role to play in the formulation of that offer. Years later I joked with my family that if I had accepted I could have written a book entitled "Black and Brown," telling the very different stories of Conrad Black, who had attended Upper Canada College just before I would have been a student, and myself who, rather than chasing money made a career of searching for answers about who I was.

Meanwhile, I told my doctor I felt I could make a computer if I had some clear plastic and a marking pen. I had an idea to make something like a circular slide rule, but I needed transparency so I could line up logarithms. He gave me sheets of used x-ray material and I scraped off the emulsion on them, giving me the plastic I needed. Nurses and other doctors dropped by from time to time to see how I was doing, but, as is often the case with my plans, I could not translate what I saw in my head into physical reality. I could not cut the circles of plastic accurately enough, and the only marking pen I had available made lines too thick for my use.

However, as I grew in self-confidence I pinned Playboy centrefolds to the walls in my room—something else that doctors and nurses giggled over. I practiced my violin every afternoon and when the patients put on a talent show, I dazzled everyone with a virtuoso show piece. I enjoyed the time with my teachers, delighting in the attention I was getting, more than I put effort into any subject. My Latin teacher, a young Miss Hoey, took me for walks on the campus of the University of Toronto with her fiancé. Baird Knechtel, my music teacher, took me to concerts at Hart House, on the U of T campus. He gave me sheet music of things to work on to improve my skills. Life was, in short, good.

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All the men were secretly in love with one of the nurses that spring and, after she left at the end of her six week assignment, the young man with epilepsy told me that she had kissed him goodbye. Instead of feeling jealous I decided I was not going to let an opportunity like that pass me by again, so when my next nurse was assigned to me I backed her into a corner in my room, demanding a kiss. She relented and every day we necked in my room with the door closed. It was a warm spring and I started sleeping in the nude. In the mornings she'd come to my room to wake me, closing the door behind her. She'd sit by my bed talking quietly with me, a hand carelessly placed on my thigh where my ever-present erection lay just below the thin sheet. She never touched me there, but I knew exactly how many fractions of an inch her hand was from that twitching organ. Then one morning the door burst open and the head of the hospital was there, a gaggle of students he was escorting peering into my room. He must have spoken to my nurse because she stopped closing my door when she woke me in the mornings. The necking continued, however.

As the school year drew to a close I took streetcar to Riverdale to write my final Grade 11 exams. I did well enough on most that I was promoted to grade 12, though I failed both French and Latin despite the fact that Miss Hoey had given me the questions for the finale exam a few weeks ahead of time and told me to concentrate on that. I treated it like I treated all my homework assignments: I rushed through it, just to get it done, so I could spend more time playing cards and chasing my nurse around my room. I did not realize that it was the exam itself that she had given me until I sat in the exam room. With my promotion, the backup to the Upper Canada College plan was revealed to me: I was to be released from hospital at the end of June so I could work throughout the summer. In the fall, I would receive welfare payments while I attended school. My friend Stan was being released from hospital about the same time I was and had rented a third-floor room near Riverdale. There was another room available, so I took it.

The house was near a small park, just south of the Danforth. It was rented by two young men who had turned the living room into their bedroom. The second floor was rented out to another couple of men, and the third floor was divided between Stan and myself. Stan had turned his room into a mini art studio. My room had a single bed, plus another cot I used as a couch; and a balcony looking out over the quiet residential street. There were no formal arrangements for kitchen or bathroom use. Everyone fended for themselves. When it was time for me to leave the hospital my nurse asked if she could accompany me. We carried my belongings in a couple of cardboard boxes via streetcar, then spent the afternoon necking on my new bed. I saw her a few times after that, but when I showed up at the nurses' residence for a scheduled date one evening, she told me that she couldn't see me anymore; there was

just too big an age gap was her reason. I was furiously upset and snarled at the boys on the second floor who had loaned me a suit for my big date.

I found a job for the summer as an assistant in a furrier's shop. It was in the heart of Toronto's garment district near Spadina Avenue. The shop made mink collars and cuffs for women's winter coats. The furs were pinned to standard-sized plywood sheets, four feet by eight, covered with craft paper. We'd trace the templates with crayon onto the sheets. We'd then take the furs that had been soaking in water and nail them to the templates, using specially-designed flat-nosed pliers. We'd use the pliers to stretch the fur to the outline of the template, place a half inch finishing nail on the fur, then let go of the fur with the pliers and bang the nail into place all in one swift smooth movement. The sheets when covered with fur were stacked along one wall to dry. The owner, a middle-aged Jewish man, worked an industrial sewing machine for edging and joining furs together. His two assistants, both young Italians, took turns operating a second sewing machine, alternating with tacking furs to the stretching and drying boards. I spent my days stretching furs and driving nails into place to hold them. There were hundreds of small shops like this scattered throughout the district, each specializing in one aspect of the process of producing clothing. It seemed to me that all the owners of these shops were Jewish and the employees all Italian. I used to joke that I was the only blue-eyed person in that entire area of the city. One of the Italian young men and I became friends that summer. He would sometimes invite me to his home for lunch on weekends where his father would provide us with a bottle of home-made wine. His family invited me to an open-air concert featuring arias and duets from Italian operas. We played pool on the Danforth where he taught me an invaluable lesson. I won the first game with him easily, so he proposed that we bet a dollar on the second game. He cleared the table before I even got my first turn. He laughed as he took my dollar and said he hoped I had been paying attention. I had. I never again bet on a skill-game, especially when it looked like an easy win for me.

John and Jean Lee, meanwhile, had separated when John realized that he was gay. They remained friends the rest of their lives. Jack had to find new accommodations when John and Jean split up and somehow found an elderly woman who needed a live-in care-giver. Jack filled that roll in her life. She never liked me and told Jack she thought I was a homosexual who was trying to seduce him. Nothing could have been further from my mind, but I stopped visiting in his new digs though he often visited me over the next few years. Speaking of homosexuals, it was obvious to me that the pairs of men I was sharing a house with were couples, but I never gave it a second thought. What they did was none of my concern. They worked as waiters or in Yonge Street record stores and were interested in the arts scene, encouraging me to see experimental and foreign movies. That's how I got to know the early movies of Roman Polanski and Ingmar Bergman, as well as some of the more obscure Alfred Hitchcock movies, and the films of Sergei Eisenstein.

I also became friends with a number of Stan's friends and students. They were a loose collection of artists, actors, and writers. Two of the girls who hosted many parties called themselves Kig and Kog. I don't think I ever knew their given names. They had special names for everyone in their circle; mine was "Worm." Kig was short and intense and Kog was tall, slender, with waist-length black hair and a more detached manner. She and a tall young man named Denis with hair to the middle of his back tied in a ponytail were a couple, and I saw them eleven years later when I was escorting my grade seven class at

the National Art Gallery in its old location on Elgin Street in Ottawa. My class and I were on a balcony over-looking the main concourse and I saw Kog and Denis entering a door marked “Staff Only.”

All of which, in a way, brings us to the subject of why I turned down the offer from the provincial government for a full scholarship to one of the most prestigious schools in North America, if not the world. I started to sense, without being able to articulate it, that my generation was splitting into two: the straights, interested in careers, marriage, and a house in suburbia, and those who were more hip to the arts and alternative life-styles. Upper Canada College, to me, represented everything I was trying to avoid: an obsession with money, high pressure careers, a dubious moral code, and an intolerance for anything or anyone that questioned that lifestyle. I didn’t realize it then, but someone who would become my next mentor, beginning in about 18 months into the future, was a graduate of that body, thus proving that even the high-pressured conformist atmosphere promoted by the teachers, administration, and students of Upper Canada College, could produce some notable exceptions. But, then, the Rev. Dan Heap, Member of Parliament, was exceptional in many regards.

Meanwhile, there were odd rumblings going on about me in the summer of 1963. Men’s hair was slowly getting longer and women’s skirts shorter. In my case, on the subject, I stopped getting my hair cut in the juvenile delinquent duck’s ass and opted for what was called a Caesar cut: short, and brushed forward over the forehead. I had decided I was not going to waste any more time in trying to style my hair. It must have started to creep longer because I recall Stan telling me that summer that he thought long hair was okay as long as it was kept clean. When I returned to school in the fall, teachers, including the vice-principal, used to slip me a dollar from time to time so I could get my hair cut, delivering a message that I was not interested in receiving. Stan’s sister visited him as she was beginning a career as a teacher and questioned me at length about my feelings about short skirts for girls. It was becoming an issue.

Kig, Kog, Stan, and friends used to meet for espresso and conversation in the outdoor cafes on Elizabeth and Elm Streets sandwiched between Yonge Street and the Toronto General Hospital. This was the area frequented by Ernest Hemingway when he worked for the Toronto Star, a fact we were conscious of. One of the members of the household I shared worked at Barberian’s Steak House on Elm Street and introduced me to Harry Barberian who invited me to his office a few times to expound on his philosophy of life. He believed in hard work and high standards; all I had to do was shake off self-doubts and start putting myself forward. During the winter he ordered one of his waiters to take me to a party so I could meet some influential people—an opportunity I blew—and once got me a job working for a colleague that I quit after six hours on the job. I definitely was not interested in the restaurant trade.

I also spent time that summer trying to come to terms with and understand what I had learned about myself at the Toronto Psychiatric Hospital. I learned that my IQ was close to Einstein’s IQ. His was an estimated 160 and many years later I scored an astounding 174 on a test administered by Mensa—and also learned that there are many factors affecting one’s scores on this type of test, resulting in widely differing scores at different times in one’s life. At a time when I was depressed and anxiety-ridden a therapist told me he thought I couldn’t score above 135 in my present state. As I got older I realized that no one was even sure what these tests were measuring, exactly, because intelligence is such a nebulous

and variously-manifest capacity. I met people who probably could not score above 90 on such tests who I considered to be smarter than many people who could easily score 120. I also concluded over many years of observation that people in the “average” range of IQ were often not nearly as smart as they thought they were. When I joined Mensa I discovered that very many of the brightest members of our world are misfits who can barely carry on a coherent conversation and have trouble mastering simple day-to-day activities most take for granted. With the spread of the Internet, making it possible to connect with and read the thoughts of people from all walks of life throughout the world, I could barely believe the depth of ignorance and stupidity I was encountering. We have highly-placed and influential people in power who can’t grasp the basic principles of modern science and are unable to employ elementary reasoning in their encounters with reality.

In my attempt to understand all this, I relied on the meaning of the word perception. I could perceive things that the average person could not, like patterns where others saw random numbers. I drew a bell curve along an x-axis centred on a y-axis representing 100. The curve almost flattened out at 80 and 120. And then I drew a horizontal line from the high point of the curve to the right, above the highest IQ scores. The difference between the value of that line and the line representing the percentage of the population that scored that value is what I understood to represent the difference between what brighter people were aware of and could perceive and that of the average person. I pictured it as the ability to “see” further than the limits of one’s self. The trouble with such associations is that one can very readily be accused of having an inflated ego, compounded by the fact that it is often very difficult to articulate what one can “perceive” to someone who sees nothing. For example, in analysing the music of Johann Sebastien Bach, one of the brightest minds the world has known—in any field, not just in music—one can encounter musical progressions that defy reason and all the so-called “rules” of the musical theories of the times, and yet they make sense from a perspective of someone playfully poking holes in the boundaries as if to find what lies beyond… and most people hear nothing but pretty sounds. In such encounters terms like “elitist,” “long-haired freak,” and “snob” get tossed about freely, often leaving the one trying to explain or instruct feeling a bewildered hurt. After a few years I simply gave up trying to explain the reality that I inhabit to others. The few times I’ve ventured to attempt a description of the gap between my perceptions and what others were telling me they experienced I was slapped down hard. Unknowingly, I was embarking on a life-time of underachieving, of riding, for the most part, under the radar, rising momentarily to shine, then sinking once again below the horizon. I never lived up to the promise of my adolescence and the people who were supporting and encouraging me mainly, I think, because of that very telling heartfelt cry when my doctor injected me with sodium thiopental and asked me what my problem was: “Nobody loves me.”

04. Growing Alone

In September of 1963 I was seventeen years old and had been away from home for almost three years. I entered grade 12 at Riverdale alienated from my classmates. I had attempted suicide and spent eight months in a mental institute. I was friends with artists and writers and had spent the summer working in the garment industry. Nothing, as far as I could see, had changed for them. They still lived in comfortable homes with comfortable parents and had their lives planned out. Just two more years of high school and they'd be off to the University of Toronto, or Queens, or Western, settled into frat houses and on their way to careers in business. I didn't know what I wanted, but it wasn't that.

Though I remained friends with the men who lived in the house where I had rented a room for the summer, it was considered a good idea for me to move when Jack and I got drunk one night on Stan's wine while he was out. Jack staggered about the room, flailing his arms, tearing down decorations that Stan had put up and falling onto Stan's silkscreens. I was drunkenly angry, cursing the men who tried to calm me and throwing burning cigarettes at them. The reason I was angry is that I had met a young woman at a party who had come home with me. Though we never made out—I slept on the cot while she took my bed—she was the first woman I had seen completely nude. The first morning we awoke and each got up, wrapped in a blanket. She let hers drop as we stood facing each other and said, "I think people should be comfortable with the human body, don't you?" Of course I agreed, trying not to stare. She hugged me and then quickly dressed. Whatever dreams I might have had of an affair with Doris vanished as she spent her evenings off visiting friends, then coming back to my room to sleep. One night I gathered up her clothing that had been scattered about my room and threw everything down the stairs to send a message to her when she returned that night. So, Jack and I got drunk and I was asked to leave.

I found a room in a house a few blocks away. The home was owned by a young couple with two young girls. The wife, Maria, was from Italy, and the husband, Hans, from Poland. They occupied the first floor and rented the second floor to another young couple. The third floor had two rooms; I took one, the other was empty when I moved in. The room had a single bed, dresser, a table and chair, and a hotplate. My rent was $10 a week. My welfare cheques had started arriving when I began school. They were for $54 a month, meaning I had between $4 and $14 a month, depending on how many weeks there were in a month, for food and everything else. I was a heavy smoker, so there was even less money remaining for food. I had no idea how to budget or how to prepare simple meals. I had enough saved from my summer job to pay for text books and basic supplies. There was a fish and chip shop a short distance away and, when I had enough money, I'd take home a meal wrapped in newspaper. There was also a lunch counter where I'd order coffee and chat with the owner. He occasionally gave me small jobs to do, like cleaning the gutters, and he'd sometimes give me a free cup of coffee. I couldn't afford the club sandwiches he sold. I used my hotplate to heat water for instant coffee that I learned to drink black, as I had no way to keep milk.

I starting seeing Mr Belt again once a week as he kept office hours one evening a week to accommodate those going to school or working. He invited me to his home for dinner a few times. And my music

teacher, Baird Knecktel, invited me for Sunday dinner fairly regularly. Generally I could count on one good meal a week. Sometimes Jack would drop by and he'd buy me tea and a Danish pastry at a lunch counter.

Hans, who owned the house where I rented, told me the story of how the Germans had come to his village and, because he had four brothers, all fit and healthy, the family was offered a larger home. All the boys were expected to—and did—join the German army. However, he was wounded and captured while battling the British in France and was evacuated to England where, after he recovered, he joined the British army and was sent to fight in Italy where he met his future wife. He was the first person I had met who had fought for the Germans during the war. Growing up I was used to seeing thin older men with blue numbers tattooed on their forearms. They were from Latvia, Poland, Lithuania, Estonia. They were all quiet and grim, raising their families with a sad distance. Like my insight a year before when I realized that most Russians had to be simple hard-working folks just like the rest of us, here was a representative of the most hated regime in history and he was a quiet, hard-working man with a young family. He was a fan of the Irish Sweepstakes and tried to explain to me how it worked, but I just didn't get it. When I'd return from trips to the University of Toronto's music library with pages of scores of Schoenberg and Stravinsky that I had copied out, he translate the German and Russian for me.

I was now convinced that I was destined to become a composer of music. I stayed up late at night furiously scribbling notes on the staff paper that Stan had printed for me. I'd copy out all the orchestra parts and take the clutches of barely legible pages to Mr Knecktel hoping he'd have the orchestra class play them. He never did, though he did start giving me private violin lessons at his home.

Sometime during my stay at Hans' and Maria's I was drawn to a paper-back book in the coffee shop rack. It had a dark blue jacket, a picture of a woman in a swirling dress seemingly floating in an ill-defined chaos—like the paintings I had produced when at the Toronto Psychiatric Hospital. The cover was dominated by an iron-like letter "V." Thomas Pynchon was the author. I bought and read that book, unable to put it down, absolutely enthralled. It described a world I, at the point, was barely aware of existing. It is a sprawling story embracing many characters in scattered parts of the world. It described parties that went on for days, and hunting for alligators in New York's sewers. The characters were hip, alienated, wildly creative, and sometimes weird. It was so far from the neat orderly world I had grown up in, it was as if I was reading about creatures from another planet. Even the hipsters I knew, like Kig, Cog, Stan, and Denis, were narrowly straight-laced compared the Pynchon's characters. For the rest of my life I skirted around the edges of Pynchon's world, never a part of it, but never quite apart from it either. I still have that same paperback, though I have not yet re-read it, on my bedside table, more than 50 years later. A few years ago I started to read "Gravity's Rainbow" and found it absolutely unreadable. I tried three times and never got more than about 50 pages into it before I gave it up as a lost cause.

Meanwhile, Stan gave me a jacket he no longer wanted, as the jacket I had used since leaving home was now far too small for me. However, my shoes were worn and holes developed in the soles. My socks soon were worn through where the holes were and my feet became blistered from the constant contact with pavement. I learned to cut layers of newspaper to line my shoes and felt an enormous sense of relief and comfort for the few moments before the paper shredded and wore through. Rainy days were

the worse, as my feet would be wet and as fall advanced towards winter, it seemed as if I was always cold—especially my feet. I was also experiencing a deep sense of exhaustion and was finding it increasingly difficult to get up on time to attend school. Often I would sleep until two or three o'clock in the afternoon, then rush off to school in time for orchestra rehearsal.

Stan had moved to the basement of the house he shared and built a bunk and work tables. Every Saturday evening artists and writers would gather at his place to talk about the arts. I joined them. Stan was planning to start a printing business and conversations often revolved around that. At a given point during the evening people would pile on top of each other on cushions in a corner of the room, groaning loudly and moaning. I didn't really understand what was going on, but wanted to join in. I'd lean on top of the pile stiffly, uncertain. One night Doris, who was below me, suddenly kissed me passionately during such a group huddle.

One of the girls treated me kindly and invited me to her home for dinner and so she could lend me some books that she thought I might find enlightening. As we stood in her porch, I holding the bundle of books, she suddenly threw her arms about my neck and hugged me tightly. I didn't understand what was going on, so I kissed her neck and she immediately drew away. The next Saturday I was waiting for her at Stan's when she arrived and fell into an animated conversation with another young man. I waited, growing angry and impatient. When she finally ended her conversation and turned to me, the smile faded from her face when she saw the look on mine. She drew back as I lashed out at her, angry that she had talked with someone else before acknowledging me. It was as if I had split into two people. One of me was angry and hurt; the other wondering what was going on and why was I acting this way. I finally caught up with myself and stumbled, mumbling an apology, but I knew that I could never undo whatever harm I had just created.

I raced home in agony and threw myself on the stairs leading up to my room. When the owners returned home from visiting relatives they found me there, asking what was wrong. I couldn't answer them. I had no idea how to explain. Soon Mac Belt was there and he led me to his car and drove me to St Michael's hospital. I didn't want to talk to anyone and stared through a frosted window at the raining distorted world of the emergency parking lot. Mr Belt called my name several times, but I didn't respond to him. Finally he left. Meanwhile, I was admitted to St Michael's suffering from malnutrition and anxiety. They kept me there for two weeks. That's where I passed my eighteenth birthday. Jack visited me, giving me a book as a birthday present.

On my release from hospital I figured I deserved to take the time remaining before Christmas off. I looked after Hans and Maria's children until he arrived home from work. I'd then sit in the kitchen chatting with him while he prepared dinner. It seemed it was always the same: potatoes and vegetables in a beef stew. He'd invite me to eat with them, so, as Christmas approached I was getting at least one good meal a day. I'd usually retire to my room for the evening, writing music, then creep downstairs to watch the late night movie after Hans and Maria had gone to bed. They rented the front room on the third floor to an older man who I avoided. He drank a great deal and I'd hear him muttering to himself as I lay in bed. He frightened me.

Hans and Maria invited me to spend Christmas day with them. I had received my January welfare cheque early and bought the two girls simple toys. Maria was angry with me for having spent what little money I had on them. They then took me with them when they visited Maria's family for the Christmas meal. What a feast. They started with spaghetti and I filled my plate, not realizing that this was the appetizer course and there was a lot more to come. They served eels and various Italian dishes that I was unfamiliar with. All throughout they steadily drank hard distilled liquor and my glass was always kept full. I was drunk and satiated when we returned home. I lay in bed listening to the old man mutter about how nobody gave him any respect and how angry he was at being excluded from the Christmas festivities. He kept saying he was going to stick a screw-driver in my stomach to make me pay. There was a small hook and eye latch on my door and I hoped it was strong enough to keep him out of my room. I told Hans about the old man's threats and they asked him to leave their house immediately.

After the Christmas break I made a valiant effort at returning to school and catching up, but I had missed a month of classes before the break. Also, it was a rare day I woke up early enough to make it to school on time. A crisis came when the chemistry teacher returned the test we had recently taken. I had failed miserably. What angered me was the test was based on one's ability to remember the characteristics of the elements, like their valencies. I understood all the concepts but couldn't remember the damned little numbers that crowded the boxes on the periodic table. I walked quickly from the class and headed for the principal's office where I complained loudly that the teacher was prejudiced against intelligence, focusing on idiotic rote memory work instead of intellectual comprehension. The principal suggested I go home for a few days. When I returned to his office a few days later I told him that I had decided to drop out. I was literally starving to death on the pittance the welfare department provided. He then told me he had petitioned the school board and they had agreed to give me twenty dollars a month for living expenses. It was too late. I had made up my mind.

I read the Toronto Star every day. In those days the classified want ad section was 20 or 30 pages long, about a quarter to half filled with job vacancies. I phoned a life insurance company looking for a mail clerk and was interviewed the next day. I was hired and began work immediately.

The company was on Yonge Street at King, the heart of Toronto's high finance district. It was in an 18-story stone building, long since torn down and replaced with about 60 stories of steel and glass. The company occupied three floors near the top. The middle floor was where the agents occupied private offices around the periphery and the typists and clerks occupied the open space in the centre. The mail room as also on that floor. On the floor below was the supply room and purchasing department. The floor above was for the company president and owner. My job was to sort the mail when it arrived twice daily, open the envelopes and sort the contents for various recipients. I would then push a small cart around the floor dropping the mail into appropriate in-baskets. I also had to operate a mailing machine. The unsealed envelopes, already addressed by the typists, were fed through the machine that printed a stamp and dampened and sealed the envelope. One of my life-long afflictions is the inability to make machines fulfil their intended purpose. Invariably, envelopes would jam and be torn by the machine, or fail to receive a stamp print, or be stamped on the wrong side or upsidedown.

Actually, I was the junior mail clerk. I shared the mail room with the senior clerk. As far as I could see his duties were to read the newspaper in the morning and kibitz with other staff members the rest of the day. He also ran the office hockey pool. The director of personal had me in her office a few times for pep talks. She didn't think I was putting enough energy into the job. Though starting time was 9:00 am, and I usually arrived at about five minutes to the hour, she suggested I should arrive 15 minutes early and start the coffee machine. I also should show more initiative on the job, and, to that end was asked to run errands for the company president. I was to check outside his office each morning and take the pair of shoes I found there to a shop down the street to be polished and to pick up a red carnation for his desk. I also was to check his closet to see if there were shirts that needed dry-cleaning. Whatever I was asked to do, I did, but it did not appear to be enough. I was sent to the Toronto Stock Exchange, a few blocks away on Bay Street, so I could "learn" something. I had no idea what I was expected to do once there and stood bewildered, watching as meaningless letters and numbers scrolled by on the strip display over the trading floor. Finally, after a couple of weeks I was let go, the reason given was that I did not show enough initiative and interest in the job. And, so it was back to having next to nothing. At least I had been able to buy a new pair of shoes with my first pay cheque.

Hans rented the other room on my floor to a young man who decided that we should join forces and merge our rooms together. He moved his single bed into my room and moved my table into his so that we now had a sitting room-kitchen and a separate bedroom. I was not happy, being used to being alone, but I didn't know how to say no. He had a small portable record player and played early Beatle pieces over and over, gushing enthusiastically over each piece. I was thoroughly immersed in 20ieth century classical music at that point, thinking that Prokoviev, Stravinski, and Shostakovitch were the only music worth listening to, but the Beatles tunes were catchy and a step up from the mindless pop music that I was completely disinterested in. One night I arrived home to find him in his bed with another young man. I was repelled and took my blanket downstairs to sleep on the couch in Hans' and Maria's living room. The next day, Hans, on hearing why I had slept on his couch, ordered the young man to put the rooms back the way they had been originally. In a week or so, my once roommate moved out and I never saw him again.

Mr. Belt, meanwhile, was working hard to get me established at something. He sent me to visit a potential "big brother," but the interview consisted of the intense man staring into my eyes, his hand on my thigh, telling that he hoped we would become very close as we got to know each other. Mr. Belt told me of an elderly couple who had a book-binding business looking for a young person to train to take over their shop once they retired. I could not picture myself doing this for the rest of my life. And then he lucked into an opportunity for me to start on the ground floor of a new business just opening. The owner was looking for a right-hand man to get his ice cream shop up and running, eventually becoming his manager. I went to the interview in the sawdust coated restaurant and was hired after receiving a lecture from Mr. Hopgood about how the ice cream business was all about making people happy. He gave me some pamphlets on how to store and retail ice cream to take home and study.

Over the next few days I worked at prepping the restaurant, particularly at cleaning up and repairing the broken plaster walls of the washrooms. I had no idea how to mix and apply plaster. I just kept layering it on, hoping some would stick. He eventually hired someone who knew what he was doing to complete

the job. I learned how to operate the grill and the formulas for making ice cream sundaes and he hired a young woman to take orders and run the cash register. Hopgood's Old Fashioned Ice Cream Parlour and Sandwich Bar opened, the small restaurant crowded with the owner's family and friends wishing him well.

Other staff were hired—young people from a local high school. Though I was supposed to be training to be the manager, I was treated like the other employees and resented it. I felt humiliated when told to distribute flyers throughout the local neighbourhood. I retreated to working the grill, though I had no idea how to make the fried eggs sandwiches and other simple items on the menu. Mr. Hopgood himself seemed unclear on how to run a restaurant in that part of Toronto. Initially he charged ten cents for a cup of coffee and faced a near riot as customers refused to pay such an exorbitant price. I had to scratch out the ten cent prices on the menus and replace them with the standard five cents. There was a movie theatre across the street from the restaurant, but he never seemed able to coordinate our closing time with the time the movies let out, so that often he would have me reopen when he saw the crowd leaving the theatre, after all the closing activities were done, the grill scrubbed and cooling off, chairs on tables off the freshly mopped floor, cash register balanced, and all dishes washed and put away. I was angry and miserable a lot of the time. Mr. Hopgood tried giving me pep talks, telling me repeatedly that if I smiled everything would go so much better.

Finally, one night, when working alone with a young woman who was ordering me about as if I was a junior apprentice, I had enough and left by the rear door. A new plan for my future was forming. I gave Hans and Maria my notice and moved on. It was July of 1964.

05. New Directions

In the spring of 1964 Prime Minister Pearson was campaigning for a unique Canadian flag to replace the Red Ensign that Canada had been using. At the same time, Stan's plans for a printing company were starting to jell. He organized a company to print hundreds of copies of proposed flags, as well as some joke ones, and a team of seamstresses finished them off. They were a massive hit and Stan was beginning to make enough money to realize his dream. One afternoon he and I went to visit a carriage house he was thinking of renting to use for his printing business. Like all carriage houses, there was a double hinged door big enough to admit the carriages. The ground floor was barren, except for a horse stall in a back corner. The upper floor, that once housed the hay needed to feed the horses, was a massive open space with a single half door formerly used to hoist the hay bales as the only outside light source. He didn't commit to it then, but it would soon become the home of "Coach House Press," one of Canada's most outstanding and frequent award-winning printers of books.

https://chbooks.com/About-Us

2 The home of Coach House Press, Canada's most celebrated independent publishing house. Stan Bevington, its founder, was awarded the Order of Canada in 2009.

The owner of the house where Stan lived let me camp out after I left Hans' and Maria's. I slept on the floor of the unused dining room. I packed flags into boxes for shipping and listened as Stan and his friends discussed the publishing arm of Coach House Press, House of Anansi, named for an African spider goddess. I didn't pay much attention as I was trying to put my plans into action. I had decided I

was going to return to Kitchener, appeal to a school principal to admit me as a student and apply to the welfare department for support. I needed some cash. Stan gave me a bundle of ten flags that I could sell and I phoned one of the teachers that I knew at Riverdale. He agreed to lend me fifty dollars and invited me to visit his home to pick it up. He sat close to me on the couch, his hand always on my thigh as he asked me about my plans. When it got late he asked if I'd like to spend the night. My head was filled with my idea that I would board a bus for Kitchener in the morning, so I said no thanks. He hugged me. I saw him next a few years later when I visited Riverdale when I was a university student, hair down to my waist, the same length as my girlfriend's. He died soon afterwards of a brain aneurysm. I don't need to name him, as nothing happened that night when he gave me fifty dollars.

I walked from the bus station in Kitchener to the YMCA, only a few blocks away, where I paid to rent a room for four nights. It was a Monday afternoon and I figured that five days would be enough to accomplish what I set out to do. The next morning I took my breakfast at a lunch counter near the YMCA and the owner agreed to take my ten flags and sell them on a consignment basis. The flags I had were the most popular of the proposed designs: a red maple leaf on a white square in a blue field. They were designed to be slipped over car radio antennas.

My first order of business the next day was to visit one of the high schools. I put my case to the principal that I should be admitted to grade 13, as I figured that I could tough out one year of high school on welfare, but two years would have been too hard a grind unless I could manage to find part-time work to supplement my income. He turned me down, saying he'd be willing to accept me into grade 12, but that was all he could do. I said I'd think about it.

Wednesday morning when I returned to the lunch bar, the owner told me he had to return the flags. Many of his customers were so angry that they had threatened never to enter his establishment again if he did not get rid of the flags. He explained that he had no problem with the proposals, but he could not afford to upset his regular clientele. Kitchener, in the heart of the most conservative part of Ontario, was not an environment where one could freely discuss new ideas. I was going to get another lesson in that later that day. About four years later when I returned to visit with my sister, my hair now shoulder-length after a year in university, as I waited for a municipal bus, cars of angry looking young men circled the block to get a better look as this hippy in their pristine city, some shouting insults at me. Fast forward a few years after that incident and those same angry young men had hair even longer than mine had been that day. I am sure that today the customers of that lunch counter would be equally angry if someone were to propose that we change the current flag of Canada back to what it had been prior to 1965.

However, on my way to the welfare office I stopped at a small confectionery and the owner agreed to take my flags on a consignment basis. Two days later she had sold all the flags and insisted that I take the entire proceeds, foregoing her agreed-upon share. She wanted me to get more flags for her. As I sat in the waiting area of the welfare office, I could clearly hear the woman in charge addressing a client, from what I could overhear a young woman whose husband had abandoned her, leaving her with two small children. Instead of assistance, the welfare official was bragging that Kitchener held the record in Ontario for the lowest welfare rate and she was not about to let a healthy and fit young woman spoil

that record. “But I can’t feed my kids,” the woman pleaded. “Then get a job,” she was told. “But who will look after my kids?” “That’s not our problem,” she was told. Nothing would move this official, not even the mother’s tears. She left quickly, baby in arms, holding the hand of a two year old.

My turn.

The woman listened to my story and then told me that Kitchener held the record for the lowest welfare rate in Ontario and that no healthy young man was going to spoil that record. “But I can’t hold a full-time job and still go to school,” I argued. “Not our problem,” I was told. Then the woman softened and said, “Why don’t you go home? I know your father. He’s a good man.” When I got back to the YMCA that afternoon, the desk clerk gave me a ten dollar bill. “This is for you,” he said. I don’t know who it was from, but I was getting very low on cash and appreciated it.

Through that hot and muggy week, I visited the homes of friends from elementary school days. The stories were all the same: they’d be pleasant to me and their parents would advise me to go home, my father was a nice man, etc., etc. It was as if the entire city knew my father and what a good man he was. I could not answer any of them. I did not have a vocabulary able to express the sense of oppression I had in his presence. No one understood what I was about and I wasn’t even sure about that myself. Hot, sticky, muggy evenings, I sat in my room, looking out the window at a small park across the street.

Nothing was working out the way I had hoped it would. I could not explain to anyone what it was I wanted. I picked up a pen and started to write on a sheet of paper on the ledge of the window.

Simple words. Keep it simple. No explanations or expositions. Just words. “He big,” I wrote. “I small.” “He big/ I hurt.” “Small me.” And so it went, one page filled and became another. “Big hurt.”

I looked at the park across the street. “Park/ green/ so green/ cool/ dark.” Keep it simple. Just write what was there, nothing more. “Bright cars/ dark trees.”

The next day after I returned from my breakfast the desk clerk told me that he had a phone message for me. “Mr. Brown” and a phone number. Someone had told my father I was here. I felt panicky, afraid he was going to show up. I quickly packed, checked out, and walked quickly to the bus station, worried that his car was going to screech to a halt across my path. As the bus pulled away from the city I felt as though I had just escaped prison and was headed for the freedom and anonymity of the big city.

Over the next three years I called myself a poet. I filled books with neatly typed pages, numbering some 300 poems in all. I read regularly in coffee houses, like “The Bohemian Embassy,” where Margaret Atwood, Milton Acorn, and Gwendolyn MacEwen read their poetry between performances by Ian and Sylvia Tyson.

I read often at The Inn of the Unmuzzled Ox, a poor cousin of The Embassy, run by The Student Christian Movement, a Canada-wide campus organization where some of the most radical ideas in Canada, such as the early discussions of gay rights, were being discussed. One of my poems was published in an anthology of Canadian poetry edited by George Bowering, and a number were published at McGill

University when I was a student there in 1974-75. Poetry became a vehicle through which I could say things I could never put into words before and it helped me articulate and define who I was becoming.

The Encroachment (May 13, 1966)

the ambivalence of cold cheap stone

in amber lights

a room flashes on, one off

over hypnotic ritual of apartment buildings

can I say this pyramid

will not collapse on fulfilment

of its ten year lease

while this ancient home

can legate to its legacy?

and can I say this cold, this warm

this house, this home

this and all and no more?

and will I say this doomsday

book will outlive its inheritors

this scrap, the dust? I will be

free as birds which dart though the one hole

in the tangled interwoven twigs

be quick

before the foliage fills them in

Seen in Passing Eyes (November 3, 1966)

The loneliness of people's eyes

moves in a slow inner dance

like a buttocks bone grinding into a chair

it eats.

Like a young girl

tears streaming down her cheeks

writing on her window

for passing pedestrians the word

Happy.

the movement increases

till mind and body

are divorced in a frenzy

and ceases

in a cumulative

sleep.

06. Peace Camp and Temple House, Summer and Fall 1964

On arriving back in Toronto in July of 1964 I had a problem. Namely: no money, no job, and no place to live. I went to Stan's place and used the phone to call my old friend Jack. When I explained my situation he told me that maybe John Lee could help. John was running a Peace Camp on behalf of the Student Christian Movement that summer. Jack gave me the number.

I told John's widow, many years later, that one thing I could always count on was that whenever I asked John for help, he gave it immediately, unquestioningly. John told me where the camp was and invited me to come over; he could see what he could do. The Student Christian Movement, in the 1960's, was one of the most radical campus-based groups in the country. Every summer it organized "camps" across the nation where young people from university campuses would live together and focus on some aspect of social services. There were mental health camps where members worked in the field over the summer, or worker camps, where members worked in industry; casual study groups would help coordinate and integrate what they were learning in their fields. The Peace Camp that John was coordinating that summer was devoted to studying issues relating to world peace, with students working wherever they could find jobs. It was located in Trinity Square, a collection of older homes on a short street near the Toronto General Hospital, the street dominated by Holy Trinity Anglican Church—a large stone imitation gothic building. Eaton's eventually took over the entire area, razing the homes to make way for a downtown shopping centre, isolating the church. At the time, Holy Trinity was virtually abandoned, but over the next several years it became a centre for the homeless and gay rights activism, led by the Reverend Don Heap, later a friend and a member of parliament.

I was invited to stay for dinner with the chatty, enthusiastic students from across Canada. They agreed to discuss my situation in a meeting after dinner. I took a walk through downtown Toronto while they decided. The new city hall was under construction and I admired the inward-curved towers embracing the central clam-shell council chambers. There was a catwalk between the towers near the top so construction workers would not have to descend then ascend if they need to move to the other tower. A few days later one of the camp members and I climbed the concrete staircase in one tower and crossed the catwalk to the other for the descent. I paused midway, realizing I was one of the few people who would ever see downtown Toronto from this vantage point.

In any case, the campers decided I could stay while they worked out a solution for me. Over the next few weeks I sat in on their discussions of the war in Vietnam (which, at that time, was largely being ignored by the press) and on nuclear disarmament. They were enthusiastic and optimistic that their efforts would have an effect on the world. One young man decided to go on a hunger strike to support world peace. An excited young reporter form the Toronto Star came to interview him; hunger strikes were something new and interesting. The students were planning on attending a demonstration at the American Bomarc missile base in La Macaza, Quebec and invited me to join them. A half-dozen of us crowded into John's car for the drive to northern Quebec. We reached Ottawa in the dark and crossed

the Ottawa River. Hull, then, was a collection of tiny houses interspersed with taverns and depanneurs. We drove along gravel roads through thick forest, finally deciding to stop for the night at a clearing beside the road. We rolled up in sleeping bags on the ground. In the morning we reached out destination, a large log cabin. There were perhaps 50 other people there and later that afternoon a shout went up, "The Heaps are here. The Heaps are here." An old much-battered van pulled up, driven by a middle-aged man with a thick black beard, accompanied by his short heavy-set wife and six children, all blond, blue-eyes, self-possessed, and apparently old hands at this sort of thing. We trained in passive resistant techniques, taking on roles of brutal military police and polite, soft-spoken protesters. Schedules were drawn up. We were to picket the military base for two days before blockading it.

I was assigned to stand by the road leading into the base holding a sign. A picture of me appeared on the back cover of the Student Christian Movement national journal a few months later with the caption, "A Christian Takes a Stand." As evening approached there were only four of us left. Townsfolk drove out to see these "peaceniks" come to visit their corner of the world and flashed thumbs up at us. After dinner a large group of us picked up sleeping bags and began a long hike to where we were to spend the night—another cabin a couple of miles away. Night fell as we marched. The only way I knew where to go was to keep the person in front of me in sight. The next day more local residents came out to stare at these strange peaceniks lining the road leading into the base. A few young men flirted with our female members in heavily-accented broken English.

Early next morning, in a heavy fog, the entire contingent marched to the base's main gate where a row of military police waited. Our spokesperson approached the camp commander who was waiting and informed him politely that we wished to enter the camp to turn it into a school for native Canadians (which is what happened years later when the bases was finally abandoned.) The commander refused and was informed that, in that case, we intended to blockade the base for three days. At a signal we all sat down on the pavement. As the sun burned away the fog, what had been a cold August morning turned into a blisteringly hot day. Heavy sweaters came off. In the afternoon a group of French Canadians from a local nationalist group joined us, but kept off to themselves playing a game I had never seen before that involved tossing handfuls of soft-drink caps into the air and then counting the number of heads up and heads down.

John had to be back at work the next day, so we left in the early evening directly from the protest site. He drove nearly all night to get back to Toronto by next morning. I heard later that the military police played loud rock 'n roll records all night and shone bright lights on the sleeping protesters. Early next morning they went out among the groggy protesters and dragged or picked them up, bodily throwing them into the ditch alongside the road. The protesters picked themselves up and sat back down on the road. This went on for 20 or 30 minutes until the military police noticed someone taking pictures. They stopped their actions and resumed standing at ease across the entrance to the base. A picture of the encounter made it onto the cover of Maclean's magazine under the caption, "Peace March Comes to Canada." This was the pattern for three days until, at a signal, the protesters struggled to their feet, collected their belongings and left the base, exactly as they had said they were going to do all along.

John told me they had located something for me. A group of students were running a coop. The idea was that I could do some cooking and cleaning in exchange for meals. He had located a rooming house a short distance away where the rent was only $7.50 a week. He would pay the first few weeks until I found a source of income. In discussions with him I said I thought I could handle the rest of my highschool by correspondence course, so this looked like a plan. He gave me the address so I went to check it out. It was an older 3-story home on Huron Avenue. The only person home was ensconced behind a desk in a glassed in porch off the rear of the house on the second floor. He introduced himself as the "manager" of the coop, which turned out to be a non-existent position. At the time I believed him. He was merely renting a room for the summer while the students were away. That was his method of operating, as I slowly learned over the coming years. He was a hanger on at the edges of the University of Toronto and the artist community, sometimes manipulating and exploiting the innocent and naïve.

I moved into the room in the rooming house and began spending my days at Temple House, as the coop was called. As the regular members returned from their summer jobs, the "manager" moved out. I was told that the coop was named for William Temple (1881- 1944), Archbishop of Canterbury (1942-44). Archbishop William was a noted theologian who worked for the relief of the victims of the Nazis during the war. Several of the students who lived in the coop were studying social work at the University of Toronto, but not all were students. One worked at the CBC; another was a librarian who worked at the Toronto Library's main branch. Two of them had just returned from spending the summer in Cuba, a working tour that had been arranged through the Student Christian Movement. The USA had recently embargoed Cuba and tensions ran high. Even many Canadians were suspicious of the Castro regime, parroting American anti-Communist propaganda lines. Most of Temple House's residents were members of the Student Christian Movement, though, as I soon learned, the house was split between the members of the United Church of Canada and Anglicans. The Anglicans attended services at the local church, St. Thomas's, a few blocks south of the coop. I joined them. As I had attended an Anglican Church for a few years between the ages of 8 and 10 I was comfortable with the service. A young assistant priest would accompany us back to the coop for Sunday lunch.

3 Temple House, Huron Avenue, Toronto.

Temple House tended to be something of a gathering centre for students living in the area. There seemed always to be a discussion group on-going in the living room. Alice Heap, national secretary of the Student Christian Movement was a frequent visitor and sometimes guests were invited to give a talk. I was particularly entranced by a talk by the dean of the Royal Conservatory of Music, Dr. Boyd Neel who told us that the best way to study music was to study medicine. (He, himself, was a surgeon with an illustrious career in music.) A few months later he, personally, gave me a tour of the Royal Conservatory while discussions about granting me a scholarship were on-going. Baird Knechtel, my old highschool music teacher, continued giving me violin lessons once a week at his home, took me to concerts at the U of T's Hart House, and sent me to see an elderly German violin teacher and member of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra who gave me a book on bowing techniques. Mac Belt bought me lunch once a week at a restaurant near his office. I decided that the first course I would take by correspondence was grade 12 chemistry. A few lessons in I realized that I could not complete it. I was expected to conduct experiments requiring lab equipment and chemicals I simply did not have access to.

Lack of a source of income was a major problem for me. There was nothing I could do about paying the rent in the rooming house. I had noticed a small room in the basement of Temple House, so I asked for it and the coop members agreed I could live there. Though I knew nothing about cooking and preparing food, I was assigned the job of doing all the grocery shopping and preparing one meal a day. I ordered canned vegetables from a food wholesaler that I heated up on the stove, peeled and boiled potatoes and served some kind of meat—usually fried hotdogs. Eventually I was assigned a member to help me with the grocery shopping and the other students took turns preparing dinner.

One of the students who had spent the summer in Cuba was taking a year off from her studies at the University of Manitoba. Faye and I began a relationship that continued to the present, though it was romantic for only the first four years or so. Those first few months I was jealous and possessive, uncertain of my standing with this woman five years my senior, very unclear on how to handle a sexual

relationship, and virtually no knowledge or experience with intimate relationships. She was the first person in my life who I was close to and I was untrusting and suspicious. I was baffled, entranced, and leery. Once she thought she might have become pregnant, despite our care, and she and Alice Heap spent an afternoon in her room discussing various options which, at the time, were very few. Basically the choices were: have the child, find a back street butcher and possibly be maimed or die, or fly to Sweden, the only country in the world where abortions were medically and legally available. Fortunately, it turned out to be a false alarm.

I spent a lot of time writing poetry, exploring my new-found path. Being surrounded by university students, I had access to their many books and recommendations. I read a lot that fall: "The ABC of Reading" by Ezra Pound, "Howl" by Allen Ginsberg, "The Stranger" by Albert Camus, "Being and Nothingness" by Jean-Paul Sartre, "Lord of the Flies" by William Golding, "Generation of Vipers" by Philip Wylie, everything by Leonard Cohen and Irving Layton I could get my hands on. I recall reading the entire text of "After the Fall" by Arthur Miller and read several of Shakespeare's plays, including "King Lear." One of the students gave me a Bible that I still have. I discovered Bob Dylan and listened to his early protest songs over and over. "Masters of War," "A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall," "The Times They are a-Changing," "Chimes of Freedom," "and "Blowing in the Wind." Faye sent me to meet a friend of hers from the University of Manitoba who was a poet and artist. Marvyne and I became friends (to this day), she acting as an adviser on my poetry efforts those first few years. In other words, I was a getting a 1960's general arts education without attending a single class.

But, in late November, in a fit of adolescent anguish after a misunderstanding with Faye, I slashed my wrist with a razor blade. This time I was driven by ambulance to the real loony bin: 999 Queen Street West. It was decided to keep me under observation for a month. I was put in an open ward and, despite my request not to do so, they contacted my father. I woke from an afternoon nap to find him sitting by my bed. He was quiet and concerned. He spoke to an attendant about getting me a haircut. The next day the attendant led me through the old wards where the failed experiments were kept; people, whose brains had been invaded by ignorant surgeons, slashing and cutting randomly, sat staring into nothing, cigarettes held loosely burning their fingers. I got the haircut that had so concerned my father. Jean Lee was working as a social worker at the hospital at the time and I was free to drop in on her and chat. She gave me advice on how to handle my sexual relationship with Faye. She arranged for tutors to visit me to help with high school math and history. My father returned a few days later and sat uncomfortably when a group of girls from Temple House arrived, laughing and joking. They brought me a copy of Playboy and a copy of Dostoyevsky's "The Idiot." My father was clearly baffled by both gifts. In his world young women did not give young men copies of dirty magazines and why would someone write a book about an idiot? I next saw him again about 17 years later when I visited him with my wife and eldest son who was a few months old at the time.

When I was released it was decided that my presence in Temple House was too disruptive given the problems that my relationship with Faye were causing. I knew they were right. After Christmas, Mac Belt managed to get me a job with the Unemployment Insurance Commission. I found a room in a rooming house a few doors down the street from Temple House. This, my second foray into the business world was no more successful than my first. At the time, Unemployment Insurance was a relatively new

government initiative and it was as grudgingly given as was welfare. Applicants had to line up to receive a card with their name and history on it, then take the card to the Employment Office, in the same building, where they would line up and get their card stamped to demonstrate that they had been to the employment bureau in search of work. They would then return to the UIC office, line up and hand their card to a clerk who would complete a form verifying that they were actively searching for employment, have them sign it, and then put the paper work into the system so that a cheque could be prepared and mailed to them. It was an absurd and wasteful system, governed by attitudes of condescension and paternalism. My job was simple: fetch and collect the cards for the clients. As I was staying up most of the night making out with Faye, writing poetry, or reading, I found it difficult to get up in time for work. About 10:00 am my landlady would barge into my room as I slept with a vacuum cleaner which she smashed into furniture making as much noise as she could. After a couple of weeks, Mac Belt called me one morning to let me know I had been fired.

Back to the drawing board

I thought long and hard about my next step. I came up with an idea that served me well; one which included a lesson I applied again a few times during my lifetime and later tried to share with my sons. I could not get up in the morning, but I had no trouble staying up all night. Solution: find a night job. What sort of job is there where people work at night and sleep during the day? Night watchman. So, I looked up security companies in the telephone book and walked to the closest one: Barnes Security. I lied, said I was 21, and was hired and given a uniform. I did not want to stay in the rooming house, especially as I would now have to sleep all day when the owner was busy with her loud and disruptive housework. I spoke to Alice Heap, knowing that they sometimes gave rooms to young people in their home. She was reluctant, but I persisted. Finally she sighed and gave in. And so I went to live with one of the most radical socially-active families in the country. Don and Alice died a few years ago after a life-time of social activism, including, for Don, many years as a Toronto municipal councillor and a Member of Parliament for the New Democratic Party. When they had to leave their home they sold it, at their original cost, so it could be used as a centre for refugees. Their children are still active in movements and groups committed to making the world a little bit better for everyone. Alice charged me $10 a week room and board and I was expected to share in household tasks, as were all the children. This was to be my home for the next several months. I had no idea at the time that I was only two years away from realizing my dream of entering university as a full-time student.

07. The Heaps and the Dupont Street Coop, 1965

The spring and summer of 1965 I rented a room from the Heap family. They lived, at the time, near Broadview Avenue between Gerrard and the Danforth. Don worked in industry as a shop steward, though he was an ordained Anglican priest. He believed his ministry was among the workers and the poor. He had a small office on the third floor in their home with an altar where he conducted communion services. They had two daughters and four sons, one of whom was adopted. There was no doubt that Alice ran the household. Chores were divvied up and everyone was expected to contribute. My job was to keep the kitchen floor clean. Every second night, after everyone was in bed, I'd wash then spread liquid wax on the floor. Meals were simple and basic. A frequent dish was chicken giblets served in egg noodles.

When Don went to Selma, Alabama to march with Dr Martin Luther King Jr the entire family staged a sit-in in front of the American conciliate on University Avenue. I joined them when I wasn't working. They often entertained young writers, poets, and social activists in their home and the dinner table sparkled with lively discussions on the current state of the world. Don was friendly towards me, but there was a reserve in his manner. Still, he was always supportive. He attended my going-away party when I left for Montreal and I visited the family a few times during my university undergrad years.

My first assignment as a security guard was at a major high rise subsidized housing project called Regent Park. There were guards posted 24 hours a day, usually two during the day and early evening, but only one overnight. I worked either 3:00 pm until 11:00 or sometimes 11:00pm until 7:00 am. When there were two of us, we'd patrol the grounds, but, when I was left alone overnight I'd stay in the office reading or writing poetry. It was a relatively quiet job. Only once there was a fight that I and the other guard had to break up, and one time I watched a lone police officer arrest and take two men into custody as the sun was rising. One evening a group of punks threatened to beat me with a baseball bat after my partner left in the evening. I called the office at Barnes and was advised to lock myself in the office until relief arrived. A car arrived with a senior employee at the wheel and he drove me home.

They posted me to guard a wood-working factory evenings and weekends where I walked among the machinery in the darkened corridors. Then Barnes arranged for me to work at Connaught Laboratories in northern Toronto. It was a huge sprawling medical research and vaccine production centre on Steels Avenue which, at the time, marked the end of Toronto. Across the road from the centre were farmers' fields. There were dozens of buildings in the complex with barns for horses, cattle, and sheep used in the production of insulin or for research. Shifts were from 5:00 pm until 8:00 am and we worked every second night, with back to back shifts every second weekend. There were two guards on duty. We had our home bases in different buildings and never met during the night. We were issued time clocks and had to follow a specific route at specific times throughout the night, punching the clocks at various stations. I liked the work. It was quiet, my task was simple, and I enjoyed the animals. I took an alarm clock to work and, during the wee hours, would set it to wake me for the next rounds. Otherwise, I had lots of time to read and write poetry in the tranquil setting.

Faye, meanwhile, had been getting work as a supply teacher, something she kept at for the rest of her life. It gave her freedom, variety, and enough of an income to support herself. In the spring she joined a camp set up by the Student Christian Movement as a paid employee. She was the cook of the camp and lived on the premises. Our sex lives took a break during the time she was at the camp. I had mixed feelings about it because it was a Canadian-Cuban fellowship camp. Several students from Cuba summered there, including one who had been her boyfriend in Cuba the previous summer. When the camp ended in late August, she returned to Winnipeg to complete her final year at the University of Manitoba. I wrote her almost daily, long epistles describing my thoughts and emotions. There were typewriters at the labs and I had lots of free time.

Also that spring I wrote the Royal Conservatory's harmony and counterpoint exams. My scores were near perfect. Mr. Knechtel drilled me in preparation for my grade six violin exam and it was shortly after that that the dean of the college gave me a guided tour of the facilities. Practice rooms all emitted music of a complexity that I felt was beyond my skills; I felt lost in the stage where they produced operas. Dr Neel told me he had heard I had an unusual talent; he knew of my circumstances and mentioned the possibility of a scholarship. As far as I knew I would have to complete highschool first, so that was uppermost in my mind. I had decided that I would try night school as the path to the highschool diploma and then I would worry about a career in music.

A problem with night school was that I was working nights. I told Barnes that I'd have to give up the job at the labs, but hoped they could find something that would fit my schedule. I had also decided that it was time to leave the Heaps and strike out on my own, sort of. There was a student coop on Dupont Street at the corner of Bathurst where a number of musicians and recent graduates from the University of Manitoba lived. That's where I wanted to live, but as a full member, not a charity case. I would soon be 20 years old and my six months of a steady income as a security guard gave me a sense that I could look after myself.

The Dupont coop was a lively place. One of the members, Wayne, was a recent graduate of the University of Manitoba. He played guitar and sang lusty folk songs like "The Winnipeg Whore" and "Four and Twenty Virgins" that had us in stitches. There were other grads of the U of M in the house as were some of the frequent visitors. All were trying to figure out what to do with their degrees. One of visitors was Bob Davis, one of the founders of one of Canada's oldest political journals, This Magazine. I babysat for Bob and his wife from time to time. Another was Michael Moore, later to become a senior editor at The Globe and Mail. I took on the role of treasurer, meaning I was responsible for collecting each member's share of the expenses and paying the bills.

Barnes found me odd jobs from time to time, such as sitting in a truck depot or a discount store watching for shoplifters (I never caught any). Then I got more regular work on the Toronto ship yards, guarding ships as they were being unloaded or sometimes standing on deck throughout the night. One of my unofficial tasks was to translate the Portuguese-English of the stevedores unloading the ships for the Russian-Italian-Swedish-whatever-English of the ships' crews. However, in December the port closed for the winter and work became scarce.

I had decided to take grade 12 history at night school. The teacher was a weirdly odd right-winger whose theory of history was that civilization was born in Greece, moved to Europe, then to the Americas, meeting stiff resistance from savages all the way. It was now trying to advance into Asia but was meeting the usual resistant, this time from primitive Vietnamese. For some reason civilization had always moved inexorably westward and was always met by fierce resistance to be overcome, though everyone was grateful once they finally submitted. I was so angered and outraged that I sputtered incoherently as he condescendingly called me a "commie dupe" and other such idiocies. After about 6 weeks of this nonsense I quit, thoroughly disgusted.

As the fall progressed more people moved into the coop. One was a self-confessed thief who regaled us with stories of his exploits. He specialized in safe cracking and told us how he and friends would steal different types of safes and take them out to the country where they'd figure out how to crack them. He was also a teller of tall tales, telling us about an island in the Pacific Ocean where canaries rested on their migrations. The result was an island covered in guano, miles deep in places. Apparently gardeners would pay top dollar for the stuff, so, if we could raise the money to hire a ship, we could all be rich. He also had a violent temper and one night assaulted a young pregnant woman who was seeking refuge after running away from home. Don and Alice Heap took her to live with them after that, but she ran away and, last we heard, was in Quebec City. We evicted the thief from the household. I've met people like him from time to time: tellers of big stories with childishly violent outbursts when opposed, even with the opposition is all in their imaginations.

Another newcomer was Byron, who was to be my close friend for a couple of years. He had moved into the coop with one young woman, but, soon switched to another. He had been a student at McGill University in Montreal and had travelled to the Belcher Islands in James Bay where he stayed for a year. He had with him a trunk filled with Inuit soap stone carvings that he had brought back. He had a story for each carving, some of which were not anything like what we had come to associate with Inuit work—such as a life-sized head of a woman he called Mary, and carvings of seascapes with sea creatures barely visible below the surface. Byron had some carving tools and repaired damaged carvings, especially amulets.

Faye came to stay with me during her Christmas break, about three weeks in duration. We spent Christmas day at the Heaps. After she returned to Winnipeg, it was apparent that the house was in desperate straits. Some people had moved out and those remaining had no income. We would scrap together what we could to buy fuel oil ten dollars' worth at a time and resorted to stripping the basement of whatever wood we could find to burn in the fireplace. One night Byron, his girlfriend, and I were so hungry we put together what change we had and went to an all-night coffee shop on Yonge Street. We counted out our pennies on the counter and determined we could afford two cups of coffee and a single donut to share between the three of us. On the way back to the co-op, cutting through Yorkville Village a police officer stopped us, asking us where we were going and where we lived. On learning we shared the same address he asked Byron's girlfriend, "Which one's your sugar daddy." Byron said, "I've had enough of this shit" and started to walk away when the police office grabbed him and swung him up against a fence, snarling, "You don't walk away from me!" Fortunately, at that moment, another officer appeared from across the street and calmed things down.

Talk radio shows had been shouting about “hippies” for the past year or so, with callers complaining about how they couldn’t tell the boys from the girls and stories about innocent girls falling prey to “free love” and other such nonsense. I never really thought they were talking about me or my friends specifically. For one, none of us partook in illegal drugs, though we were generally sympathetic to those who did. I did know a few artists who wore their hair very long, but, generally, hair did not get much longer than what the Beatles were sporting. What we did do that people might have been talking about was not visit a barbershop every two weeks to get the back of our heads shaved up to the crown. The reasons were partly to do with our anti-military biases, but mainly to do with insufficient income. We lived together in co-ops not for the orgies (which I never heard of happening) but to share expenses. Many people were paired up into couples and enjoyed sex without benefit of clergy and, in that, we were probably the first generation to do so openly. The pill, recently invented and available, took a lot of the risk out of such relationships. But, “free love” existed mainly in the overheated imaginations of people who didn’t understand what was going on in the minds and environments of young people during the 1960’s.

What really seemed to raise the ire of the talk show hosts was the area around Yorkville Avenue. Because of the cheap rents a number of coffee houses and bars featuring folk artists like Ian and Sylvia Tyson, Joni Mitchel, Peter Paul and Mary had sprung up. Ronnie Hawkins’ “The Hawk’s Nest” was just a few blocks away. Young people, drawn to the music, flocked to the scene, causing general hysteria in the louder aspects of the press. When I walked through the area on weekends it seemed that most of the traffic was people who had come to stare at the “hippies” and make fun of anyone who was dressed in blue jeans and whose hair covered their collars. Though we sometimes went to hear specific groups perform in Yorkville, generally speaking the true “hipsters” gathered in expresso bars on Elizabeth and Elm Streets near the Toronto General Hospital. I recall sneeringly referring to the ones gathering in Yorkville on the weekends as “hippies” meaning “little hipster.” Bob Dylan sang, “The Times, They Are a Changin’” and, in a sense they were, but not in the ways the press was focused on. The American war in Vietnam was slowly making its way into the public’s awareness and American draft dodgers were starting to appear in co-ops throughout Toronto.

At the end of January I received a letter from Faye in which she said that her typewriter was broken. Students, then, needed typewriters. So, I crated my typewriter, packed some clothes and boarded a bus for Winnipeg, coming to her rescue. I think that I may have also been looking for a way to escape the oppressive and depressive atmosphere of the co-op as it disintegrated. I boarded the bus at midnight. The trip took about 36 hours. As I headed further north in Ontario, then swept the high arc over Lake Superior it grew increasingly colder. At the bus stop in Port Arthur I heard Nancy Sinatra’s “These Boots Are Made for Walkin’” for the first time. It seemed it played, with increasing loudness, at every bus stop after that. We stopped every three hours. Every second stop would be a quick 20 minute break—just enough time for a coffee; the alternating stops would be for about 45 minutes—enough time for a full meal. We move through the tundra west of Lake Superior throughout the night and when I awoke in Manitoba, I was bewildered, wondering why the bus was in the middle of a frozen-over lake. I then realized this was my first glimpse of the prairies. The taxi driver I caught at the bus terminal told me on

the way to Faye's apartment that the temperature was -100F with the windchill. I believed him. During the two weeks I stayed with Faye in Winnipeg that winter it was unbelievably and unrelentingly cold.

Faye's typewriter had been repaired by the time I arrived. She took me to her classes with her. I recall one where the lecture was on the employment of onomatopoetic devices in *Beowulf*. Mainly what I remember of those two weeks in Winnipeg was the intense cold. I kept an extra pair of jeans handy that I'd pull on over the ones I was already wearing before venturing outside. I was impressed by the fact that store owners did not mind when we waited for buses in their doorways—something no Toronto business owner would have tolerated. But, in the end, I rode a bus back to Toronto, joining a group of three other young people on the journey. I was thrown out of a bar in Sudbury for ordering a beer during a stop (the drinking age at the time was 21). Two of our group paired up, cuddling together on the long ride through the night. The other girl and I necked for a while, but there was no spark and we both dozed off.

We arrived in Toronto in the early morning and I invited my travel companions to the co-op I had left two weeks before. We taxied there, but the front door was locked with a new, strong lock. (We had never locked the door.) So, I took them to another co-op on Dundas Street, but we couldn't rouse anyone there. In the end we returned to the bus station and I phoned Michael Moore, a recent grad of the U of M, who picked me up and took me back to his place. I spent the night, then the next day set about searching for a place to live.

08. I Take Charge of My Life

My first order of business on returning from Winnipeg was to find a place to live. All of the coops that I knew of were either full or closed. I checked the rooms for rent section of the Toronto Star over breakfast at Michael's, then he dropped me off near the corner of Yonge and Bloor Streets as I had decided that a central location would do best and there were a number of cheaper older houses just tucked in behind that famous intersection. Michael must have loaned me money to get started and I quickly found a room in a tumble-down two story row house. As usual, it did not come equipped with a refrigerator, but there was a gas-fired hot plate that doubled as a heat source.

One of the former residents of the Dupont coop had a room nearby. He and I met for lunch every day at a hole in the wall. He paid and kept track of the expenses in a notebook. He loaned me money from time to time for cigarettes and my room rent. A couple of times I went to a day job office. Men would begin showing up at 5:00 am and wait on benches. Between 6:00 am and 7:00 am contractors looking for day labourers would arrive and select us on a first-come first-hired basis. I worked at the Toronto train yards where my job was to take crates of produce from the trains to waiting trucks. It was so cold that sometimes I took refuge in a refrigerator car, just to get out of the biting wind. The $5.00 or so that I made for a day's hard labour was enough to buy food for about a week.

It took a few weeks of effort, but I found a job working in a bank as a ledger clerk. The bank was located on King Street, a short subway ride away, though I usually walked to and from work. The bank, The Provincial Savings Bank of Ontario, had been one of the first to introduce computers in the banking field, though it abandoned them after a short trial. I can't imagine what sort of computers had been available in 1966 as there were only multi-million dollar mainframes that required armies of people in lab coats in constant attendance, or toys. I suspect the latter. A few years earlier, one of my teachers had introduced me to a new "computerized" learning tool. Essentially it was a plastic frame that held two platens on which a scroll of paper could be rolled. Strategically-placed windows in the plastic cover revealed questions and the correct answers on the paper. While the teacher marvelled, I thought it was a piece of junk, figuring that anyone could have replicated this wonder of advanced technology with a shoe box and a couple of pencils to act as the platens.

In any case, I was the replacement for the junked computers in the bank. My job was to take the slips of paper on which the tellers had written out the details of the transaction and duplicate the information on ledgers cards which were, essentially, pieces of cardboard with lines and columns pre-printed. These cards were kept in the vault and stored by account number. The tellers did not do the actual arithmetic of the transactions; that was my job. Every time I made an error in addition or subtraction I had to fetch the error book from the vault and take it and the card to the accountant who would initial my correction. The more errors I made, the more nervous I got, which led to more errors.

Did I mention that I hated the job?

A young teller and I struck up a friendship when we discovered we shared the same attitudes towards the bank and the other employees. She slipped me pills that she said were tranquillizers to help me get through the day. I spent my evenings and weekends with Byron and a few of his friends who had gotten together to rent a large apartment. He adored my poetry and could recite a number of my works from memory. I read on the weekends at the Inn of the Unmuzzled Ox on Huron Avenue becoming one of their regulars. I saw Marvyne, my poet friend—another graduate from the University of Manitoba—frequently, sharing writing and insights. I was becoming familiar with the works of the Montreal school: Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen, buying their books when I could afford them.

As the winter morphed into spring, Marvyne invited me to share a large house that she and an elderly gentleman were renting. Expenses were shared equally and we took turns preparing the evening meals—which seemed to be mainly pan-fried pork chops, mashed potatoes and a vegetable. I had a large comfortable room with a balcony. Faye would be returning to Toronto at the end of the school year and we all assumed that she would be sharing with me. Meanwhile, I had earned enough money at the bank to pay back those who had been sponsoring me and to fly to Winnipeg to spend the Easter weekend with Faye.

The woman at the bank mentioned that her boyfriend had a good job at the Department of Chemistry of the University of Toronto and that there was an opening. So, I went to the university's personnel office to apply. The two men I talked to were unaware of the opening, but they checked and discovered that I was right. One said that he thought the position required a completed course in high school chemistry, but I assured him that my friend who worked there did not meet that requirement. And, so I was hired. My salary was $200 a month. My friend's name was also Ron, so there were two of us. We were lab assistants. There were five or six of us and our job was to each take responsibility for a pair of chemistry labs, ensuring that all required equipment and supplies were clean and prepped for the classes. Between each pair of labs was a supply room that doubled as an office, and we were each ensconced in one of them during the school year. During classes students would come to the window to ask for chemicals or specific pieces of equipment that we would hand them and check off on the student's ledger card. Actual classes were infrequent and we spent the between class time cleaning the labs and restocking our supply rooms.

Soon after I started, university classes ended for the summer. We had three months to thoroughly clean the labs. Under the work benches were small lockers that were assigned to individual students during the school year. We removed the contents of these lockers, cleaned everything and restocked them for the next student. We also spent a lot of time socializing with the other employees. Our manager was an elderly Dutch gentleman who had been captured by the Japanese in the Philippines during the war. He was friendly and not very demanding of his "boys," as we were known. As long as the labs were clean and stocked he left us to our own devices. Over the summer I sometimes found a quiet corner of a lab and curled up with a book, reading the days away. I read "Lord of the Rings" in its entirety over my first summer there, and re-read the entire collection the next summer. In other words, life was being good to me. I was making more than enough money for my needs in a job that was reasonably enjoyable and non-stressful. I had a comfortable place to live. I enjoyed my walks across Queen's Park and the

University of Toronto campus to and from work. My evenings were free to work on poetry or to read at the Inn of the Unmuzzled Ox where I was making friends with other poets and musicians.

I had decided to take guitar lessons. I found a teacher who ran a Flamenco studio with his wife. He taught guitar, she dancing. Marvyne loaned me an old guitar she had, but within a few weeks my teacher said one of his students was upgrading and I could buy the old guitar for a reasonable price. I did. I still own that guitar. Because I read music fluently and had already played with a guitar a few years earlier, I progressed quickly. I was delighted with the exotic scales and rhythmic patterns.

Faye was due to return to Toronto in June. We spent her first day back making out in my room, but she told me that she did not intend to live with me and had made arrangements to live in a coop just south of Dundas Street. I was devastated. In my depression I withdrew from my housemates, refusing to eat with them or to engage in any conversations with them. I did my chores and paid my share of expenses, but otherwise avoided them. But, as my depression lifted I took stock of my situation, deciding I had enough income to afford an apartment of my own. I rented a comfortable one bedroom furnished apartment between Yonge and Bay Street two blocks south of Bloor.

I also had reached a realization that I was never going to graduate from high school. Neither correspondence courses nor night school had worked for me. That didn't stop me from attending university, however. The University of Toronto offered non-credit courses in the evenings. I enrolled in a course on World Religions. I was thrilled to be sitting in one of those old fashioned lecture halls, with its semi-circle of ascending seats, the lecturer in the pit at the base. It did not take me long, however, to become disenchanted with the lecturer. His understanding of other religions was shallow. Instead he focused on the architecture of holy buildings, showing slides of various temples, churches, and synagogues, mainly exteriors. He giggled and waffled for a few weeks about whether or not he should show us slides of obscene carvings that graced a Hindu temple he had visited. In the end, he decided that we were all adult enough. The famous carvings were indistinct blobs scratched in stone. I don't think any of us were impressed. The coup de grace, as far as I was concerned, in the downfall of this guy's credibility as a university lecturer came when he told us that he once met an Indian holy man who told him that he had studied Judaism and had lived as a Jew for several years; he then studied Christianity and lived as a Christian for several years; and then a Buddhist. The holy man then told him that he had discovered that they are all, essentially, the same. What a marvellous insight I thought as the lecturer paused, then said, "Of course, we all know that's ridiculous."

Throughout the fall, Byron was a frequent visitor, staying with me for a week or so when he was between apartments. He and I went to a Bob Dylan concert one evening, a spur of the moment decision. Dylan was playing Massey Hall and we had no trouble getting seats in a box overlooking the stage.

One of the poet friends I had made through the Inn of the Unmuzzled Ox committed suicide by jumping from the Don Valley Viaduct. Byron told me that Henry had tried to visit me before he leapt but I wasn't home that evening. The inquest into Henry's death was held by Toronto's celebrity coroner, Morton Shulman. Byron and I, with some of Henry's other friends, went to the final hearing. A seedy-looking man was testifying that he was in prison and that Henry visited him frequently, telling him about how

troubled he was by the drug trade that his friends were involved with. I was sitting with Henry's friends and none of us had heard of this fellow before, nor of any visits that Henry had been making to the prison. Dr. Shulman then instructed the jury, telling them to rule that Henry had been under the influence of LSD. Byron raised his hand to object and Dr. Shulman told him to keep quiet or he would have us removed. During the break while the jury thought things over, Byron, I, and some of Henry's friends, were struck dumb. What LSD? If Henry had been taking LSD he was very good at keeping it a secret from us. And who the heck was this guy telling the court such a strange story about Henry? The jury ruled as Dr. Shulman had ordered them to and the next day the headlines were filled with stories about the hippy who thought he could fly while under the influence of LSD. We all knew the story was a complete fabrication, but it got Dr. Shulman the headlines he loved and led to the eventual criminalization of LSD.

When Faye told me she had been sleeping with a young writer I was, at first, deeply upset, but, oddly enough, soon became adjusted to the idea. We were not married or living together and saw each other infrequently. Where we were drifting apart was over her new-found interest in Eastern spirituality. I was curious about it—after all, I was taking a course in world religions—but I resisted attending meetings with her and her guru—or bikkhu, as she called him. Though she followed him for the rest of her life, I never met him or saw him in person. Despite this—and I don't fully understand this—we decided shortly after Christmas to begin living together. The idea was I would rent a small room—a closed-in porch really—at the coop she was living in, but we would actually be sharing her room. As far as I knew she continued to see her writer friend from time to time until I left for Montreal. I never knew what became of their relationship and never asked. After a few months, because of friction in the coop, Faye and I moved to the Dundas Street coop where we rented a room on the third floor overlooking the street.

In something of an effort to find a common interest, we both signed up for an extension course at the University of Toronto for the winter session on Psychology and Literature. We studied Dostoyevsky's "Crime and punishment" in class. Faye also began taking a course in Flamenco dancing at the studio where I was studying guitar. In the spring I signed up for a course in life drawing at the Ontario School of Art, and, after a week or so, Faye also joined the class. When her mother suddenly died we went to Winnipeg for a week, staying with Faye's relatives who promised to throw us a genuine Ukrainian wedding when we took that step.

My life probably would have continued along pretty much the same lines—living in an uneasy relationship, working in a minimum-skills job while writing and reading poetry and taking courses in whatever caught my fancy—except for the fact that a young man joined our crew in the Chemistry Department for a few weeks. He told me stories about Montreal and about this fantastic university there where everyone was high all the time, despite the presence of the RCMP headquarters across the street. What caught my interest was the fact that one did not need a high school diploma to enroll. The only requirement was that one be 21 years old—and I had met that criteria a few months before. I wasn't interested in the drug angle, but the fact that this might be the entry to the world I longed for fired my interest.

I went to the Toronto Public Library and examined the calendar for Sir George Williams University. The young man was correct. I needed to be 21 years old—check—to have worked for at least two years—check—and have two confidential letters of recommendation forwarded directly to the registrar—that I could arrange to have done. I examined the calendars of other universities and discovered that mature matriculation wasn't restricted to Sir George Williams, but the requirements were tougher elsewhere. Twenty-five was a common minimum age; it was 30 for the University of Toronto at the time.

I applied and phoned Mr. Strickland who agreed to write the recommendation letter for me. When I called the Big Brothers the receptionist who answered the phone sounded surprised when I asked for Mr. Belt and handed the phone to someone else. "Can I ask what this is about?" the man inquired. I explained that I was one of Mr. Belt's cases and that I needed a recommendation from him. "I'm sorry," he said, "but Mr. Belt passed away about a year ago." I've always been sorry that he never knew that his faith and efforts with me would eventually pay off. Don Heap agreed to write the second letter. I was accepted. Classes would begin in early September. I applied for student assistance from the Ontario government who agree to give me a $600 bursary and guarantee a student loan for about the same amount. That gave me about $800 for living expenses for a school year after tuition, which was less than $400 at the time. It was enough.

4 Montreal, as seen from atop Mount Royal

Alice Heap gave me the name and address of the Student Christian Coordinator in Montreal and I sent him a letter asking if he could give me any assistance in locating a place to live, preferably a student coop. He never replied. Faye threw a party for me two days before we were to leave for Montreal. Ironically, I never saw any of the people who attended the party, with the exception of Don Heap, again. In the middle of August, 1967, Faye and I took a train to Montreal, planning to visit Expo 67 and locate somewhere to live while she returned to Toronto. We stayed with friends who had recently relocated to Montreal and our first night there Faye and I climbed Mount Royal and looked out over the city, glowing in the night, that was to be my home for the next several years.

09. Conclusion

It was a little less than 7 years from when I stepped out the door of my family's house on a cold night in October, 1960 until a warm August evening in 1967 when I stepped off the train at Montreal's Windsor Station to begin my life as a university student. When Faye and I stood atop Mount Royal that first evening I felt a rush of excitement, joy, anticipation, and a love of this new city. Those first few weeks were an unfolding adventure. We spent our days at Expo 67, or simply exploring the city. We bunked with friends until we found a squatter's house beside Sir George William's main building. Byron was staying there as well. I then found a one room basement apartment on Lincoln Avenue, running between de Maisonneuve and Sherbrooke streets just a few blocks from campus. I lived there my first two years in Montreal, my home becoming a gathering place for the many new friends I was making.

I took to university life as though I had been born to it. I had promised myself that I would never miss a class if I could help it. I took careful notes, then typed them in the evenings, putting them into binders, one for each course. I slaved over research papers, striving to make footnotes and bibliographies as extensive and correctly formatted as I could, retyping complete pages if I found a single error. My professors noticed me, some befriending me as we gathered over beer at the many nearby pubs. I met heroes, like Irving Layton and Mordecai Richler, who were writers in residence when I was a student, Clark Blaise, who was teaching at Sir George, and Leonard Cohen who hung out in some of the same pubs I did. The world unfolded before me with avenues leading in any directions I chose to follow.

I started a major in English Literature, but was deeply demoralized and depressed following the police riot on the campus in 1969. I dropped a key course on Shakespeare, which I loved, and switched to a major in Comparative Religions, finishing my four-year degree a decimal point away from a citation for highest average in the department. I took a year of graduate work and then was given a teaching post while I completed my master's thesis. I mumbled and stumbled my way through a course on "The History of the Relationship Between Science, Philosophy, and Religion in the Western World." Relationships flourished and fell apart and I was lost at the end of that year, the thesis mainly untouched. Casting about I lucked into a job teaching general subjects to a grade seven class in a small town a short distance from Ottawa. I got used to finally having a decent income and bought my first car. I returned to Montreal for a year at McGill to get my diploma in secondary education and then wound up teaching high school English in Maniwaki where I stayed for seven years learning more from my students than I taught them. I joined Mensa to find avenues outside of the little town and met Ann. We married, moved to Ottawa, and raised three children while I worked for the federal government, first as an employee, then as a consultant. I was, at one time, one of Canada's leading experts in midi-computer performance issues, giving talks at conferences across the country. I worked in almost every department of the government on short term and long term contracts. We retired to running a bed and breakfast in a village on the Rideau Canal. I supplemented our income for six years preparing income tax returns, and then, here I am, more than 70 years old, retired, looking forward to living out the remainder of our lives together with simple needs and simple pleasures.

5 Cite Etudiante de la Haute Gatineau, Maniwaki, Quebec, where I taught for seven years. Sometimes, during the winter, my students and I would say "to heck with it" and don cross-country skis to explore the trails near the school.

Everything that followed 1967 was a result of Sir George Williams University's basic philosophy of giving people a second chance at an education. The cost to taxpayers to turn me from a non-skilled drifter into a highly skilled and highly paid contributor to the world about me? About $3,000—five years at $600/per, plus an additional $2,400 bursary for my year at McGill. I paid almost $3000 in income taxes my first year as a professional teacher. More than ten times that annually in my final years as a consultant. And that is where my deeply felt passion for social justice lays. It pays dividends when society spends a little bit of money and effort to give people a fair chance.

And what of those I knew during my seven years in Toronto? I've already noted that Mac Belt died a year before I entered Sir George. I visited Roy and Irma Strickland from time to time, especially when my sons were growing and whenever I was in Toronto on business. He died more than 10 years ago and Irma entered a facility to guide her through her declining years. The last time I spoke with her, she refused to tell me where she was going because, she said, she didn't want anyone to see her as her mind left her. I visited John Lee when business took me Toronto. The last time I saw him he apologized for the way he had treated me, but I saw him only as someone who always stepped forward when I asked for help. His widow, Jean, and I correspond by telephone and email from time to time. I hope we can visit with her next time we are in Toronto. Marvyne and I are still friends. We visited each other every few years, though, as we age, travel is much less frequent. I visited the Heap family from time to time during my undergraduate years. There was a long gap, then I encountered Don at the Ottawa airport as I was returning from a business trip to Edmonton and he was headed for Toronto from his job as a Member of Parliament. I followed news about him until he died a few years ago. Byron left Montreal a few months after I arrived, leaving his stone carving tools and pieces of soapstone with me. I carved a small figurine that is still on my desk beside me, though much chipped over the years. I don't know what became of him.

And Faye….We remained lovers for about a year after I left Toronto, visiting for weekends and over Christmas and Easter. I spent a month with her between my first and second year, but I became involved with someone else early in my second year and, though we always remained friends, we were headed in

very different directions. She became a devotee of her guru and, after she gave birth to a daughter in 1970, eventually took off on a round world trip, following her teacher to India, Nepal, Bangladesh, and, eventually, to New Zealand where she settled. We wrote often and sometimes talked by telephone. She visited here five years ago as she made a world tour to visit family and old friends. Though I always treated her passion for Eastern mysticism and rejection of Western science and medicine with silent respect, when she became an ardent anti-vaccination crusader I could no longer remain silent.

And, what of my father? We spoke briefly on the phone a few times over the years and then, in 1982, with wife and new-born son, I made a determined effort to breach the gap. Our visits were friendly and respectful. He appreciated what I had done on my own and, in a way, it was similar to his story. He too had had no family support as he made his way out into the world, working and studying to make a place for himself. He told me his story as we drank beer in his garden. I was always appreciative of the opportunity I had to make my peace with him. He died in the mid 1980's of a heart attack. I got to know my mother when I located her in 1975, visiting her twice in Omaha where she owned a rock n roll bar called Penelope's. She and her husband visited my young family as well. After her husband died she spent a week visiting me, telling me her story, shortly before she died in the mid 1990's; she is buried in Tilden, Nebraska. The rest of my original family is estranged. They are like a distant troubled dream.

I am deeply aware of how lucky I was in many ways. I was something of a pioneer because, in 1960, young people did not leave comfortable middle-class homes and try their luck on the streets. But I had grown up reading books by people like Horatio Alger and Charles Dickens both champions of the poor and underprivileged, though with overly-simple recipes for their success. Still, I believed that honesty and diligence were key attributes. There were times in my life when the only defence I had against being unjustly accused or suspect was my reputation for veracity. For years, when I could afford it, I donated to Coventry House in Toronto, an organization set up to help young people such as I was, though social services are now overrun with young people needing help and guidance. After 1960 the number of young people leaving comfortable homes grew exponentially. No one, as far as I know, has undertaken a serious in-depth study of why so many14-year-olds don their shoes and jackets and head out the door into a potentially dangerous and very uncertain world.

I know why I did it. It wasn't the unexpected beatings whenever I tried to express an opinion that contradicted my father's view of things. It was that I was not allowed to be myself. I felt stifled and opposed at every turn. No one ever asked me what I wanted. Adults made all the decisions and it was up to me to accept what they wanted, unquestioningly. But, I didn't know what I wanted—all I knew is that I did not want what they had decided was "best" for me. It took a long time for me to find my path, aided by people like Roy Strickland, Mac Belt, Don Heap, and John Lee who stood by ready to help, but who never interfered in my lonely search. One of the lessons I learned from the Algonquins in Maniwaki is that we do not own each other. Children are respected as autonomous creatures, in need of guidance, yes, but fully capable of making their own decisions. When I resided at the Toronto Psychiatric Hospital a resident doctor asked me how I thought people should raise their children. "Just leave them alone," I answered, "Let them explore and find things for themselves." And that is all I really wanted: to find out who I am.