It’s a Miracle It Wasn’t Worse:
Growing Up in the 1930s and 1940s

the
shorter
sharper
2025 edition

EDWARD PACKARD

“What strange and unlikely things are
washed up on the shore of time.”

William Maxwell,
So Long, See You Tomorrow

I

My growing up occurred mostly in Huntington, New York, then a modest-sized Long Island town about thirty-five miles from Manhattan. My first recollection is of being born, so it seemed to me for many years, though more probably it was of a traumatic event during my first year or two. In any case, ever since I was a young child, I remember lying small, helpless, and unhappy, and a glaring bright light in my eyes, an experience that surely is common, whether remembered or not.

Instead of plunging into my adventures as a two-year-old, I'll say a word about my family. My father, Edward B. Packard, (b. 1895) grew up in Watertown, Massachusetts, the next town west of Cambridge. According to my mother, he put himself through Harvard playing the cello with an ensemble at the Copley Plaza or some such renowned Boston hotel. In this memoir, I sometimes use the qualifiers "it is said that. . . ," or "according to my mother. . . ," or "my mother said that . . ," because I've learned of some discrepancies between what I heard from her and the actual facts. None of these involved gross fabrications, but she did tend to exaggerate or introduce minor alterations in descriptions of events. For example, when I was a young child, she told me that the first Packard in America was Samuel Packard and that he came here from England on the *Mayflower,* which reached these shores in 1620. Mom told me that he also founded the town of Bridgewater, Massachusetts. Long afterward, checking other sources, I found conflicting information, but it appears most likely that Samuel Packard and his family arrived on the ship *Diligence* in 1638 and that he founded a *tavern* in the Town of Bridgewater, Massachusetts, which, to my mind, was no less an accomplishment.

Subject to this caution, I think that most of what Mom told me was pretty much true. As to most matters of Packard family history, her word is all I have to go on, because my father and I rarely conversed. Not that there was any enmity between us. It was just the way we were. He was contained — bottled-up, you might say — and I was too.

Indeed, I don't remember anything Pop said to me during my early years other than his soft-spoken but oft-repeated comment, "Children should be seen and not heard." I don't think it occurred to him that he could play a role in my education simply through conversation. He talked more to me

when I got older, but I don't remember our having had a substantive discussion. To some extent this was my own fault. When I was about ten years old, he asked me if I'd like to see a chart showing the Packard ancestry, a rare initiative on his part. I said, "No, that doesn't really interest me." I was clueless about how that might make him feel. With that remark I lost a perfect chance to draw him out.

Pop was contained, as I've said, but at least, as a young man, he had an adventurous streak. He served in World War I as a Navy blimp pilot, and, according to Mom, made the longest nonstop flight achieved by man at the time — from Montauk, Long Island, to Key West.

One day, when he was on patrol looking for German subs to sink, Pop's blimp sprung a leak, began losing altitude, and fell into the ocean. It was only after both my parents were dead that my brother, Dick, filled me in on this event. As Pop's blimp was losing altitude, his crewman suggested dropping a depth charge to reduce weight. Pop replied that they were already so low over the ocean that they could be killed by the explosion. The crewman said, "There's not really a risk of that — these things never go off."

Why the crewman was aware of this and Pop wasn't I'll never know. In any case, Pop agreed that it was worth the risk to drop the depth charge. They dropped it, and it didn't go off, but to no avail: the blimp fluttered onto the waves. The sea was relatively calm. Pop and his crewman took to their life raft. They were rescued by a Chilean freighter a few days later.

Mom told me that Pop was invited to join the Boston Symphony after he graduated from Harvard, in 1916, but he declined because the salary was so low — this was before musicians' unions. He felt he would have to go into business to make enough to support a family. After getting out of the Navy, he worked for a company in New York City until 1927, when he started his own business, as a jobber of mill supplies. This enterprise proved to be a long hard career for Pop. His was a case of a man trudging along, not particularly enjoying his work and not highly successful at it, but working long hours, including a long and tedious train commute, until he retired at age sixty-five.

Pop's main recreation, besides yard projects and family outings, was playing golf Saturday afternoons at the local country club. One summer I caddied for him and got a first-hand look at golf without taking it up. What seemed to me to be the principal pleasure of golf was walking the course, which had interesting topography and pleasing vistas. People carried their own bags or hired caddies. Nowadays, players are always hopping on and off their electric carts, and tee-off times are scheduled, say, at 8:12 in the morning, or if that slot is taken, a bit earlier, at 7:54. The tee-off schedule on weekends resembles

the commuter train schedule on weekdays.

All those years, Pop's cello lay in its case under the baby-grand piano in our living room. After he retired, he took it out and had enjoyable times playing chamber music with friends and, for a year or two, playing in a local community orchestra. He died suddenly of a heart attack at the age of seventy-five.

Pop was a very conservative man, both in his conduct and his politics, even favoring General MacArthur for the presidency after World War II, a wildly misguided position in my opinion. He was the third of five children, the youngest of whom was about twenty years younger than the oldest. Pop's father, my grandfather, Edward H. Packard, ran a business with his brother, Frederick, which consisted principally of designing and installing sets for theater productions. Edward H. was also an opinion contributor for the Cambridge newspaper.

According to my mother, Pop's brother Theodore founded the MIT orchestra. Their sister, Mary, was a concert violinist, and frequently went on tour. Pop's youngest brother, Prescott, was a prize-winning artist. Did my brother or I inherit any such talents? We did not.

I never met any of my father's siblings, except for Theodore, and he only after my father died in 1970. A few years after Theodore's death, I met his daughter, Ronda, who had become a violinist in the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. I visited her in Atlanta once and met her mother, Edith, who surprised me with recollections of my grandfather Edward H. Packard that were new to me. In the course of our conversation Edith said that she liked him. I was slightly surprised when I heard this, not because I knew of any reason why she wouldn't like him, but because it made me realize that I had no memory of Pop ever mentioning his father.

On this visit to Atlanta I learned that Edward H. had published a book of his collected writings, titled *New England Essays,* most of them opinion pieces that had appeared in the Cambridge newspaper. For the first time I got a chance to look at this book, because Ronda had a copy of it. My daughter Caroline later found a copy in the rare books department of the Philadelphia Public Library, which she photocopied. Eventually I obtained a copy from Powell's, the second-hand book-store in Portland, Oregon.

I vaguely remember seeing Edward H. just once, when I was three or four years old. Neither of my parents ever mentioned Edward H's book of essays to me or my brother. There wasn't a copy of it in our house, a clear indication that Pop and his father were not simpatico.

I can understand why Pop might have felt embarrassed by his father's book. The frontispiece consists of an outline map of New England in which a rock with the words "PLYMOUTH ROCK" on it covers most of eastern Massachusetts. Standing

on the rock is an allegorical figure modeled on the Statue of Liberty, whose form blocks out western Maine and towers above it. She holds high a radiant torch, above which in large type is the word "OPPORTUNITY." She is wearing a sash with the words "OUR COUNTRY" inscribed on it and has her free arm draped about a young man who is drawn on a smaller scale and looks dressed for cavalry drill. Below this tableau are the words: "Dedicated to the Genius and Genesis of the compact made in the cabin of the Mayflower." It's an image that gives the impression of a certain degree of derangement on the part of its creator, as do the puritanical and Bible-thumping rants distributed throughout this volume. Eccentricities aside, Edward H. was most passionately concerned with exposing and deploring the trapping of wild animals and the inhumane treatment of livestock and poultry. He lent force to his arguments with photographs taken in the field. He evidently devoted much of his energy to this noble cause, and in that respect, he was a man ahead of his time, and Pop's time, and my time too. Pop couldn't see beyond his father's hokey drawings and slogans and religious hectoring. The two had different views of the world.

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My mother, Charlotte Burne Packard, named after her mother, was the fourth of six siblings, only one of which, her younger brother, was male. Mom's family was living in New York City in 1894, when she was born. Her father, Richard C. Burne, was born in Dublin, in 1859. He attended Trinity College, in Dublin, and Mom told me that he immigrated to America and graduated from City College of New York, circa 1882. He was a glove importer. Every summer he traveled to Europe to inspect gloves and take orders on behalf of merchants in America. I never heard any details as to his activities in Europe, nor am I aware of any artifacts he brought back from his travels. How I would like to interview him now! Richard (Reechie, as he was sometimes called in the family) was a good churchman, a vestryman of the local Episcopal Church. He was successful at importing gloves and was said by all to be a kindly person, but I never heard anything to suggest that he had any interest in art, music, literature, or science.

For many years the Burne family lived in Manhattan. At some point, my grandfather acquired a sizable old house as a summer residence about half a mile west of Huntington village, on Long Island. The property was on a corner lot perhaps three acres in extent. Route 25A, the main North Shore east-west thoroughfare, ran along the north side of the property, but it was set high on an embankment, and no one seemed to mind its proximity to the highway. Of course, traffic was much lighter in the 1930s and 1940s than it is now.

Some years before I was born, the Burnes moved to Huntington full time. My parents, my maternal grandparents, and two of my mother's sisters' families lived in Huntington when I was a young child, whereas my father's parents lived in the Boston area, and visits with them were so rare that I remember only one of them, and all I remember about it was of my grandmother kissing me on the cheek. So it was that I grew up in a matriarchal milieu.

Mom told me that her father was once the richest man in Huntington. I later learned that he bought twenty-eight prime-location grave sites at the Huntington Cemetery for future family use, which suggests that he was indeed well-to-do, though that affluent stage didn't last. Long after Grandpa had passed from the scene, I learned from my brother, or possibly from his wife, my sister-in-law, Pat, that he had taken a tremendous hit in the 1929 stock market crash. He lived comfortably thereafter, but left only a modest estate when he died in 1944.

Grandpa's wife, my Grandma Charlotte Stinson Burne, graduated from Hunter College, *circa* 1988. Although she apparently had the benefit of a liberal education, she was superstitious, for example believing it was bad luck to have thirteen at a table and bad luck to cut off the top of a Christmas tree. She liked to buy big Christmas trees, so most years the top curved for up to a foot or more along the ceiling.

I asked my mother if Grandma ever accompanied Grandpa on a trip to Europe. She did not. Why? Because "she didn't want to leave the children," apparently even after they were grown. Something strange there. What the marital dynamics were I'll never know.

There were six offspring of this union, spaced roughly two years apart. The oldest, Caroline, graduated from Smith College in 1910. She was said to be beautiful, brilliant, a gifted pianist, and a talented writer. She had a "novelette" and several stories published in literary magazines, including *The Smart Set,* which was edited by George Jean Nathan and H. L. Mencken, and *All-Story Weekly,* a magazine that published what was called "pulp fiction," but included stories by future notables such as Edgar Rice Burroughs, of Tarzan fame, and Rex Stout, whose Nero Wolfe mysteries I delighted in at an early age.

According to Mom, Caroline was a protégée of H. L. Mencken. As to what that meant specifically, I failed to ask. I never saw any evidence of Caroline's stories or of the magazines in which they appeared until long after my mother died and my cousin Jack Ordeman sent me two, including the "novelette," both of which I found to be quite perky. Caroline married an Annapolis man, the commander of Pop's blimp squadron, and died, pregnant but childless, in January 2019, a victim of the great flu epidemic.

The next sibling, Mary Cotton, born less than a year after Caroline and unaccountably nicknamed Tony, was attractive and intelligent, but according to several sources, crushingly overshadowed by Caroline, whom Grandma blatantly favored. Rather than attempt to follow in Caroline's tracks, Tony attended a "finishing school." By the time I began college, in 1949, finishing schools no longer existed, or maybe they did but were then called junior colleges. Tony married a Huntington man, Arnold Sammis, who had the distinction of becoming one of the first few Ford dealers and being personally acquainted with Henry Ford. According to my mother, Arnie could rip a deck of cards in half with his bare hands. I regret that I never witnessed this feat, which I suspect was a magic trick.

During World War II, Ford's entire production was devoted to military vehicles. After the war ended, and new cars were becoming available, my father wanted to buy a new Ford. "Sorry," Arnie said, "there's a long waiting list — I'll put you on it." My mother told me that she and Pop were upset that Arnie didn't give them preference because they were "family." Would it have been ethical for Uncle Arnie to give Pop preference? Or at least tip him off during the war years that it would be wise to get on the waiting list? Surely Aunt Tony knew about this developing situation. Why didn't she alert my mother, her own sister?

This was one of those cases where my mother said, as she often had occasion to, "We'll just rock along." It hardly mattered. Our 1941 Ford got so little use during the war that it still performed satisfactorily until 1947, when we were able to get a new one.

Apparently, my mother never forgave Arnie for consigning Pop to the bottom of the waiting list. When, some years later, she told me that Arnie had died, she added, "Out with the old; in with the new," a strikingly uncharacteristic remark for her to make on the occasion of a family member's death. Being a literal-minded young fellow, and, I think, some distance along the Asperger's syndrome spectrum, rather than fastening on the chilliness of that remark, I wondered how she could say such a thing when, although it was apt to say,"Out with the old," there wasn't any "new" to come in.

The next of my mother's siblings, Elizabeth, nicknamed Libby, being further removed from the dazzling light cast by Caroline, must have observed that Tony had taken a less than desirable path. In any case, Libby determined that, like Caroline, she would go to Smith, and so she did, graduating in the class of 1914. Libby wasn't intellectually or artistically equipped to the degree Caroline was, but she was smart and socially at ease, and she married a man, Lee Ordeman, who became a top-of-the-heap business executive.

The fourth Burne child, my mother, Charlotte, nicknamed

Mimi, fell in Libby's shadow. As I mentioned, Tony choose to take a different route rather than trail in the wake of Caroline; Mom was content to trail in the wake of Libby. She was twenty-eight months younger than Libby, but only a year behind her in high school and at Smith.

My impression is that Mom was no less intelligent than Libby, but that Libby dominated her psychologically. I think the combination of being so young for her class — starting college when she was only sixteen and living so closely under Libby's tutelage — may have stunted Mom's social development. She was effusive and outgoing, but some deep insecurity showed through.

After Mom died, in 1978, my sister-in-law, Pat, who was my second cousin, and whom Mom had known for years before my brother and Pat were married, told me that Mom had considered studying medicine and becoming a doctor, an impressive goal for a woman at the time. I suspect that Libby played a role in Mon's decision to follow a conventional path.

The fifth child of Richard and Charlotte Burne, John, known in the family as Jinx, graduated from the University of Pennsylvania, worked for what was then called Standard Oil of New Jersey, later Esso, eventually Exxon, and died while still in his fifties. My memory of him is of an impassive, stocky fellow. His wife, whose name, Olive Winterburne, sounds as if it escaped from a Henry James novel, was a classmate of my mother's at Smith and presumably introduced to Jinx by her. Olive had a cackling laugh and was an astonishingly slow eater.

The sixth and youngest child, Dorothy, was known in the family as Toots. Being last in line, she was in a position to take a long look at her older sisters. Like Tony, she determined to set her own course. But, unlike Tony, she was not only independent, she was also brilliant and ambitious and of no mind to settle for a finishing school. She went to Barnard, got her PhD at Columbia, and spent her working years as a history professor at Hunter College. She married Julius Goebel (Jul), a law professor at Columbia. Among other honors, he was commissioned to write the first volume of the *History of the Supreme Court*, authorized by Congress and funded by the Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. devise. The Goebels were unable to have children. My mother told me that Toots wanted to adopt a child, but Jul nixed the idea on the ground that an adopted child would be much less intelligent than they were.

From my perspective, Toots, never a barrel of fun, became increasingly imperious and sour. I think she felt lifelong disappointment in not being able to have a child of her own. Jul was more mellow, and quite witty. When I was about eleven years old and obsessed with such things as meteorology and barometric pressure, I was given an aneroid altimeter. Soon afterward, my parents and I visited the Goebels for Sunday

lunch. I brought my altimeter to see what change it registered riding the elevator up to their tenth floor apartment. I walked inside behind my parents with my altimeter in hand. Jul said, "What's that?" I told him, and he took it and held it overhead as if to see if there was any change. I knew the altimeter wasn't that sensitive and knew that he knew it wasn't, and laughed. It was playful of him. Toots would never have done that. Jul's brother, Wally, was an eminent biologist. Later, I thought: if Toots had married Wally instead of his brother, I might have gone to medical school instead of going to law school. I still think that's the case, but, then, it would not have been in Toot's nature to marry a biologist.

Lacking a child, Toots and Jul had a succession of French bulldogs, a breed that appeared to have been bred for repulsiveness. The bark of each of the Goebels' dogs was worse than its bite because of the way it sounded, a sort of harsh *galumph, galumph,* interspersed with slobbering.

During the decades when I knew them, the Goebels lived in an elegant, book-lined, antique-filled, rent-controlled apartment at East 90th Street and Madison Avenue with a fine view of the reservoir in Central Park. There was a maid's room and bath on the far side of the kitchen. Dinners and luncheon service included finger bowls, placed on little lace doilies, a phenomenon I don't recall witnessing anywhere else.

In this building there were just two apartments on each floor, separated by a tiny space in front of the elevator. Toots and Jul had reached their seventies when a new occupant moved into the other apartment on their floor, the celebrated African-American singer and actress Lena Horne. When I next saw Toots after I'd heard of this, I asked her if she had invited Lena Horne over for tea. "Certainly not!" was the reply.

Other prominent figures in my early life include my brother, Richard ("Dick"), about whom I'll say more later, and my four maternal first cousins. The oldest of these, Arnold Sammis, Jr, was mindlessly nicknamed "June," but, more fortunate than the "boy named Sue" in the Johnny Cash song, he contrived while still young to have himself referred to as Sam. He was, I'm guessing, about six years older than Dick, which would mean he was born about 1917 and therefore would have been a toddler when the beloved Caroline died. For some reason, the nearby presence of this presumably appealing little fellow brought no solace to Grandma, who continued to mourn Caroline's death until 1923, when Dick was born. Mom told me that Grandma regarded Dick's arrival to be the first thing after Caroline's death to brighten her life. Thenceforth, just as Caroline had been her favorite child, Dick became her favorite grandchild. This didn't matter to me. My existence wouldn't begin for another eight years.

About two years after Dick was born, Libby's first son,

Richard Lee Ordeman ("Skip"), arrived. Two or three years after Skip's birth came that of Jinx's son, John, who was called Bobo until he resisted it, I think in his late teens. Three years later, John Ordeman, ("Jack") appeared on the scene, seven months before I did. The Ordemans lived in Huntington until I was seven years old, and Jack and I were close to each other in age, so I saw a lot of him in my early years, mostly at Grandma and Grandpa's house. I have more memories of him in this period than of my brother, with whom, because of our age difference, I had little interaction. I rarely saw my other cousins except at family reunions, when, at least in my early years, everyone in this extended family showed up for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter. Fourth of July tended to draw a crowd as well.

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Given that, during the early formative years of my brother and me and our cousins Skip and Jack, we lived in the same town, as did our maternal grandparents, and our mothers were close to each other in age, and we had comparable social and educational opportunities, it might seem likely that we would have had approximately the same emotional/social intelligence. We didn't. If there had been an emotional intelligence scale on which we could have been rated, Skip and Jack would have scored much higher than Dick and me. It's worth pausing here to consider just what the elements of emotional intelligence *are*. Without attempting to be comprehensive, I'll note that being self-assured —comfortable with yourself — is a key element. No less so, in my opinion, is the degree of awareness you have about what you say, what you don't say, how you look, and how you behave will be perceived by the person or persons you're interacting with. A high state of such awareness enables you to tune your behavior to achieve maximum effectiveness in your relationships. Ideally, this social sense should work below the level of consciousness, lest you be self-conscious (obsessive about how you appear to others), which is not a high emotional intelligence state.

Apart from generally low emotional intelligence, I had some idiosyncratic emotional problems, manifested most overtly when I was in seventh grade, which I'll describe later. Dick's problems were less acute, but he was not socially at ease either. That this was the case was borne out by his experience at Andover. This elite, academically rigorous boarding school had fraternities that students might join their junior year (called "upper middle year" at Andover), if they were invited. There were, as I recall, six fraternities, each having a nonresidential house with a kitchen, and, in most cases, a room with a pool table, a library or sitting room, and a meeting room. The fraternities were of such size and number that there was room

for admission to them of about half the students in each class. So it was that this vaunted secondary school — the oldest private preparatory school in America — maintained a system in which fifty percent of the students felt shunned. My brother, the first of the four Packard and Ordeman cousins to attend Andover, was never invited to join a fraternity. Some of those who were shunned may have been resourceful enough to adopt the sensible Groucho Marx attitude — "I would never join a club that would have me as a member!" — but Dick didn't forgive Andover for this slight. For the rest of his life he tossed Andover alumni bulletins and fund-raising appeals in the trash without looking at them. Fraternities were abolished at Andover a year or so after I graduated.

Social ranking at Andover, as practiced by students, was not based so much, as one might think, on how much money a student's family had, or whether his family had high social standing (such as might be evidenced by its inclusion in a book called *The Social Register,* which one found displayed on the telephone stands of homes of many of those listed in it), as on how manly and "with it" a student was, those not being "with it" being "out of it."

So inept were fraternity members at Andover in 1939 and 1940 in assessing suitability of candidates for admission, that they failed to discern in Dick the manly and "with it" qualities that enabled him, a few years later, as a member of an Underwater Demolition Team (precursor to the Navy Seals), to swim a mile into the beach at Iwo Jima and blow up landing obstacles before the first Marines came ashore.

Dick was manly enough, but because he had realatively emotional /social intelligence, he didn't project that hard-to-pin-down character of male adolescent acceptability. The same thing happened to me for a while. I was passed over in the first round of invitations to fraternities, but in a second and final round I was invited to join the least prestigious of them. Skip and Jack were both admitted to the most prestigious one. On joining this exclusive organization, Skip must have been introduced to, and executed the secret handshake with, his new fraternity brother, who was a year ahead of him, George H. W. Bush. So, I assume, was the case with one of Skip's classmates, the memorable actor Jack Lemmon.

The deficit in emotional intelligence Dick and I had compared to that of the Ordemans manifested itself dramatically decades later when Aunt Toots died and bequeathed sizable portions of her estate to Skip and Jack but left Dick and me out, though we were her two nephews who had gone to Columbia Law School and Dick had been the Goebels' special favorite during his youth. I think the reason we were discriminated against was that over many years Dick and I had been thoughtless and obtuse in our relations with the Goebels,

particularly with Toots. Toots was not a woman who was easy to please, but if Dick and I had had higher emotional intelligence, I think we would have acted in ways with respect to her that she would have found acceptable when she wrote her will.

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It seems unlikely that I was a wanted child. The 1929 stock market crash occurred two years after Pop started his own business in a modest office in the shadow of Wall Street skyscrapers. My mother's family's resources were greatly depleted; my father's family never had much to lose. Things were so bad by 1930 that Mom, Pop, and Dick had to move in with my mother's parents, so, when I arrived on the scene in February, 1931, my grandparents's "house on the hill" became my first residence.

It requires no retroactive clairvoyance to appreciate that, after having produced five boys in a row, my mother and her siblings must have hoped that I would be a girl. How they would have doted on me! As it was, I am sure that, upon hearing of my arrival, one or two, or maybe all of them, muttered, as they often felt occasion to, "Man proposes, and God disposes."

My parents named me Edward Burtt Packard, Jr., then decided to call me Jerry. At some point I learned that, besides having no recognizable relationship to "Edward," as "Dick" has to "Richard" and "Jack has to "John," the name "Jerry" was associated with Germans (the bad guys in the war) and with cheap construction, as in a "jerry-built" house. I grew to dislike the name and later adopted the nickname Luke. This only added to the confusion. In my mid-twenties, I decided to identify myself as Ed, which I later tried with some success to upgrade to Edward. One's name is essentially one's brand. At some point, I learned the importance of branding well enough to know that it was an art at which my parents and I didn't excel.

I think that I sensed the disappointment my mother and her sisters felt over my failure to be a girl; that it was almost at the moment of being born that I began to form a subconscious sense of unworthiness that became an embedded emotion that clung to me and was reinforced thereafter, generating a syndrome labeled by a psychiatrist of my acquaintance as "fear of success." This theory may sound bizarre, but I have ruled out every other explanation I have explored to account for my long history of self-destructive behavior, and, as Sherlock Holmes said, "When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."

In any case, for my first few years, I lived in my grandparents' house, a white clapboard structure, designed in what I think would be called farmhouse style. I have a vivid image of the grounds and buildings in my mind. In lieu of a

garage, there was a barn, built when its principal purpose was to accommodate a horse. A footpath ran between the house and the barn, which had its own access to the road. Another driveway looped in front of the house. The lawn between the house and the barn was brightened in spring and summer by profusions of dandelions and buttercups. No one thought of them as weeds. The usual access to the house was via steps leading to the back stoop, from which a door opened into a space, to the left of which was the kitchen and, to the right, the "breakfast room." As you walked into the kitchen, on your left was a big black gas stove, and at the far end a sink, two large washtubs, and a counter with draining racks for dishes, which were washed and wiped dry by hand.

The breakfast room, which seated about six at a red-checkered — maybe it was blue-checkered — cloth-covered table, provided access to a large dining room dominated by a heavy claw-footed oak table that could be expanded by adding extra leaves.

To the left of the dining room was the library, what I suppose in a later era might have been called the family room. The library had shelves with perhaps a hundred books; also an upright piano, which I never heard anyone play except Aunt Toots, at Christmas, when she would sit at it while a few faithful souls huddled behind her and intoned, "Away in a manger, no crib for his bed / The little Lord Jesus lay down his sweet head . . . ."

Also in the library was an old couch, a primitive cabinet-sized phonograph and a supply of records of a vintage so old that only one side had grooves. The only record I remember being played was a rendition, by a female singer, of possibly the dreariest song ever written. It began, "There's an old spinning wheel in the parlor / spinning dreams of the long, long ago," and I'm glad I can't remember more of it.

Straight beyond the dining room was the living room, which had a couch and several easy chairs and a fireplace. Under the stairs at the far end of the living room was a closet, which was converted to a cramped powder room for my grandmother's convenience during her last years. At the foot of the stairs was a small foyer. A door opened to the wraparound porch. Step out, turn left, and you could walk down a few steps to reach the driveway. This was the almost never-used front entrance to the house.

On the second floor there were four or five bedrooms, and at the end of a long hall, two bathrooms with old-fashioned tubs, toilets with overhead water tanks, and sinks with marble tops. Between the doors to the bathrooms was a door that led up to the attic bedroom occupied by Helen Tetkoski, the maid.

As even this sketchy description reveals, this residence was not a fine architectural specimen, but it had a spacious covered

porch that wrapped halfway around the house and was furnished with a glider and plushly cushioned white wicker chairs. Luxuriant wisteria vines hung along the roof line. This grand porch overlooked grounds distinguished by a mature copper beech tree and a fine horse chestnut tree, and obliquely to the right and down the hill, an apple orchard, an arbor with purple grapes, a big barn with a dusty, cobwebbed attic, and, to the left of the barn, a vegetable garden and an extensive raspberry patch. Attached to the left of the barn was a still-functioning outhouse.

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When I was two, and the nation was still in the depths of the depression, Mom, Pop, Dick, and I moved into a little white clapboard cottage across the street from my grandparents' barn. We rented it for fifty dollars a month from the neighbor, Roger Brush, a dentist so prosperous that you couldn't see his house from the road even in winter.

The narrator in Don DeLillo's story *Sine Cosine Tangent* says, "In memory, the actors are locked in position, unlifelike." Most of my memories, the recounting of which is the main stuff of this book, consist of snapshots, mind-pictures in which the actors are locked in position, but others consist of short videos I can run in my mind. The actors appear suddenly against a backdrop, move briefly, sometimes talk, sometimes interact with me or one another; then the scene ends, as does the memory.

Many memories I can summon up at will. Others appear unbeckoned. For the most part I have no idea when events took place except through clues such as my approximate age or where I was living at the time. In the last few lines of *Swann's Way,* Proust says: "the places we have known . . . are only a thin slice held between the contiguous impressions that composed our life at that time . . . ." Of the long string of contiguous events in my life, I remember only thin slices. Are these faded memories, flickering in and out of consciousness, a fair representation of history? Might my brain be following some subconscious agenda in deciding which memories are preserved, and which are brought into my conscious mind? That may be the case, but, more likely, the reason a memory is readily retrievable is that it had an exceptional emotional impact at the time. It is the traumatic, joyous, and other extraordinary event that becomes strongly imprinted. Except for the fragment I mentioned earlier, my memories begin with those of events when we lived in the rental cottage we called "Roger's house."

Along with the Depression, the early 1930s brought a period of colder-than-normal weather. Our cottage was heated by coal. I have faint early memories of a chute leading down through a cellar window, the coal company delivering a load

and filling up the coal bin, and my father shoveling coal into the furnace. This was in the deepest years of the Depression. My parents must have felt the need to be sparing in the use of coal, because my recollection is that the house seemed cold — cold and gloomy. My brother was at school. I was home, at first confined to a playpen, then, once I'd learned how to climb out of it, the four or five rooms in the house. The impression imprinted in my memory of those days is of feeling alone and isolated. I have almost no memories of my mother in the house, though she must have been there most of the time. My earliest vivid memory from this period, from a day when I was three or four years old, is of my mother having left me and gone across the street to my grandmother's house. She may have only been on a quick errand, but it seemed to me she'd been gone a long time. I felt lonely and picked up the phone. I listened for whatever sound might come out of the earpiece. I was afraid I was doing something wrong.

"Number, please!"

I knew my grandparents' number — it was 1, 2.

"One, two," I said in a frightened voice. In a few moments I heard a phone ringing. What I perceived as a gruff, impatient voice answered: "GRIFFITH'S BUTCHER SHOP." I hung up, appalled at what had happened. It would be unthinkable to try again.

Why did I feel so humiliated, so ashamed, as if I'd committed a rank offense? Why wasn't I annoyed with the operator for connecting me with a wrong number? Why didn't I try to place my call again, speaking more distinctly? Why did it seem unthinkable to tell my mother about it later? Why was this incident so traumatic that the memory of it became fixed in my mind?

Am I asking too much of my three- or four-year-old self? I'm not so sure. Rather, I think this event was a harbinger of a pattern of fearfulness and self-abnegation that impaired my functioning for much of my life.

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A book I read raised the question as to why, among kids with similar intellectual capacities and family environments, some thrive and learn to cope with all manner of adversity, and others don't. What is the mysterious factor that seems to play a big role? The author made a convincing argument that it's *grit.* On reading this, I remembered being engrossed by the Charles Portis novel, and the movie adaptation of it, and years later the remake of it, titled *True Grit.* It was set in the "old West," maybe Arkansas and Oklahoma, and was about a girl named Mattie Ross, thirteen or fourteen years old, whose father had been murdered. Mattie was determined to find the killer and bring him to justice. With the help of a skeptical, reluctant, and

alcoholic character named Rooster Cogburn, played by John Wayne in the version I remember, she succeeds despite every obstacle thrown in her way. So impressed was John Wayne / Rooster Cogburn with Mattie that he paid her the highest possible compliment: "You remind me of me."

I think of Mattie Ross as the archetypal exemplar of grit, and my reaction to my failed attempt to make a phone call as a demonstration of lack of it. A few weeks after I wrote these words, *Grit: the Power of Passion and Perseverance,* by University of Pennsylvania psychologist Angela Duckworth, was published and quickly became a best seller. Duckworth uses the word "grit" in a somewhat different sense than I do — as a strategy for achievement. She speaks of life as a marathon and grit as an essential element of a training regimen. I don't think of life as a marathon. In my view, true grit is composed of perseverance, inner toughness, self-discipline, courage, and equanimity.

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From probably the first time I saw flakes of snow falling, I was obsessed with this seemingly miraculous phenomenon. One winter day, when I was about four years old, I became so dismayed at the continuing sight of bare ground outside that I prayed for it to snow. Meanwhile, my mother and Aunt Libby had decided to drive to Best & Company, a department store in Garden City, about twenty miles distant, and they were going to take me along. For some reason I was eager to go on this expedition. Shortly before we were to leave, it began to snow. The trip was cancelled. My disappointment was instructive, obliging me to conclude that it was not wise to have prayed for snow, especially since I had neglected to say how much I wanted, and we only got an inch or two. It would have taken almost a foot to compensate for loss of the trip to Garden City.

My next memory was of an event that probably took place that spring: my first haircut. The barber was a genial fellow named Alfred Sapone. To accommodate patrons like me, he had in his shop a bright green toy car large enough for a small child to sit in. So that the hair he was about to cut would be at the height of Mr. Sapone's scissors, the car was set on a pylon, as if ready for a lube and oil change. It had a steering wheel you could turn. I sat in the car, turning the wheel. My mother told me that having my hair cut wouldn't hurt. Mr. Sapone told me it wouldn't hurt. It didn't hurt, but I wailed at each snip. Mr. Sapone talked soothingly. He knew that some kids lack grit.

I think it was the following year that we got more than enough snow. New York City and Long Island had one of the coldest winters on record. A low of -14 F. was recorded in Central Park, a mark unlikely to be approached in the 21st. century.

Huntington Bay froze over, and on Sound beaches the ice extended far out from shore. One day our family drove to Bay Hills, our regular bathing beach on Huntington Bay. The beach was covered with great ice cakes and blocks of compacted snow. Repeated tides had brought more ice up on the beach, forming glacier-like layers interlaced with crevices that receding currents of melt water cut down to the sand. I walked along these sinuous passageways amidst ice walls rising over my head. So strong were these impressions that I can run a video of them in my mind.

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My grandparents' house — we tended to call it Grandma's house, which seems appropriate given our families matriarchal culture — was the center of extended family activity during the 1930s. The Goebels (Toots and Jul) lived in Manhattan, and the Burnes (Jinx, Olive, and Bobo) in Bronxville, but the Sammises (Arnie, Tony, and Sam), the Ordemans (Lee, Libby, Skip and Jack), and the Packards (Pop, Mom, Dick, and I) lived in Huntington. In September 1938, the Ordemans moved to Westport, Connecticut, but until the war years, the era of gas rationing, they usually drove back to Huntington for special occasions.

For some years, all or almost of all of this crowd would show up for Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners, which commenced around 1:00. Typical fare was turkey, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes, gravy, asparagus or peas, rolls, butter, and ice cream and cake for dessert, all in plenteous quantities. Water was served in crystal goblets. Wine was unknown. After these feasts, the men, and sometimes the women, would settle into chairs and sofas in the living room, slouch back, and pass the time reading the newspaper or chatting until they felt less overstuffed. I remember darting in and out, stopping to stare at them, wondering, How can they just *sit* there?

Sometimes, for variety, my parents would go for a "Sunday drive," and I would accompany them. The drive was usually to Lloyd Neck, a few miles distant, where we could behold the most distinctive scenic attraction in Huntington: the biggest oak tree on Long Island. We called it "the big tree." It wasn't strikingly tall, but had enormous girth and tremendous branches going out in several directions. Half a century later, I revisited Huntington and checked out some familiar places, including the big tree. Only the lower section of the trunk and the truncated beginnings of its once great branches remained, an arboreal travesty held together with cement patches and steel plates and rods. It would have been better if they'd taken it down.

One of the family gatherings at Grandma's stood out from the others. It probably occurred in 1938. After a hearty midday dinner, people were slouched around in the living room as

usual, but then they perked up. Someone had turned on the radio — a speech was being given by an important world leader, Adolph Hitler! I don't know what the occasion was. The speech was in German, of course, and only Jul, and probably Toots, could understand it, but you didn't have to know German to feel apprehensive listening to it. It sounded like what it was — the ravings of a madman. Even at age seven, I could tell that this was a dangerous character.

Critical to the functioning of this household was Helen Tetkoski, whom I mentioned earlier, and who was employed by my grandparents from before I was born until Grandma's death in 1951. Helen came from a family of Polish immigrants, many of whom settled in central Long Island, most becoming farmers. Many spoke Polish at home, though their children learned English at an early age. It was common for young women in these families to get employment as maids in the more affluent households closer to the shore.

Helen was probably still in her twenties when I was a young child. I found her more agreeable to talk to than any of the adults in my family and spent a lot of time in the kitchen with her and helped wash and dry the dishes. She taught me some Polish phrases, which regrettably have escaped my memory. I ate too much chocolate batter when she made a cake. Helen was very fond of my grandfather. She liked him so much, in fact, that he became a source of concern for her. She was a devout Roman Catholic. She had unwavering faith in every tenet of the Church. At some point she began to worry that Grandpa wouldn't go to heaven because, although he was a Christian, he wasn't Catholic. She took the matter up with Father Murray, the chief priest at her church. Father Murray must have listened attentively as she described Grandpa's virtues, after which, I'm happy to report, he said that Grandpa would go to heaven. God bless you, Father Murray. Grandpa died after a short illness in 1944. I never learned what happened to Helen after Grandma died.

Grandma had a reasonably agreeable last few years, though she became increasingly foggy. Not long before she died, my mother took her for a drive. I was present when they returned. As Mom was escorting Grandma from the car to the house, Grandma turned to her and said, "Why don't you take me for a drive anymore?"

Grandma didn't seem bothered by her failing mind. Helen was there to take care of her, and my mother and probably Aunt Tony must have frequently looked in on her. In Grandma's last year, when I was home from college and stopped by the house, I had a chance to observe her as she tottered about, making a whistling sound with each step as she breathed. Her spine had curved, and she hunched over and was about four feet ten inches tall. When I was younger, she occasionally slipped me a

quarter, or even a dollar bill, when I was visiting, but that practice had ended, presumably because she'd run out of them. She seemed purposeful, however, even as the end approached. I discovered why that was — she had hid bottles of sherry behind books in the bookcases, forgot where they were, and, so, spent her time on sometimes endless quests to find one. Helen may have been complicit in Grandma's maintaining her habit of taking nips of sherry, a practice my mother discouraged, but not so strenuously as to guard against it. With good reason: spending part of each day hunting for a bottle of sherry was probably as good an exercise regimen as a doctor could prescribe. Grandma was still able to walk upstairs to her bedroom, and, as I recall, it was after one of her successful searches for the sherry bottle that she had a few nips, went to bed for an afternoon nap, and never woke up.

Fine a man as Grandpa was, like my father, he was lacking in sense about nurturing young children. One time when I was about four or five, and I was at the house with my mother, and she was talking to my grandmother, Grandpa said to me, "Hop up on my knee and I'll tell you a story." I was excited — this had never happened before. I hopped up on his knee, and he said, "I'll tell you a story about Johnny McGory. Now my story's begun. I'll tell you another about John and his brother, and now my story is done." Then he let me down off his knee, and I looked up at him unbelievingly. He had promised to tell a story about Johnny McGory, and he hadn't. He had said that his story was begun, and it hadn't. He had promised to tell a story about John and his brother, and hadn't. He had said that his story was done, and it wasn't. Good a man as Grandpa was, he was clueless at least in one respect.

I don't remember any other thing Grandpa ever said to me, and I had little interaction with other adults, except for Helen, and not a great deal with my cousins, except for Jack before his family moved to Westport. I don't have any recollection of my oldest cousin, Sam, during these years, though I remember looking at some exquisite ship models he had built. My brother and I made attempts at this craft as well. Meticulously detailed kits with high-quality materials were available at that time (nothing like them is now) for building models of sailing ships. I completed one of the famous and beautiful Halifax fishing schooner, *Bluenose*. The product of Dick's and my efforts looked crude compared to Sam's. He put his skill to good use, going to medical school and becoming a surgeon.

Dick was the second oldest of the six cousins who were the grandchildren of Richard and Charlotte Burne. Mostly because he was eight years older than me, we had little to say to each other in my early years. I remember telling some woman about my childhood, and she said that, though Dick and I were brothers, we were each an only child. As adults, we were

separated geographically — he took a position in the Law Department of PPG Industries and moved to Pittsburgh a few years after graduating from law school — and we saw each other only rarely until after he retired to Florida (probably 1985), where I visited him each winter and we became good and close friends until his death in 2009.

When I was seven, Dick started his lower-middle (sophomore) year at Andover; so from then on he was away during most of the school year. In the summer, for many years, the childless Jul and Toots took him to the vacation house they shared with Jul's sister and her husband in Castle Park, an upscale community on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan. It always seemed odd to me that my parents, in effect, loaned Dick out every summer.

During the war, when Dick was on duty in the Pacific, my mother and I visited the Goebels at Castle Park, traveling there by train. When I got my first look at Lake Michigan, a stiff northwest wind was blowing, and I watched surf breaking on the broad sand beach with astonishment. The Wisconsin shore was far beyond the horizon, so the scene was almost indistinguishable from an ocean beach. My mother seemed uncomfortable in the presence of Uncle Jul's high-octane sister, Eunice. An awkward moment occurred outdoors when I got into an informal wrestling match with Eunice's son, whose name was also Jul. He was a little heavier than I, but looked soft to me. The adults were present, and, as Jul and I started to tussle, his mother called to him, "Don't hurt him," meaning me. I quickly pinned him. Thereafter young Jul and I got along fine, but Eunice was obviously embarrassed by her ill-considered "Don't hurt him," and she took it out on my mother, who exacerbated the situation by drinking too much. The rest of our visit was distinctly uncomfortable. I knew we wouldn't be coming back.

After graduating from Andover in 1941, Dick had a job as a lifeguard in Castle Park; then started his freshman year at Amherst College. I remember driving up with Mom and Pop to visit him that fall. We attended a football game, in the course of which a single-engine plane buzzed the field. It traced such an erratic course that I wondered if the pilot was deranged. I thought of dive-bombers in the war in Europe.

In those days, something like bed-and-breakfasts, called "tourist rests," were common. We stayed at one in Amherst whose owner collected antique clocks. They were scattered all over the house, and they all chimed on the hour, and most of them more frequently. They were not closely synchronized, so one or another was chiming much of the time. I sat on a sofa looking at them, some in old wooden cabinets with doors that opened, revealing the clockwork inside. I half expected gnomes and elves to come out.

By the following summer Dick had been swept up in war preparations and was enrolled in an NROTC (Naval Reserve Officers Training Program) held at Williams College. Some months later, Mom, Pop, and I accompanied him to Penn Station in New York, where he would be taking a train to the West Coast, then on to active duty in the Pacific. It went through my mind — and I'm sure my parents were thinking the same thing — that we might never see him again. While waiting for the train, Dick and I left Mom and Pop and went to the men's room. After we came out, we saw a man lying on the floor with people clustered around him. He apparently had had a heart attack. He looked dead. We walked on. Dick said, "Don't tell Mom what we saw." I knew he was thinking that she would take this as a bad omen, and I didn't say anything.

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Cousin Skip was only a couple of years younger than Dick, and they must have seen a lot of each other before the Ordemans moved to Westport, in 1938. Like his father, Skip became an executive at Mead Paper Company. His younger brother, Jack, earned a graduate degree at Columbia and had a career as a teacher and secondary-school headmaster. Skip was intelligent, cheerful, friendly, and conscientious. As far as anyone could tell, he was flawless.

To my oversensitive nature, it seemed that my mother was always aglow about Skip. Once, when I was in college, she told me that she had recently seen him (he would then have been about twenty-seven), and that he looked so young — "like an Andover freshman." I said, "Mom, maybe like an Andover senior, but an Andover *freshman?*" It was typical of my mother — making overstretched remarks, though, oddly, in this case she may not have been far off the mark. I saw a picture of Skip taken when he was ninety. He looked about sixty. Or am I exaggerating, just as Mom used to?

Mom frequently recited what Dick and I called horror stories. They were always about someone she knew, or had heard about, who had had an accident or illness or other misfortune. These were intended to be cautionary tales, and usually began, "I heard about a boy (or a man, or my friend Edith's nephew, or . . .) who was swinging from a rope tied to a tree branch (or riding his bike no-handed, or swimming before the water had warmed up, or . . .) , and the rope broke (or he lost his balance, or . . .), and he broke his his right leg, and it was months before he could walk without crutches, (or he got pneumonia, and they didn't know if he'd live, or . . .); then, no matter how grievous the injury or how severe the illness, after describing it in detail, she would say, with amazing frequency, "It's a miracle it wasn't worse."

If, as was sometimes the case, the consequences of the

accident or other mishap she had described were particularly grievous, say, on the order of a broken femur, ruptured spleen, several cracked ribs, or a concussion, I more than once said, "Mom, maybe it was lucky it wasn't worse, but was it really a miracle?" I also thought of saying, "How unlucky it was as bad as it was," but restrained myself.

I was several notches below Skip and Jack on the scale, at the top of which, is a little sign marked "PERFECTION." I don't think I was ever purposely mean to anyone, but I was often thoughtless, which can have the same effect. Among my less commendable qualities was a habit of teasing my mother. After I reached driving age, whenever I was about to set out in the car, she would always look at me anxiously and ask, "Is there enough gas in the tank?" And I would always reply. "It's low, but maybe there's enough."

John (Bobo, in the family), the next cousin in age after Skip, was amiable, bright, and, unlike me, had high mechanical aptitude. He was fascinated by cars, and he made scrapbooks with pictures of cars cut out from ads in magazines. He could recite facts like how much horsepower a 1940 Oldsmobile coupe had and the compression ratio on the 1939 eight-cylinder Lincoln Continental. Bobo went to Princeton — he was four years ahead of me, so our stays there didn't overlap. I saw him only a few times thereafter — he died about twenty years ago. His obituary in the *Princeton Alumni Weekly* concluded with the saddest epitaph I have ever read: "John was a quiet man, who enjoyed puttering about his homes."

Some kids collect baseball cards. Bobo, as mentioned, collected pictures of cars, and later in life, after he'd inherited a considerable amount of money, antique cars. Skip saved copies of *Life* magazine and later collected beer cans. I collected facts like the diameter of Jupiter and the rotation period of Mars; also, at one point, in my mind — I didn't make a written list — the highest elevations in the then forty-eight states, even Kansas. I knew that Kansas has no mountains, but that didn't stop me from wanting to know its highest elevation. You wouldn't notice it driving from one end of state to the other, but Kansas is tilted — it's an inclined plane rising east to west. I once calculated the angle of tilt (on average), but will spare you by not doing so again for inclusion here.

I remember being dismayed to learn that the highest point in Connecticut is on the slope of Bear Mountain and not at its summit, which is in Massachusetts. This might not bother most people, but it never seemed right to me. It turns out that I'm not alone in such sentiments: I read that Sweden was going to give Finland a remote patch of land that contains a mountain top, a point on the slope of which has thus far been the highest point in Finland.

Massachusetts, can't you do the same for Connecticut?

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The center of the great hurricane of Sept 21, 1938, passed about fifty miles east of us, but it was awesome to behold even in Huntington. The worst of it came in the evening. The wind screamed, shrieked, roared, and howled. The electricity went out. We had to light candles. Exciting. The next day we toured the scene of broken branches and fallen trees and drove along the harbor and marveled at boats cast far above the high-tide line. The storm surge was much worse on the east end of Long Island and southeastern New England. Six hundred people died. Mr. Scribner, next door to us, had a brass barometer that would have looked in place on the bridge of a big ship. As the storm was approaching, the needle pointed close to 29 inches pressure, the lowest Mr. Scribner had ever seen. I was thrilled.

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Back to Cousin Jack: Most of our encounters as young children were at Grandma and Grandpa's place, which served as a great adventure park for us. Jack was seven months older than me, more heavily built, and more self-confident. We generally enjoyed each other's company, but I was sometimes wary of him; he tended to push me around, or, at least I thought he was thinking of it. I had one advantage — I was more daring and adventurous at climbing trees. I could get to places on the big copper beech or the chestnut tree where Jack didn't venture. The branches of a mature copper beech are spaced close together and start only a few feet from the ground. Even a six- year-old can grab a bottom branch, swing up, and start climbing. Sometimes of late, driving past an antiseptic-looking, plastic-sheathed, Insurance-Companies-Association-of-America-certified-safe playground, I think how limited today's jungle gyms are compared to Grandma's great copper beech tree.

Our family belonged to a beach club of sorts called Huntington Bay Hills. It had no clubhouse, just individual bathhouses, showers, and toilets. We shared a bathhouse with the Ordemans. It was just big enough for changing clothes and storing beach chairs and umbrellas. I never used the shower. No one told me that you should shower after swimming in salt water, and there were years when I would go the whole summer getting only as clean as you could get by swimming in the bay.

Bay Hills was not a socially upscale place. Though my mother would never have admitted it, some of its members were what, in another setting, she would call "comōnes" (emphasis on the second syllable.) This was a term of disapprobation I think she made up, though it's possible she appropriated it. In Mom's lexicon, a "comōne" was a person she considered to be vulgar and to have no taste, or to be lacking in "refinement." Though Mom generally shunned people she regarded to be

comōnes, she realized that Bay Hills had the best beach in Huntington, the only one with good swimming at low tide. The somewhat comōnish atmosphere of the place could be overlooked.

My sister-in-law, Pat, née Patricia Hawkes, was also my second cousin, the grand-daughter of my grandfather Burne's sister, Aunt Flo (for Flora?), who married a man named John Hawkes. The Burnes produced mainly girls, the Hawkes mainly boys. The Hawkes lived in Connecticut, across Long Island Sound from the Burnes, but there was evidently considerable interaction between these cousins in their youth. My mother did not have a high opinion of the Hawkes boys: she said they were "sporty." It is not good to be a comōne, and it is not good to be sporty. What is a sporty person like? In the case of the Hawkes boys, they owned a speedboat and, according to Mom, flipped quarters across the waves. Aunt Caroline's summer romance story, titled "The Hawtry Boy" and published in *The Smart Set,* in 1916, concerns the interactions between a cloistered young woman and a Yale student who has a speedboat he keeps at his family's lakeside campsite. Hawtry is a blend, I suspect, of "Hawkes" and "haughty," and almost rhymes with "sporty." Patricia Hawkes, who became my sister-in-law, was sporty, but she wasn't a comōne.

From the perspective of anyone of toddler age up to about age ten, Bay Hills beach had an incomparably desirable feature, a pipe constructed of cement cylinders that emerged from the sand ten or fifteen feet above the low tide line. It drained a swamp across the road from the beach. At low tide, when the pipe was exposed, there was something between a strong trickle and a steady stream of water flowing out and running down the beach to the bay. My mother and, I'm sure, Jack's mother, mildly disapproved of our playing at the pipe — the water emanating from it was surely full of germs — but they despaired of keeping us away from it, and our infatuation with it had an upside — it left them in peace, sitting and chatting in their beach chairs while keeping us in view.

The mode of play at the pipe was always the same. The idea was to pile up sand and prevent water from coming out and flowing down to the bay. We piled up lots of sand and packed it tightly, trying to hold back the water as long as possible. Eventually, the dam would burst, and the water would break through with a rush, carving out a gully as it ran down the beach. We were invariably defeated in our endeavor, but the experience was so exhilarating that we would immediately start damming the pipe again.

I don't know how many times or over how many summers this ritual was repeated. Years later, I found it reminiscent of Sisyphus, the Greek king who, as punishment for his arrogance, was condemned to push a boulder up a hill, and each time as he

was about to get it to the top, have it slip away and roll back to the bottom. Albert Camus retells the tale in his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* and concludes that this parable bespeaks man's fate. Despairing as Sisyphus's punishment might seem, there is satisfaction, even joy, to be had in pushing the rock up the slope, defying gravity, getting it ever higher, achieving with every step what you are trying to accomplish. Camus concludes, "The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill man's heart. One must imagine that Sisyphus was happy."

And so were we those sunny years, damning up the pipe. In Doris Kearns Goodwin's *No Ordinary Time* (about Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt during World War II), she tells how, as a stratagem to get himself to fall asleep at night, Franklin would remember how he felt as a child with his sled on winter days in Hyde Park and would visualize himself sledding down the hill, going over bumps, reaching the bottom, then pulling his sled up the hill, then starting down again. I wonder how many times he had to imagine himself pulling the sled up the hill before he fell asleep.

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When I was four or five, about 1935 or 1936, the Depression had bottomed out, Pop's business had begun to get some traction, and my parents were able to buy a house. They had little money, but real-estate prices were still depressed, so we were able to move into a modest, stucco-faced, Tudor-style house with three bedrooms and two bathrooms, and a big backyard. It was in a semi-rural area a little more than a mile from the village and my grandparents' place. Our street was given its redundant name, La Rue Drive, by Jack La Rue, the fellow who developed it. For a while, my brother and I shared the second-largest bedroom. We had twin beds. The reason we didn't each have a bedroom was that the third bedroom was occupied by our maid. Even though the Great Depression wasn't yet over, and my father was still struggling to make his business profitable, our micro-culture mandated having a live-in servant.

As might be expected, maids in our area were paid very little. We had one for only a couple of years, because washers, dryers, and dishwashing machines were coming into use, and most people in our socio-economic class, including us, stopped having maids, whereupon the maid's room became mine.

Though I had become great pals with my grandmother's maid, Helen, the maid at our La Rue Drive house and I had little to say to each other.

Having a maid in our family, before labor-saving appliances became common, may have made economic sense for us because it freed Mom to help Pop with his business. There were years in the thirties and forties when she spent hours

a day in the "sun parlor," a long narrow room off the living room, working on the "Burroughs machine," a mechanical contrivance that, though it stood in the same relation to present-day computers as *Australopithecus afarensis* does to *Homo sapiens,* performed arithmetic, typewriting, and possibly limited printing functions as well.

I'm not sure exactly how old I was when we moved to this house, but I know it was before I started kindergarten, because I remember going to Brush's Nursery School, which Mrs. Brush conducted at her house and backyard about a hundred yards up our street. I remember little about this institution other than the swings. My first day there I gazed in wonderment at some slightly older kids who were swinging as high as they could, pumping their legs to gain altitude. I thought I would never dare go as high. Mr. Brush owned a dairy. One day Mrs. Brush took us on a field trip to look at the cows. After looking at the cows, we started back to the nursery school and were pursued by Mr. Brush. He quickly caught up with us and intemperately rebuked Mrs. Brush — she had left the gate open, and the cows could have gotten out. I was horrified. I had never seen an adult acting angrily toward another. I never once heard my mother and father argue or even raise their voices when talking to each other.

I think it was soon after we moved into our new house that I must have complained of stiff joints or some such malady. Whatever it was, I was examined by our family doctor, who concluded that I had (or had had) rheumatic fever and that, to protect my heart, I should be quiet all the time and not run around. I soon felt symptom-free and paid little attention to this stricture. My mother became less and less vigilant about enforcing it. Eventually, no one talked about it. No one said, "The doctor says you're over it." Or, "It's okay to run around now." Eventually, it became as if it had never happened. I later wondered whether, rather than having had rheumatic fever, I'd had a mild case of polio.

One day my parents had friends of theirs — the Campbells — over for dinner. With that complete lack of tact characteristic of young children, I asked Mr. Campbell why he was so fat. He must have felt good about himself, for he replied in a tone you'd expect in response to a civil question: "I like to eat." To me, this seemed to be a reasonable answer. For him, the downside of being so fat was more than offset by the pleasure of eating more. If he was sixty pounds overweight, he probably had enjoyed eating sixty pounds of good food that he wouldn't have had otherwise.

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The neighborhood where we were living was about half developed and half vacant land, with lots of nearby fields and

woods to play in, and quite a few kids too, mostly boys, living nearby. Our rough-cut lawn went back for more than one hundred feet from behind the garage to a six-foot-high rickety wooden fence at the rear of the property. Beyond it were fields with patches of scrub oak and wild cherry trees. Friends I'd made in the neighborhood and I played baseball in this long backyard. It was hard to find balls in the fields and brush beyond the fence, so we made a rule that if you hit the ball over the fence you were out. This didn't help any of us to become great sluggers and go on to major-league careers.

Except for one proto-sadistic boy, a future criminal-type, in my estimation, these were nice kids. We never had more than three or four on a team, and no one took the game seriously. One of my friends, Bob Mackin, delighted in yelling at a teammate chasing an outfield hit, "Get the lead out of your pants!" Then, when it was clear that the batter would get home ahead of the throw, "Take your time." At some point I told my mother that I'd like to be a big-league baseball player when I grew up. She said, "You wouldn't want that — they're all comōnes."

At the far end of La Rue Drive, about a quarter mile from our house, was a picture-book cottage with an overgrown lawn and a lot of vines and scrubby trees around it, and nearby, on the same property, an odd-looking cement building, also with vines on it, with little square windows. The sole occupant of the cottage was an elderly (to my eyes — she may have been about sixty, for all I know) woman named Mrs. Paulding. The cement building housed a cider mill. There was no sign saying so, but the kids in the neighborhood knew about it, and during the cider-making season, we'd stop by two or three times a week. Mrs. Paulding was always welcoming and never failed to give me a free cup of cider. I think it brightened her day when I or one of my friends appeared. She remains in memory as an example of a naturally kindly, generous-spirited soul.

On Halloween, kids went trick or treating just as they do now, though I don't remember hearing that term used in my era. There was one house on the street that older kids said we should avoid. The people who lived there were supposedly unfriendly; they would never open their door except to let out a fierce dog that would attack you. This was universal knowledge, though both its source and evidence of its verity were never made available to me. I think their name was Singer, and they were said to be members of the German-American Bund! Our imaginations ran wild when we talked about them, forming images that far outstripped plausibility.

Whenever mention is made of global warming, I think of what excellent skating we had on nearby ponds. There was nearly always enough ice for at least part of Christmas vacation. We played hockey. I could skate fast but was no good at stopping.

For a Christmas present when I was about ten, my father got me a portable foundry (I guess you'd call it), which came with a lump of lead, which you put in an iron pot that was part of this heavy and ugly contraption. Plug it into an electric outlet, and the pot heats up enough to melt the lead (I just looked it up, and see that this happens at 625 F). Once the lead is in a molten state, you lift a lever, and molten lead flows down a chute into a mold. Lower the lever and the flow stops, and the lead solidifies inside the mold. Unplug the contraption and let everything cool. Open the mold, and you have a lead soldier, a rather crude and drab one. Oh, the thrill of manufacturing something! I may have made as many as four or five soldiers before running out of lead. I didn't attempt to obtain more. The boiling point of lead, which I just looked up, is 3,760 F, so maybe not that many molecules got into the air I was breathing. I probably lost only a few I.Q. points hunched over the cauldron. Not as bad as imbibing lead in your drinking water.

During these years my father worked tremendously hard, not only enduring long commutes — home to office in downtown Manhattan must have involved an almost two-hour trip each way, and I'm sure he worked on the train. He also worked at home on weekends, sitting in a no-nonsense armchair in the "sun parlor" with a wooden board on his lap that served as a desk. He kept this up for nearly his entire working life. It took grit to do that. Pop had grit, but his psychological makeup did not prepare him for the Great Depression, which I think caused him to develop what I think of as a "depression mentality." His business thrived during World War II, but a ninety percent "excess profits" tax, necessary to prevent runaway inflation, greatly reduced his take-home earnings. After the war, he was convinced that another terrible depression lay ahead. He cut expenses to the minimum, scaled back investments, and suffered from competitive disadvantage and changing business practices, and so only limped along until, when he reached sixty-five, in 1960, he sold his business for almost nothing. Fortunately, my parents' home mortgage was paid off, but they lived on not much more than Social Security checks from then on. Dick and I weren't able to help them — we each had multiple problems, including severe financial constraints.

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Dick was always nice enough to me, but when he was home, after we moved to La Rue Drive, he spent much more time with his contemporaries, principally among them, Bob Scribner, who lived next door. Bob had two older sisters. Mrs. Scribner and their kids were Catholics. Mr. Scribner was not, and I don't think he went to any church. He was a kindly gentleman, but I wondered if he felt like an outsider in his own family.

Dick and Bob taught me to play Monopoly before I could read. They put a scrap of paper on each property I owned. That was my main memory about both of them until this one: When I was about eight, I was riding my bike down the street and, as I was approaching our driveway, I felt a sharp zingy pain in my cheek about an inch from my eye. I'd been hit by a BB pellet, mindlessly aimed nowhere in particular by my brother. It didn't bleed, it just stung, but I biked up our driveway and confronted Dick and Bob. Dick was still holding his gun. "You hit me in the cheek with a BB," I said, "I'm going to tell Mom."

Fortunately for him, Mom was not at home, but Dick, Bob, and I all knew that permanent confiscation of the BB gun could happen within minutes after she returned. Dick and Bob pleaded with me not to squeal and promised to be my slaves if I kept mum. I relented, and we went inside, and I sat on the couch and ordered them to bring me milk and cookies or some such treat and to call me master. This lasted almost an hour until gradually the dynamics changed. They sensed by then that I wasn't going to tell on them, and our relationship reverted to normal.

Bob was friendly toward me, but there were some things about him I didn't like. When I was about eleven and Bob about eighteen, we got talking about Darwinian evolution, which I had recently learned about and thought was amazing and wonderful. I mentioned this to Bob, and he reacted scornfully. "You think we're descended from monkeys? That's disgusting." I remember thinking at the time: I wonder why he thinks it's disgusting, and I don't. I think the Catholic Church had accepted the reality of Darwinian evolution by then, but maybe not the local priest. Another time, Bob started talking about a public swimming pool that allowed Negroes in it. "Can you imagine what it would be like to be in the same pool as a Negro?" he exclaimed. I wondered what must have been going through his mind. I formed a mental image of a Negro swimming in a pool and the black color on him coming off and floating over and attaching itself to Bob's skin, which then began to get a little black too! I didn't pose this scenario to Bob.

In these grade-school years, living on La Rue Drive, I mostly played with boys in the neighborhood. There was a boy a year younger than I, named John Colgan, who lived a few doors away. I remember only two incidents involving him. His house was made of bricks and, at each corner, one brick stuck out a few inches every couple of feet up to the roof. This was for decorative purposes, but I saw it as a climbing opportunity. While John watched, I began to demonstrate how I could climb all the way to the roof. I got halfway up, fell, and sprained my foot. It was weeks before I could walk at a regular pace. The other incident with John was in the Keens' backyard. The Keens lived two doors from us, and they had two girls, Linda and

Elizabeth. Linda was a couple of years younger than I, and her sister was even younger — not in my normal range (or gender) of playmates, but they had a croquet course set up in their backyard, and Linda, or maybe it was Mrs. Keen, invited me to play, and I sometimes stopped by, and John did too. One afternoon, when John and I were playing croquet with Linda and Elizabeth, preparatory to knocking an opponent's ball, John executed a violent backswing, in the course of which his mallet was arrested by contact with my forehead. I staggered a bit and felt a little dizzy, but didn't fall or get knocked out, so I just walked home. I developed a bump on my head, but I don't recall that anything was done for it, and eventually it subsided. This episode dampened my liking for croquet and for John.

I must have been "bad" at times — I don't remember any of my transgressions, but I remember Mom swatting my legs in punishment for them. When she pronounced sentence, she would take a pair of sheers and cut off a suitable switch from the forsythia hedge between our property and the Scribners', next door. I remember thinking that the Scribners had installed that hedge, and Mom had no right to trim part of it off. Thou shall not steal! I didn't advance this as a counterclaim against her.

The problem was not pain, which was somewhere between trivial and nonexistent, but humiliation. She was undoubtedly trying to do what she thought parents were supposed to do in such situations, but it wasn't a good idea. I would have been responsive to a discussion of why my behavior was unsatisfactory. As it was, with each infliction of punishment, my affection for my mother was diminished. If I'd had more grit, I'm sure I would have shaken off these humiliations and not let them infiltrate my psyche. Mom wasn't the slightest bit mean.

If Pop happened to be at home when my being bad occurred, he was assigned to inflict punishment, which, being a man, it was appropriate to administer with his belt. Pop seems to have harbored repressed anger, for example saying he wanted to bomb the Soviet Union, but he was not inclined to inflict corporal punishment — he only did so because he was supposed to, and as it turned out, not even that; he waved his belt against my legs a few times, never hard enough to cause the slightest pain. I doubt he would have even done that had it not been for reluctance to taking a stand on the issue with my mother. "There," he'd say a bit sheepishly afterward. Mom was never present on these occasions, and presumably assumed Pop swatted me with a respectable degree of force. Pop never hit me, nor did he ever talk to me about my behavior.

His tenderhearted nature was exhibited at least once at the dinner table. Mom was not a gifted cook, except when it came to baking cakes, at which she ranked with the greats. But she grossly overcooked vegetables, thinking that it was necessary

to make sure they would be digestible, when in fact it only washed out flavor and nutritional value. Once at a Sunday dinner with just her and me and Pop, she served stalks of asparagus so overcooked that they lay like oversized bleached earthworms on the plate. "Eat your asparagus." she demanded. I tried, but the sight, feel, and taste of what was on my fork was enough to make me gag. It was so limp I couldn't chew it. I resisted. Mom turned up the heat. "Eat it now!" After a while, Pop couldn't stand it. "Charl," as he sometimes called Mom, "don't make him eat it all." After about ten minutes of haggling I ate a token amount, trying not to choke on it; then we declared a truce.

About the time of the asparagus incident I went for a walk with my mother and we encountered Mrs. Keen, and Mom greeted her as warmly as she would anyone, which I wasn't sure she would, because I knew that the Keens were Jewish, and for that reason, Mom wouldn't imagine socializing with them. I knew this because she had made occasional references to Jews, the tenor of which was that they were not as nice as us non-Jews. Even if they were cultured people, there was something about them that made them no better than comōnes. When I asked Mom for particulars, she said that Jews were not as nice as Christians. I asked why they were not as nice as Christians. She said, in effect, that it was because they were Jews. I had not heard the term "circular reasoning" at this point in life, but I sensed there was some faulty thinking going on. To complicate the situation, my mother had once said to me that I "should work hard at school and get ahead like the Jews."

The Jews weren't nice, but I should try to be like them. That seemed odd. Then there was the inconvenient fact that our Lord, whom we were supposed to worship, was a Jew. And Jesus's mother was Jewish. And what about the disciples? Jewish! It all seemed very awkward to me, though I would never convey such a thought to my mother. Any talk that smacked of lack of faith in her version of the Episcopalian version of God and attendant beliefs was taboo.

I was not religious, but I'd given some thought to theology, and decided that Christ was more or less an Assistant God. I got that idea from a creed we had to recite in church that had a phrase that said, Jesus "rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty." He is God's right-hand man, or rather God's right-hand God, is the way I thought of it.

I was a literal-minded little fellow and wondered whether the Holy Ghost was seated on the other side of the Father. Since nothing was mentioned in the creed about this, I decided that he was not. So I began to visualize two high-backed chairs floating in heaven. God is sitting in one, and in the other chair, on God's right, is seated Jesus. Then I thought, if that's the case, God

would be sitting on the left-hand side of Jesus. Wouldn't that invest Jesus in the preferred position? That didn't seem right. There was no way even two Gods can both sit on the right hand of the other. I concluded that the Holy Ghost must float around, as you might expect of a ghost, even a holy one. Further evidence of this was that, as I understood it, though it was clearly too delicate a subject to be discussed at home, the Holy Ghost was the agency of the Virgin Mary's impregnation. The idea of one God in three persons didn't make sense to me. Admittedly, I never tried to understand it, though I'm sure there are impressive writings on the subject.

Thinking about this makes me wonder why, among individuals of similar backgrounds and degrees of education, you can find lots of people drawn to religious belief and lots of others repelled by it. Once, walking past a newsstand, I noticed that the cover story line on the current edition of *Time* was, "Is There a God Gene?" I didn't read the article, but I think the question is a good one. Rephrased: Is there a genetically-linked predisposition to religious belief? If there is, I don't have it. Nonetheless, years of religious indoctrination became so immersed in my brain that, well into adult life, I exhibited traces of adherence to the Faith. Gradually they molted away.

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Aunt Toots, the imperious history professor, and Jul, her law professor husband, though they had no children, were the authorities on educational matters in the family. Academic achievement ranked highest on their lists of prescribed goals. As Dick approached high-school years, it was undoubtedly Toots and Jul who advised my parents that the best secondary school for him to attend would be Phillips Academy Andover. Dick was duly enrolled there, beginning sophomore year (then called lower middle year, at Andover), in September 1938. I doubt if Aunt Tony and Uncle Arnie consulted Toots about where their son, our oldest cousin, Sam, should get his secondary education. As noted earlier, Tony had determined long before to set her own course. In any case, Sam attended the local public high school, then went on to Dartmouth. But the Ordeman boys entered Andover: Skip in the class of 1943 (two years behind Dick), and Jack in the class of 1948. So it was that, beginning in the fall of 1938, when I was only seven, Dick spent most of the school year in Massachusetts and most of the summer visiting the Goebels in Michigan.

During these years, my mother sometimes drove me to school and picked me up in the afternoon. More often I took the

bus. What seems odd now, I started school in February rather than in September. They had-half-year classes then, a practice that was discontinued when I was in second grade. At that point I had to be skipped ahead half a grade or left back half a grade. There was a controversy about which it should be. One teacher thought I should be dropped back half a grade because my handwriting was so bad, but other views prevailed, and I was skipped ahead. The result of this was that going through the rest of elementary school and junior high I was about seven months younger than the average age for my class. Here follows an almost complete compilation of memories I have of my passage through elementary school, from kindergarten through sixth grade at Woodbury Avenue School in Huntington.

Kindergarten: We made candles. I held a long wick. Miss Jenkins, our teacher, stood next to a big pot of melted wax, and the other kids and I went around in a circle, and each time we came to the teacher and the pot, we dipped the wick in and pulled it out. Our candles gradually became thicker, until after maybe five or six dippings they were finished. I was awestruck by the process: I had manufactured something, a candle! But why wasn't it perfectly cylindrical like candles at home or in a store? I didn't realize that they were made in molds with machines.

First grade: We had to color drawings with crayons. We each had a book with outlines of drawings in them and had to color them. I looked at the first one. It was a horse, so I decided it should be brown, as in most pictures of horses I'd seen, so I used a brown crayon. I may have been the worst in the class at keeping my color inside the outline of the horse and not leaving any white spots where it should be colored. My problem was incompetence coupled with impatience. I didn't want to spend time doing it. My mother told me later that Dickie Gardner had won a prize for having the neatest drawing. I felt an implicit rebuke. What was so great about coloring drawings neatly? Answer: neatness counts. I was sure then that it didn't, and it took me a long time to learn that in many instances it does.

Second grade: We were reading books, and I showed Laurie Clark mine and asked if she knew what a particular long word was, and she said right away, "electricity." I was impressed. Laurie smiled at me. I looked at her. I felt electricity between us. Another time, I started to reach for something — I think it was piece of chalk — at the same time Laurie did. I pulled back, knowing that you shouldn't try to grab something ahead of a girl. I felt I had blundered by reaching for it when I did. I suspect that my relationship with Laurie afterward was never quite the same, because I have no further memories of her, but she was the first girl that took up permanent residence in my mind. Maybe her family moved away the next year;

otherwise I think I would have remembered at least looking at her when we were older.

Third grade: Recess, out on the soccer field. I was no good at this sport, and it was the only one offered at Woodberry Elementary School in the fall. (I liked playing football, but that was an occasional after-school activity.) There was a lot of time when no one was playing soccer, and we were just standing around. I was often apprehensive during those interims. One kid liked to push me and threatened real damage. I didn't think I could beat him in a fight, and I didn't want to fight. As I mentioned earlier, I didn't talk much to my father, and he didn't talk much to me, but one Saturday I told him about this kid who threatened me and pushed me around. Pop listened carefully, then he said, "You have broad shoulders." Neither of us discussed the matter again. That I had broad shoulders was of little consequence. The problem was that I didn't have grit. If I'd had grit, I would have let the little miscreant have it — POW!

Fourth grade: We are each seated at a school desk. The teacher, Miss O'Brien, is behind her desk in the front of the room. She may be talking, or maybe we're supposed to be working on something. Our classroom has big windows. It's near the end of October, and it's raining outside. Miss O'Brien is talking now, definitely saying things, but I'm transfixed, watching the rain come down. Wow, is it raining hard! What's the teacher saying? I have no idea, because amazingly, wonderfully, now there are snowflakes mixed with the rain. Look at them! Is it going to turn completely to snow? Looks like it could. *I saw snow, and it's still October!* This was far more important than anything being talked about in class. My memory ends there, as if in a dream from which one abruptly awakens and feels, even if it's not a happy dream, as if something has been snatched away.

Fifth grade: With Miss Evans, the most accommodating teacher I remember. This was the year we studied the medieval period. We had a model feudal castle in the classroom. Miss Evans didn't tell us about battering rams, possibly afraid we'd knock it down.

Sixth grade: That was when my teacher was Miss Leech. She was strict, but interesting. She was an enthusiastic supporter of FDR and the New Deal and had strong convictions. (Nobody was telling *her* to teach to the test!) She told us that discrimination was bad, and that it wasn't right that in southern states they made it harder, or even impossible, for Negroes to vote. When I got home I said to my mother, "Miss Leech says that in southern states they discriminate against Negroes and make it harder for them to vote, and discrimination is bad." "Oh no," Mom said, "discrimination is good. There are more Negroes than whites in some of those states, so if you didn't

have discrimination, Negroes would be elected and run the government." That didn't seem like a good argument to me, and if I'd had a little grit, not even rising to true grit dimensions, I would have told my mother so, or I might have told Miss Leech what my mother said and seen what Miss Leech thought of *that*, and that would have been interesting and educational, but I was in the grip of passivity.

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I was what now might be called a free-range kid. Although Mom thought it was dangerous to lie on the grass, because it might be damp, and risky not to dry your hair thoroughly after a shower, she had no problem with my climbing high in trees, biking to a beach with no lifeguard when I was ten years old, and, after I reached driving age, using the family car for social events, sometimes lasting to late hours. My brother and I had total freedom with fireworks. Dick was the only kid I knew who got the Spencer Fireworks catalog. We would order fireworks about a month ahead of the Fourth. They were shipped Railway Express from Ohio and arrived in a wooden crate. You could save money by buying an assortment. I looked through the catalog each year with unmatched attentiveness, awestruck at pyrotechnic descriptions of ways to celebrate the Fourth, especially of what may have been the most powerful explosive device offered to the general public, the "Super Giant Fancy Blast Salute."

Mom never restrained me from hurling cherry bombs and two-inch salutes in all directions on the Fourth, though she did warn about tetanus, a terrible medical condition, sometimes referred to as lockjaw, which could be brought on from a variety of causes, including burns from fireworks! More of her horror stories involved a kid getting tetanus than any other adversity. One Fourth of July, I was careless igniting a firecracker and incurred a little powder burn on two fingers. I didn't mention this to Mom, but I began to worry about getting tetanus, and I felt ill. I told Mom that I wasn't feeling well. She told me to lie down and rest. She came back in a while. I still wasn't feeling well. She took my temperature — it was a degree above normal. I timorously asked, "Do you think it's tetanus?" "Oh, mercy no," she replied with complete authority. I felt immensely relieved and within half an hour felt fine and my temperature was back to normal.

Years ago, I read a book by a British science writer named Jo Marchant dealing with the interrelationship of mind and body. In it she talks at length about placebos and also about their opposite, nocebos. If you think you ingested something that you believe might have an adverse physiological effect, there's a good chance you'll feel sick, even get sick, even if it's harmless, My powder burn sequela was a perfect example of the nocebo

effect.

Though I didn't read as much as my brother, I read probably more than the average kid. When I've been interviewed about Choose Your Own Adventure books, whoever is interviewing me asks what books I liked most as a child. Unsurprisingly, because that's what I specialized in as a writer, the books I liked most were adventure books, particularly *Huckleberry Finn* and *Treasure Island.* After that, *Robinson Crusoe.* A book series I took to, which I never heard anyone else mention, consisted of novels on deep sea diving written by Commander Ellsberg, U.S.N. It mattered little to me that the plot hardly varied from book to book. As I recall, it always involved a deep-sea- diving expedition in which, after ascending too rapidly to the surface, the hero gets the bends. The best book in the series was splendidly titled, *On the Bottom.*

I read *Oliver Twist* and a few other classics, the names of most of which I can't remember. Detective books appealed to me. Sherlock Holmes, of course, and even more so, the Nero Wolfe series, which my brother introduced me to. Later, I saw Nero Wolfe stories depicted in a television series, but never with images as wonderful as I had conjured up in my mind.

Aunt Toots occasionally gave me books for Christmas with depressing titles like *The Little Lame Prince* and *Little Lord Fauntleroy.* I never read any of them. Like most of my contemporaries, I read dozens of "Big-Little" books. These were adventure books with cheap hard covers. They had a trim size of about 4.5" by 4.5." Print was large, so each page had only about forty words on it. Every facing page was devoted to a crude illustration. Some of these books had little inset pictures positioned in the upper-right corner so that if you riffled through the book you were treated to a crude animation. My mother looked askance at these confections, but reading and trading Big-Little books was a better-than-average use of my time.

On my ninth birthday, Feb. 16, 1940, the Japanese were in the process of conquering Indonesia. My father's business had become more profitable as the nation began gearing up for war. He had bought a phonograph on which you could make recordings, and for my birthday he gave me a sound-effects kit. My favorite sound effect was simple enough — a balloon with some sand in it. Blow it up, and shake it. You get a sound like thunder or an explosion. I also had a siren and an arrangement of metal plates which, when rattled, made a sound like a car crash. I had some friends (all boys) over for a birthday party. I don't remember the cake, but I remember producing and recording a simulated radio broadcast in which I made the sound effects, and one of my guests, Tang Jorgenson, was a war correspondent. I can still hear his voice: "This is Tang Jorgenson, reporting from Batavia, Java. The bombs are crashing all about us. *VIGOROUS SHAKING OF SOUND*

BALLOON; SIREN; CRASHES. "A whole building is going up in flames." *SHAKING OF THE BALLOON NEXT TO THE MIC.* "Oh, what a terrible explosion. That one was close! Oh, here comes a big squadron of enemy planes. They're coming in fast. We have to go. . . Signing off. This has been Tang Jorgenson from …" BIG BOMBS EXPLODING.

Did Tang survive? Listeners, if there had been any, would never have learned.

These were "Radio Days." Though almost five years younger than me, Woody Allen was nostalgic enough about the pre-television era to make a movie with that title. It was a good one, too.

Just as kids today spend too much time watching TV and even more too much time with their electronic devices, I spent too much time listening to the radio, especially shows like *Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy,* introduced each day with the song, no line of which is weak enough to cut out:

> Wave the flag for Hudson High, boys. Show them how we stand. Ever shall our team be champions, known throughout the land. . . *Oh* . . . won't you *try* Wheaties, the best breakfast food in the land. They're crispy, they're crunchy, the whole year through; Jack Armstrong never tires of them and neither will you. . .

I liked Wheaties for breakfast. My mother wanted me to have hot cereal before going off to school, especially in cold frosty weather. She believed it would keep me from getting chilled. General Mills was ready for mothers like that, and I was prepared to repeat the message I heard almost every day: "Jack Armstrong says that Wheaties have more calories, and it's calories you need to keep you warm." I pretty much won that battle. This was before the days when mothers could answer back with talk about empty calories and how overconsumption of sugar is a huge national problem.

Sometimes, early weekday mornings, the radio would be tuned to the John Gambling show on WOR. John would give news on the light side and weather reports. He had a three-piece musical ensemble, and they would play short, tasteful, semi-classical ditties, and John would chat a bit with Vincent, their leader. It was a soothing and pleasant way to start the day. John Gambling had a son named John, and every day John Senior would say, "Hello, Johnny," over the airways to John Junior, who was almost exactly my age. John Junior took over the show when he grew up, but it wasn't the same.

Fast forward a few years or so, and you could tune in on another morning show, one I think of as the epitome of civility, *Breakfast with the Fitzgeralds,* a husband and wife having

breakfast in their modest but comfortable Manhattan apartment with the newspaper spread before them, chatting between bites of toast with a dab of marmalade on it, maybe with a poached egg, and sipping coffee, commenting on the day's news or practically anything else. So reasonable and congenial, yet perceptive and interesting, were the Fitzgeralds, I thought of them as a model of how to live.

Some famous author — I think it was Flaubert — forbade having his novels illustrated. He said that illustrations fix an arbitrary impression of how characters and their surroundings look. Preferable, he thought, was for the reader to create a mental image from the words on the page. This was one of the charms of radio — people could form their own image of how the Fitzgeralds looked and how their breakfast area was furnished, including imagining details like a cat sitting on a spare chair. Watching television, you see a scene constructed by others. It may be more imaginative or evocative than yours, but the gain may not exceed the loss of the images you would have created in your mind.

My favorite show was *The Lone Ranger*. The fellow who played the title role had a wonderful deep voice. He always sounded thoughtful and reasonable and brave. Tonto was good too. My cousin Jack may have been an even more loyal fan than I was. He remembered one episode in particular:

> The Lone Ranger was being chased by the bad guys, and he came to a narrow gorge. He explained to Silver that they would have to make a prodigious leap if they were to escape. We heard Silver's hooves as they approached the edge of the gorge. The Lone Ranger shouted, "Now, Big Fella," and there was a pause of what seemed to be several seconds before we again heard the sound of hoof beats and breathed a sigh of relief.

That was radio at its best. I can imagine the producers discussing how many seconds and fractions of seconds to pause before the sound of hoof beats resumed. The arc of suspense rises as the first one or two seconds pass, but the pause can't last the slightest bit too long, or it's no longer possible to believe that the Lone Ranger made it, or the great horse, Silver, either.

So imprinting can be the power of repetition and the power of music that what I loved most about this show was the ending of each episode, which to my knowledge never varied. It was perfect:

> Hoofbeats of a horse galloping away
> *First voice:* "Do you know who that was?"
> *Second voice*: "No, who?"
> *First voice (admiringly):* "That was the Lone Ranger."
> *Second voice (awestruck):* "The Lone Ranger?"

*In the distance — the Lone Ranger:"*Hi-Ho, Silver, away!" Strains of the incomparable William Tell Overture, almost certainly performed by the NBC Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Arturo Toscanini.

Among the Sunday evening shows, Jack Benny was the best. Just listening to the foghorn voice of Rochester was worth our time huddled in front of the radio.

During the war years we'd listen to the evening news, most frequently to Gabriel Heater, who had a deep, sonorous voice and invested every utterance with great significance. He usually began with a single introductory sentence, like: *(jubilantly) "*There's good news tonight! (*slight pause)* "Russian forces have crossed the Dnieper River and surged into German-held territory!" Or, no less often *(gravely, and in a deeper voice):* "There's bad news tonight. German tanks have advanced almost to the gates of Stalingrad."

When I was apparently or actually sick and home from school, which was a lot, along with millions of "housewives" and I don't imagine very many boys my age, I'd listen to two or three soap operas in the afternoon. My favorite was *Our Gal Sunday*, or maybe it was just the introductory line to each episode, which was prefaced by a little music; then a voice asked, "Can a young girl from a Colorado mining town find happiness married to one of England's richest lords?" It would be hard to top that.

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It seems to me that I was often home from school with bronchitis. The medical arts were relatively primitive in those days. "I don't like the sound of that cough," my mother would say, and I'd know what was likely to follow: application of a mustard plaster, a hot, heavy cloth wrapping soaked with mustard applied to the chest for the purpose of *what?* The horrible smelly fumes you had to breathe when it was strapped on were supposed to clear out your lungs, but I suspect its true therapeutic value was to motivate you to get the hell out of bed and back to school.

At some point, I heard the expression "sickly child." It might be fair to think of myself as having been one. I thought of blaming my deficiencies on that fact. Then I read the first of Edmund Morris's three-volume biography of Theodore Roosevelt. T. R. was a sickly child! It's a condition that won't hold you back if you have grit.

Six months after my ninth birthday party and my simulated broadcast of the Japanese attack on Java, the 1940 presidential election campaign was in full swing. Like most nine year-olds, I assumed that my parents were right about most things. Since they were Republicans, so I was a Republican, whatever that

meant. There was never any discussion of issues or reasons to support any candidate or party other than the assertion of what was presumably the indisputable truth that Roosevelt was wrecking America and Wilkie would save it. My interest in the campaign was not in who would win the election, but in how many kinds of Wilkie buttons I could collect. There was a big one with Wilkie's picture on it, and ones with slogans like "Win with Wilkie," "No Third Term," and "We Don't Want Eleanor Either."

If this means I was a Republican, then it's also true that I was a Colonialist. My brother had a globe that I twirled around and studied. It showed the world as it was in the 1920s. All the countries that were British possessions or members of the British Commonwealth were colored pink. I was dismayed that Britain had so many possessions, and seemingly subservient allies occupying great swaths of the globe, such as India, Australia, and Canada, whereas the U.S. only had Alaska, the Philippines, and some islands that took up no more space than a housefly on the globe. It didn't occur to me that, just as Americans wanted to be independent from Britain, so might the people in pink-colored countries.

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On Sunday, December 7, 1941, Dick was at Amherst. Mom, Pop, and I had driven to Bronxville for midday dinner with the Burnes — Jinx, Olive, and Bobo. I think it was just before we were about to get in the car and drive back to Huntington when a friend of the Burnes called with news of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Pop, Mom and I were in a somber mood as we drove home. We were all thinking that Dick would probably see action.

An incident that occurred a couple of months later reveals how much the war came to dominate our minds. Looking northeast through certain second-story windows in our house, beyond the fields and scruffy woods, one could see, rising about half a mile away, the tower of a waterfront mansion owned by a man named McKesson Brown. One bleak winter day — the kind when there's a chill wind blowing off the water, and elongated whitish-gray clouds are scudding above the horizon — I was home from school with a cold or some other malady and had been shuffling about the house, looking out windows in one direction or another, and occasionally toward McKesson Brown's tower. At some point, I turned in that direction and almost jumped out of my socks. Dozens of German paratroopers were descending to the left of the tower, then smaller numbers higher and to the right. It took me several seconds to realize I was looking at swirling flocks of seagulls. The brain constructs what we see, which isn't necessarily what is there.

Looking at another angle across fields behind our house, there was a clear line of sight between the second floor of our house and the second floor of my friend Bob Mackin's house. Bob and I had developed a ritual of sending each other messages in Morse code every evening using blinking flashlights. One day Bob told me his mother didn't want him to do it anymore. She said that people might think we were German spies. Well, we'd had the fun of it, and it wasn't a big deal to give it up, but I thought there was about as much chance of people thinking we were German spies as that paratroopers were descending near McKesson Brown's tower.

Because of the war, kids my age had a lot more freedom than they would have had otherwise. Rather than use rationed gasoline driving them around, parents let them go wherever they wanted on their bikes. In summertime, I'd bike to Milbank's beach on Lloyd Harbor. It was private property, but you could get there on a path, and there were no warning signs or barricades. It seemed to me quite wonderful — a seawall and a tiny, rocky beach, and good swimming at mid- to high tide only a mile from our house. Sometimes I'd go with other kids, but more often by myself. One time when I got there, I found that the tide was exceptionally high and I could possibly do a flat dive off the seawall and safely hit the water. *Possibly,* but if I entered the water at something of an angle, I would hit rocks, or maybe even if I entered the water perfectly flat, part of me might hit the pointed top of a rock just below the surface. Nonetheless, it seemed like the most important thing in the world would be for me to dive off the seawall, even though there was no one around to be impressed by my accomplishment. I stood motionless, poised to dive, for a long time. Finally, I decided not to take a chance. The truth struck me as I biked home: It would have been crazy to have tried. Maybe it was all those horror stories my mother told that saved me. If I had dived, I could have been badly injured, and it would have taken a miracle for it not to be worse.

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Up until I was about to finish sixth grade, Woodbury Avenue School went through eighth grade. When Dick completed eighth grade, he got the history prize, which impressed Aunt Toots, the history professor. She concluded that Dick must be smarter than me, because I had shown no interest in history and wasn't likely to get any such prize. This is what I thought my mother was implying when she told me about it. It turned out that I didn't have a chance to compete for the history prize at Woodbury. By the time I finished sixth grade, junior high schools were coming into vogue. They covered seventh, eighth, and ninth grades, and a new local one, the Robert K. Toaz Junior High School, was opening just as I was to begin seventh grade.

My seventh-grade class at Toaz was a lot bigger than my sixth-grade class at Woodbury, because it included the kids who had just finished sixth grade at other schools in our town. My first day there, we gathered in the assembly hall, and the principal, Mr. Finley, gave a talk. I was interested to see what he was like because his daughter, Jane Finley, had been in my class at Woodbury. He spoke about how wonderful it was that this new school, in the auditorium of which we were sitting, had just been built, and then he said, "Does anyone want to guess how much it cost to build this school?" I knew at once that he wanted someone to guess something such that he could then say, "Well, I'll tell you, it cost a lot more than that!"

I thought $75,000 would be safely low, so I raised my hand and said, "seventy-five thousand dollars," and Mr. Finley said, "Well, I'll tell you, it cost a lot more than that — it cost over seven hundred thousand dollars!" Several people went *ooh* and *ahh* in appropriate astonishment, and I know Mr. Finley felt good, and probably Jane too, but I decided that I had pretended to guess too ridiculously low a figure, and that I should have called out least $150,000, but I was still pleased that at least I'd guessed correctly what Mr. Finley would say, and he was pleased too, I know, because he smiled broadly and paused to let it all sink in, and that's undoubtedly why this trivial incident stuck in my mind.

Like nearly everything that stuck, it was an event that was out of the ordinary or that produced either a flash of unusual happiness or unusual unhappiness. It was something that affected me that way, even though you may sensibly wonder why it should have.

I don't remember whether it was before or after this introductory talk by Mr. Finley that we went to our new home rooms. One of the features of Robert K. Toaz Junior High was that homerooms were assigned on the basis of I.Q. tests. There were five homerooms, and it was rather unsettling to find out what bracket kids I knew at Woodbury had been assigned to. I had a friend who seemed quite intelligent to me, but he was put in only the third-ranking homeroom. It occurred to me that he must have felt bad about it. I was in the top twenty percent, so I was in the homeroom with the smartest kids. It was like being in Lake Wobegon, where all the children are above average.

I was surprised and delighted to see that one of the kids assigned to my homeroom was a Negro girl who had come from another elementary school. I have to admit that I wasn't delighted because I was a civil-rights activist ahead of my time and therefore rejoiced to see that this girl hadn't been discriminated against in class assignment. The reason I was delighted was that I knew it would shock my mother when I told her about it. And indeed it did. "How could that have happened?" she wondered aloud when I broke the news. A

period of silence followed as she tried to deal with the enormity of the event. I thought she might say more, but she didn't, nor was it ever mentioned again. It became one of the innumerable topics that it's best not to talk about and better not to think about. Mom reacted similarly the summer before I started college when I told her I was going to have lunch at the house of a friend of mine, Jack Williams, and there was going to be a Negro there! Jack had a Thistle class sailboat and had asked me to crew for him in the national regatta in Maryland. The idea was that we would have lunch at his house and then go sailing to practice for it. Jack's father was in the diplomatic service and worked at the U.N.

The black man coming to visit was an associate of his and of Ralph Bunche, an illustrious African American diplomat who won the Nobel Peace Prize for his mediation work in Israel. "Oh, I don't think it's a good idea eating with a Negro," Mom said, not realizing that this would be a good educational experience for me. She had, alas, a parochial view of the world. I met this gentleman, but Jack and I each grabbed a sandwich and went sailing rather than sitting down with the adults.

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After my bracing beginning at Robert K. Toaz Junior High School, the rest of that school year didn't go well. I developed tremendous anxiety and began to get headaches at school. Why did this happen? I'm not sure, except that my mother was basically an anxious person and my father was overstressed with work and bottled-up, and in each case these states of mind were exacerbated by the war. One day I walked into the kitchen and saw Mom standing in front of the oven. She turned it off and took out a letter. It was a letter she had written and was going to send to Dick. She explained that she had a cold and wanted to sterilize the letter so Dick wouldn't catch it. I thought about how the envelope might get germs on it in the course of the about ten thousand-mile trip to wherever he was, but I didn't say anything.

I was just as anxious as Mom, but my anxiety was focused on myself. I had entered junior high nine months after the attack on Pearl Harbor. The war was raging. There were daily reports of battles in the Soviet Union, North Africa, and on Pacific islands. We had no idea where Dick was. I was overweight, not athletically gifted, uncertain about myself, and, as mentioned before, lacking grit. Thanks to my body conspiring with me by giving me headaches, I had the pretext and moral authority to more or less go on strike and take to bed for the school year. Our family doctor was unable to diagnose my condition, and after a couple of months had passed with nothing changing, I spent most of a week in the pediatric division of the Columbia Presbyterian Hospital during which specialists conducted tests,

which culminated in their threading wires up my nose, trying to clear my sinuses. This had no effect, and it seemed as if nothing could be done. After getting back home, I resumed my practice of never feeling well enough to go to school. My parents must have decided that they had done what they could, and didn't object much when I resumed spending most of my time in bed.

My father was so busy at work and spent so much time commuting and working at home on weekends, and besides didn't tend to talk to me much even under normal circumstances, that he pretty much left dealing with my situation to my mother. And she pretty much threw up her hands in despair. No attempt was made to get me to pursue my education at home.

I had heard that the law was that children had to go to school. If they didn't, a truant officer would come and get them, and, then what? Drag them to school? Take them to a reformatory for juvenile delinquents? I wondered sometimes if a truant officer would stick his head in the door and grab me, but none ever came, I suppose because I was thought to be ill. I never remember feeling depressed. Anxious, yes. Confused, yes. But as long as I was safely home from school each day, I had no trouble filling up the time with activities. I should have been given books and told to read them, or should have thought to do this myself. I read some, but far less than I had time for. Instead, I invented things to do. A lot of my time was devoted to a game I devised. I acquired several decks of cards, which I divided by suits, each of which comprised an army, and I constructed a terrain on my bed by crumpling blankets in places for hills. Pillows were cliffs. I conducted military campaigns. Battles consisted of holding cards of opposing suits together, face up, and snapping them in such a manner that one was likely to flip over face down. This soldier was dead. Sometimes both opponents flipped over — both dead, soon to be carried off the field. Aces and kings were most likely to win encounters. Jacks led groups of soldiers that I had no name for but were the equivalent of platoons or battalions; kings were like generals. Queens might get into battles, but only in extreme situations. Jacks tended to be rash and impulsive. Armies were demoralized by the deaths of kings. Spades were generally good guys and good fighters and excelled in tactical planning. Diamonds were aggressors. Clubs were rather stupid but good fighters. Hearts were peace-loving, not very good fighters, and difficult to draw into battle, but could be allies, and sometimes negotiated peace settlements, which, in the next session of play, diamonds were likely to violate.

By angling a card a certain way or snapping it harder I could tilt the scales, so to speak, increasing the frequency of battles won by one army or another in a particular engagement. After many battles, cards would lose their stiffness and become

too war-weary to engage in further conflict, but I don't remember ever lacking enough battle-ready cards.

What was this all about? Apparently to relieve my anxiety, I was unconsciously emulating what was happening in the war. I didn't explicitly equate suits (armies) with particular countries, but diamonds mounted the equivalent of blitzkrieg attacks, and clubs were thuggish and opportunistic, and in hindsight resembled the Italian Fascists under Mussolini. Spades were more like idealized Americans — they were not aggressors, but fought vigorously once engaged. I didn't draw analogies consciously at the time, but I think my impressions from listening to the news stimulated my imagination. I made no effort to emulate battlefields in Europe. My arrangements of blankets and pillows were a function of trying to create interesting and varied terrains.

Another war game I invented consisted of making model warships out of clay. I'd roll some clay to make a hull-shaped object, smooth it and fashion it into the shape of a warship, and add superstructure and turrets, then insert pieces of toothpicks to represent guns ranging in size from the five-inch guns on destroyers to sixteen-inch guns on battleships. With a couple of hours' work I would construct two small fleets, which I would array facing each other broadside about ten or fifteen feet apart. After sitting and admiring my handiwork for a while, I would fashion bits of clay into pea-size balls, then sit behind one fleet and lob the clay balls, trying to hit ships in the other fleet. The great thing about this was that when a clay ball hit a ship it would usually stick. When it did, I removed it and, using a toothpick, gouged out damage commensurate with the size of the gun I had designated as firing that shot. After the first exchange (both sides being able to fire all their guns), some guns would have been hit, and they could not participate in the next exchange of fire. When a projectile from a big gun hit a small ship on the hull near the waterline, the damage could be sufficient to sink the ship. It might take two or three hits in the same area from even a big gun to sink a battleship. When I deemed that a ship had been sunk, I removed any toothpicks and rolled the former ship into a ball, ready to be recycled for construction of the next fleet. When it was clear that one side was winning the battle, I moved the remnants of the losing fleet away from the scene, though sometimes I left damaged and diminished fleets intact for hours with the thought of returning to the room and admiring them before rolling them into a big clay ball.

So it was that, while other kids my age were in school furthering their education, and kids my brother's age were dispersed across the globe fighting real wars, I was conducting imaginary wars on my bed and on the floor.

Happily, my interests were not limited to military matters.

For years I had been fascinated with astronomy. Most of what I learned about this subject was from *The Book of Knowledge,* a multi-volume encyclopedia for young readers. Our set was of an edition that was so out of date that my mother had stored it in the attic. I spent a good deal of time in the attic, perhaps because it was even more withdrawn than my bedroom from the world I was fleeing from. It never occurred to me to bring *The Book of Knowledge* down to my bedroom. The attic was where it belonged.

A big project of mine was writing an elementary book on astronomy. I planned to title it *Beyond the Clouds.* It was about twenty-five pages long. After I had finished typing and retyping it and illustrating it with crude drawings, I put it in a hard blue three-ring binder with a spine wide enough so I could write the title and my name on it in black ink. When I'd inserted the pages and had written the title and my name on the spine, I read what I'd written: *Beyond the Clods.* Well, that was true too.

That there are a great many galaxies in the universe besides our own became well-established during the 1920s. I don't know when my edition of *The Book of Knowledge* was published — my guess is in the first decade of the 20th century. At that time the universe was thought to consist of stars visible in the night sky and quite a number of dim fuzzy patches of light ascribed to various phenomena and indiscriminately called nebulae. I didn't realize that there were innumerable distant galaxies and stars and other objects beyond the clods that I had not known about when I wrote my book.

I also became interested in meteorology. As I noted earlier, it seems I displayed some of the characteristics associated with Asperger's syndrome, a term I think is loosely interchangeable with high-functioning autism. I talked my parents into getting me a subscription to U.S. Weather Bureau maps, which were mailed to me every day. In accommodating me, they acceded to what seems to me now to have been a very odd desire. Why did I care what the temperature range had been in central Montana, for example, two days earlier? What fascinated me so much about the barometric gradients of a cold front passing over Ohio? I continued to be obsessed with snow. About this time I got hold of a Kenyon Weathercaster, which was a mechanical computer of sorts. It consisted of a concentric set of glazed cardboard discs that you could turn to various positions, matching codes keyed to particular weather conditions, such as temperature, wind direction, barometric pressure, and cloud types. The idea was to turn each disc so the letter or number or a combination of them that shows through the window of that disc corresponds to the weather datum you entered. For example, if your barometer reads 29.7 inches, find the code for that, say G3, and turn a disc until G3 shows in the little window. Once you've entered the codes for each observed

condition on the appropriate discs, reading from the smallest disc to the largest, you might get a code that read F1G4B3. Look that number up in the codebook and find the weather forecast.

On Long Island, most winters, about half the time precipitation was rain and about half the time it was snow. Quite often a storm would start as rain and turn to snow or start as snow and turn to rain. I felt the Weathercaster wasn't specific enough in this regard. It would often forecast "rain or snow." I decided that by giving more weight to some data, such as whether the wind was veering, backing, or holding steady, greater precision could be obtained. In particular, I wanted an instrument designed to tell whether, if precipitation occurred, it would be snow or rain and whether it would change from one to the other. To achieve this I constructed what I called the Snowcaster, which was modeled on the Weathercaster, but more specialized.

If the temperature was 29 degrees, and the wind direction was veering from northeast to southeast, and a couple of hours earlier the temperature had been 28 degrees, you can be sure that, if it was snowing, it would turn to rain. The Snowcaster said so. Sometimes I'd go to bed when there was a foot of snow on the ground and in the morning it was mostly gone. It was sad. For me, not for most people, I imagine. At least, once I had the Snowcaster, I was prepared for puddles of water and patches of slush where the previous day snow had lain as deep and crisp and even as when, in the Christmas carol, Good King Wenceslas look'd out.

Snowcaster owners, of which unfortunately I was the only one, found it necessary to have a thermometer that showed how low the temperature had gone overnight: fascinating information if you own an orange orchard in Florida, or if you're a certain type of 12-year-old nerd on Long Island.

Some of my scientific explorations were quite ridiculous. I had read about perpetual motion and how there couldn't be such a thing — a machine that ran by itself without being powered by some external source such as a steam boiler or a waterfall. I somehow acquired a collection of tubes and valves and vials and tried to rig up a perpetual motion machine in the bathtub. If I'd bothered to do more reading instead of just tinkering, I wouldn't have wasted a lot of time.

Months later, in late spring, with only a week or two left in the school year, my mother took me to a psychiatrist in New York — a woman. I had one session talking to her and went back to school the next day, didn't miss any school from then on except for real illnesses, and haven't had a headache since. Was the psychiatrist Karen Horney? I'll never know. How I would like a recording of my conversation with her! What I do remember is that I left her office with a feeling that it was

inevitable that I would go to school the next morning. And, indeed, in the morning my mother didn't say anything like, "Well, now that you've talked to the psychiatrist, I hope you'll go to school today." She simply acted as if I'd been going to school all year long and this was just another day. I'm sure she was faithfully carrying out the psychiatrist's instructions. My trip to the psychiatrist was a huge success, but I needed a lot more therapy than could be administered in a single session.

Less than a week or two of school was left when I returned to classes. The other kids looked at me as if I were a visitor from Mars, or even Pluto. So peculiar was I, so weird, that no one asked me about it or teased me.

At Robert K. Toaz Junior High, if you were in seventh grade you took biology; in eighth grade in the fall you took meteorology (what now would be called "Earth Sciences," I suppose); and in the spring, astronomy. I remember talking to my seventh-grade biology teacher. She said, "You missed practically the whole year, so I can only give you a B." I was surprised she wasn't giving me a D or an F, because I hadn't learned anything, certainly not as much as other students who were getting a B. The next two terms of my science courses, dealing with meteorology and astronomy, were wasted, because I knew more than the teachers about both of them. If only I'd been imaginative enough to suggest it, or my parents had been, or someone in the school had been, they would have excused me from eighth grade meteorology and astronomy and assigned me to study biology with the seventh graders. *So it goes*. . . , a phrase for which I thank Kurt Vonnegut — it's so often apt.

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The summer after my year of skipping seventh grade, I must have felt restless to an almost normal degree, because, when it was suggested that I go to a sleep-away boys camp on a lake in New Hampshire, I responded positively.

Maybe my psychiatrist had recommended it. Maybe I had requested it. The previous summer I had attended a YMCA day camp in Huntington, and didn't like it. Most of the time we seemed to stand around. Of course we did more, but that's what I remember, except for a day we went to an equestrian center and I got on a horse for the first time."Giddy-up," I said to the horse when I was told to. The horse remained stationary. "Giddy-up."

"He won't move," I complained to the fellow supervising me. "Kick his sides." Nothing. "You got to kick him harder than that." I kicked harder, and the horse took off at high speed, a gallop, for all I knew.*"Whoa! whoa!"* I was barely hanging on and afraid of falling off. At last, not at my behest, the horse stopped and stood stationery, as if to say, "There. Did you get what you wanted?"

I decided that horseback riding wasn't for me. Ever since, I've watched with awe when I see people gallop along the trail or over meadows in movies. In the movie version of *The Beggar's Opera,* Laurence Olivier does so while singing a ballad — a depiction of pure joy.

Though it certainly sounds a lot less dramatic and a lot less exhilarating than galloping over meadows and fields, I was more inclined to be like Rat, in *The Wind in the Willows,* who found that "there is nothing — absolutely nothing — half so much worth doing as messing about in boats." Later I learned that sailing in certain conditions can offer the same thrill and yield sheer joy such as I imagine skilled riders experience galloping across the countryside.

I don't think the camp I went to in New Hampshire was well run. I got impetigo there and was quarantined for almost a week of my six-week stay. The war was in full swing, and the counselors were 4F — exempt from military service for some physical reason. I didn't like the other boys in my cabin much, and I don't suppose they liked me. Nor did I have a good relationship with Mr. Sarino, the counselor in charge of us.

The first full day at camp they gave me a swimming test. Lake water felt strange to me. I even imagined it was stinging my eyes, the same reaction fresh water swimmers have when they swim in salt water for the first time. I had thought I was a good swimmer, but I scored D, the bottom rank. My style was terrible. No one had taught me the crawl — I'm not sure I had even witnessed it. My first day at the camp I looked out at the lake and saw the swimming counselor far from shore, backstroking effortlessly along. I thought how I'd like to be able to swim like that. By the time six weeks of camp were up, I'd advanced to Group B. The last day of camp, there was a bonfire and the director gave out awards. The counselors met the day before and decided what boys would get them. When Mr. Sarino came back to our cabin from that meeting, I mindlessly asked him if I was going to get an award. He said, "You weren't even considered for an award." I didn't expect to be in the running for the award for good citizenship, or wigwam construction, or just about anything else, but I knew there was an award for swimming improvement and thought there was a chance I would get it. I said nothing to Mr. Sarino and walked dejectedly away. I wonder what obnoxious qualities I'd evidenced that prompted him to make such a nasty remark. Whatever they were, he shouldn't have said what he did. He lacked emotional intelligence maybe even more than I did. On balance, the camp was a flop for me, except it was absolutely worth it for swimming improvement, for which I gave myself a virtual award.

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I don't remember much of what went on at Toaz Junior High in eighth grade. I was faithfully getting up and on the bus on time every morning, but more or less sleepwalking through classes and activities. I do remember that Pop's business was benefiting from the high level of economic activity during the war, and for my thirteenth birthday he gave me a Brownie 8 millimeter movie camera, a projector, and a screen. This was an inspired gift, because it inspired me. After some experimentation, I gathered some kids in the neighborhood and made a ten-minute silent movie titled *Revenge on the Range.* I spent a lot of time making signs to show what characters in the movie were saying, like "We'll get the varmint, no matter what." We filmed the movie mostly on the nearby golf course, parts of which, from certain angles, could pass for the Great Plains, if not Monument Valley. It was late winter or very early spring; I knew that no one would be playing golf or complaining about our presence, and in working out the plot, I had my eye on a gorge that had a foot bridge crossing over it. I don't remember who did most of the work, but we spent a lot of time making a dummy for the murder scene. The villain and the victim struggled on the bridge, while I filmed them, the villain clearly prevailing, looking as if he would push the victim over the rail. Cut to the dummy hurtling down from the bridge. (All that work making the dummy for two or three seconds of movie running time!) Cut to a close-up of the seemingly lifeless body of the victim below. Later, the good guys got the villain. I didn't attempt to show him hanged.

I continued on through ninth grade at Toaz, the idea being that I might start Andover at tenth grade (what they called lower middle year), which is what my brother had done, though the people at Andover, perhaps observing that I was young for my class, and I'd missed seventh grade, and there was evidence that I'd been pretty much sleepwalking through eighth and ninth grade, decided I should begin as a freshman, so I ended up being left back half a year from where I started out in elementary school, just as the second grade teacher who was appalled by my handwriting had recommended.

During my final year in junior high, I had my first date, or rather half-date, which consisted of my friend Gus Vasiliadis and me taking a girl named Ellie to an afternoon movie. We shared the cost of her ticket, which was probably about 25 cents, and she sat between us, and I held one of her hands and Gus held her other hand. It was a very economical arrangement, the only kind Gus and I could afford.

There was a movie I saw around this time that made an impression on me, *The Picture of Dorian Gray.* Most movies then were still in black and white, but ones in color were beginning to be shown. I came into the theater five or ten minutes after *The Picture of Dorian Gray* had started. It was in

black and white. Shortly before the end, the portrait of Dorian Gray, horribly aged and warped and ugly, in full color, filled the screen. I practically jumped out of my seat. The next shot and the rest of the movie were in black and white. I stayed afterwards to see the beginning, which I'd missed. A few minutes into the film they showed the portrait of Dorian Gray in full color, depicting him as a fine-looking young man. This wasn't shocking at all, and it occurred to me that people who had come into the movie at the beginning and seen the portrait of young Dorian in color would have been inoculated, so to speak: They wouldn't have had anything close to the shock I had, after thinking the whole movie was in black and white, seeing the portrait of Dorian in full color as a warped and hideous old man.

That same year there occurred my first memorable instance of exhibiting fear of success. I was chosen to be in a school play and assigned an important role. I don't remember anything else about it except that one of the other kids in the play was a girl named Carmella Piliciari, and at some point in rehearsing this drama the teacher directing it told me to kiss her. (This would have been a kiss on the cheek.). I blurted out — giving it not an instant's thought, "I don't want to kiss her." I'm not completely sure what happened next, but, best as I remember, I was reassigned to a less important role. In later years, before I learned about fear of success, when I reflected on this incident, my behavior seemed totally baffling to me, particularly because Carmella was by no means unattractive. In fact, she was probably the prettiest girl in my class; she certainly looked beautiful a couple of days later when I was walking out a door that she was about to walk in, and there she was, her dark eyes flashing, and then we were close up, and *WHAMMO* — she slapped me hard in the face. Then she was gone, and I felt like the jerk I was, wiser for the experience, but, unknown to me, a long way short of being wise enough.

II

Huntington Township has dozens of miles of shoreline, including wide sandy beaches and a beautiful bay and harbors formed by glaciers in the ice ages. In my time it was a wonderful place to grow up, far better, in my opinion, than nowadays, when it has about fifteen times as many residents, and probably twenty times as many power boats, each with probably about ten times as much horsepower, crowded into the same terrain, harbors, and bay.

Our town had two famous native sons. One was Nathan Hale, who every kid knew said something like, "My only regret is that I have but one life to lose for my country." A Revolutionary War cannon, a stack of cannon balls, and a plaque with those words or something like them inscribed on it stood outside the public library. Hale was hanged by the British for spying on them.

The other, far more famous, native of our town was Walt Whitman, who was born in what was we called south Huntington, which I think was an area rather than a distinct village. Whitman's birthplace was, and I imagine still is, preserved as a museum. Why didn't we have a school field trip there, and why didn't my parents ever take me there? It may have been because there were aspects of Whitman's poetry and life that were taboo in our insular society, and so, though I think it's undisputed that he is America's greatest poet, besides having done noble work tending to wounded soldiers during the Civil War, I never learned much more about him other than that he founded the local newspaper, *The Long Islander,* and wrote these lines I once could recite from memory:

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won,
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;
But O heart! heart! heart!
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

Summers, I spent most of my free time on the waterfront or on the water. In addition to the cement drainage pipe I described earlier, which was of great importance to kids up until the age

of eight or nine, the Bay Hills Beach Association (it wasn't called a "club") maintained two floats: the "near float," connected to the beach by two strings of floating wooden bars, which was habituated by little kids, and the "far float," about twenty-five yards farther out. A lifeguard sat in his chair, whistle at the ready. I never witnessed a need to rescue any swimmers — waves on the bay beach were never more than a few inches high except during northeast storms, when the place was usually deserted.

The tide variation was five or six feet. The beach was broad, sandy — with no sharp rocks underfoot — and slanted nicely, so that even at low tide you could wade out to swimming depth taking half a dozen steps or so. In summertime (except during the war, when gas rationing limited the seven- or eight-mile round trip to no more than once or twice a week) members of our family went to Bay Hills almost every day.

On Sundays, and on Saturdays after my father had given up golf, he would join us on trips there. He liked to sit in his beach chair with binoculars and survey the scene, which was usually quite active, with pleasure boats passing the bell buoy off shore and occasionally a tug that was towing barges, sometimes empty, sometimes filled with sand. These perky red boats with stepped-back superstructure and huge rope bumpers were a pleasure to watch go by.

My parents loved the beach, but weren't swimmers. Pop sometimes went down to the water and paddled a few strokes. He wore canvas water boots to protect his feet, and thereby missed the wonderful feeling of walking barefoot on the sand. My mother and her sister or one of her friends would go down to the water and wade in. I'd watch to see if they were going to swim. They would wade out up to their knees and stand and talk at considerable length. After a while, they would wade out until they were up to their hips, whereupon they would stand and talk at considerable more length; then they'd break off their conversation and wade out even deeper before resuming their conversation. Sometimes they would paddle a few strokes before returning to their beach chairs.

My parents had a couple of friends I especially liked, Helen and George Kuzmier. The Kuzmiers had no children. They often came to the beach when we were there and lined their beach chairs up with those of my parents. Helen Kuzmier had what Mom called "a sunny disposition." There was nothing put on about it. She was a naturally cheery person. Is there a gene for that? Mom was also friends with a woman named Edith White, whom she sometimes invited. Occasionally, Edith's husband, Frank, came along. Like the Kuzmiers, the Whites had no children. Frank White was a surveyor. Once, in the presence of my father, telling how he had spent some time on a government job in Cuba, he remarked, "They used me

swell down there." After that, within the confines of our family, Pop referred to Frank as "Used Me Swell" and to this couple as the "Used Me Swells." My mother ignored this slight, but I'm sure she didn't like it.

A couple of times during the summer our family went to the ocean at Jones Beach State Park. In those days it was wide and with clean sand and a clean ocean despite the hordes of people that went there. Competition to be a lifeguard at Jones Beach was rigorous. You had to demonstrate your ability in early June when the water temperature was still in the low sixties. Ocean swimming off Long Island beaches can be challenging. By the time I reached elderly status, rather than dive into the first wave coming, I'd learned to watch for a while before wading in. It's wise to spend time observing how big the "sets" are — the series of waves larger than average that come along every few minutes. How steeply are they breaking? Are there likely to be "rip tides" (not really tides, but outgoing currents formed when water that has been trapped by sand bars rushes out, sometimes carrying hapless swimmers away from the beach). I've been apprehensive more than once while swimming in the ocean, even when I was young. One time this happened, there was rough, churning surf, red-flag conditions. I was driven down by a breaking wave and tried to reach the surface, but for a long time I couldn't — the water was so aerated. I kept kicking and finally got breaths.

During college years, my friend Don Sutherland and I occasionally took a couple of young women (in that era referred to as girls) to Jones Beach. Sometimes I'd drive, and sometimes Don would drive. You had to go through a toll before getting access to the beach and give the toll-taker a quarter or two. What do I remember about these trips? Only this: When I drove, I'd pull up so the rear window was opposite the toll taker, and Don had to pay. When Don drove, he'd return the favor.

Though my parents were remote from me emotionally, within their means, and sometimes beyond their means, they didn't deprive me of material things. For a few years, my father owned a little boat with an outboard motor. When I was fifteen and the war had ended, he sold it and bought a Lightning class sailboat, which was really for me. My parents didn't know how to sail, but Frank White did, and offered to teach me. We took him up on it, and he was a good teacher. Pop appreciated that, and didn't refer to the Whites as the "Used Me Swells" again.

I'd had a little previous sailing experience thanks to my uncle Arnie (the early Ford dealer who knew Henry Ford and allegedly could rip a deck of cards in half). Arnie took me out on his Comet, a trim sixteen-foot sloop. We sailed well out into Huntington Bay in a very light breeze, which, after a while, died, leaving us temporarily becalmed. We drifted a bit, then

Arnie said, “I can make the wind come up.” He whistled, and within a few seconds a puff of wind filled the sail, and the boat started moving at a good clip. I knew there was a trick; I can’t remember whether Arnie told me or I figured it out — the puff of wind approaching us had made dimpled spots on the glassy water to windward — catspaws, sailors call them. From then on I knew that, when you’re sailing, you want to observe the condition of the water.

Some years later, I was a guest on a good-sized sailboat. My host, Howie, owned the boat, but wasn’t an experienced sailor. He set a course to pass to the right of a buoy, intending, as sailors would say, “to leave it to port.” I’d noticed that the current was slightly tilting the buoy, an indication that the outgoing tide was running cross-wise to it. I knew Howie wouldn’t “make the buoy” — pass it on the side he intended — if he kept on his present course. He would find that he’d have to tack a couple of times if he wanted to leave the buoy to port, which would be a good idea because there was a shoal on the other side of it on which Howie’s keel boat would likely go aground. “Howie, better sharpen up,” I said. “Bit of tide running here.” Saying this, I felt like an old salt Maine lobsterman or something. Howie sharpened up (sailed closer to the direction the wind was coming from) and made the buoy without tacking. Trivial as this experience was, it was satisfying. One of the pleasures of sailing is getting tuned to such things. I read a book on Polynesian sailors. They could navigate over vast stretches of ocean with no instruments because they were exquisitely skilled observers of sky and sea. Looking at the seemingly chaotic behavior of waves, they could discern multiple components of their motions, distinguishing long, rolling waves generated by storms thousands of miles away from shorter ones stirred up by local winds; they could tell to what degree waves were affected by prevailing ocean currents and detect local variations caused by islands, even ones beyond the horizon. They knew their approximate latitude by how high certain stars rose in the sky. They could detect islands over the horizon by noticing the clouds that formed above them, and sometimes, even when there were no clouds, by a variation in the color of the sky over a tiny segment of horizon, or by birds flying between their nests and their fishing grounds.

My memories of times at the beach and sailing were the brightest of these years, partly because I was generally happier on the water than anywhere else and partly because they were so brilliantly lit by the sun shining on the water and on broad sand beaches.

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After I learned how to sail, I joined the local Lightning

association, and for a few summers I raced my boat occasionally against seven or eight others. The fleet was dominated by teenagers. Also racing in our bay every weekend were Stars, narrow-beamed keel sloops, which were once an Olympic class. You can tell something about people from the kind of boat they own and from their attitude about racing. One Star boat owner, Bob Crump, lived up the street from me. He was a couple of years older than me, a nice guy, but kind of a loner. He named his boat, *Paper Doll.* This came from a song with that title, which was popular at the time. It went, "I'm going to buy a paper doll that I can call my own / a doll that other fellows cannot steal." Kind of pathetic, I thought, but I had to stuff my critical reaction back into my subconscious mind. Star boats were both more elegant and more challenging to sail than Lightnings. They could point higher (sail closer to the direction the wind was coming from), and when you were going to windward in a fresh breeze, you almost had to lie on the windward side of the boat because the deck got practically vertical to the water. The Lightning, by contrast, was a "family boat." A good boat, but sedate in comparison to the Star. Later, when I was in college, I somehow scraped up enough money to buy at a slightly battered but elegant racing boat, a twenty-foot overall length, fin keel, molded wood-hulled Flying Fifteen, which could get on top of a wave and "plane" with little more than the keel having to be dragged through the water. It was designed by the celebrated British naval architect Uffa Fox, and it was a joy to sail, and so beautiful I would almost buy one to put on the lawn to look at.

The Flying Fifteen has graceful wave-absorbing overhangs, fore and aft. You sit on the deck with your feet resting on the curved floor of the narrow cockpit. A crankless winch mounted amidships makes sail trimming easy. The rounded, streamlined hull takes the waves and chop without complaint, and because the boat has a fin keel instead of a centerboard, it tracks cleanly through lumpy waves. I once took mine out in a blow on Long Island Sound and headed into heavy waves from the northeast. The experience was like what I imagine it might be to ride a bucking bronco, an uncannily sure-footed one. I didn't own it long. I had to sell it to raise cash.

In high school and college years I had a chance to sail on a great variety of boats and rigs. My friend Stu Ingersoll, whose family's house was on Huntington Harbor, reveled in unusual boats. For a year or so, when we were about nineteen, he owned a Chesapeake Bay Skipjack, designed for oyster dredging. This boat, which I'm guessing was about twenty-six feet long, had an enormously wide beam, an expansive deck, low freeboard, a sharply raked mast, extremely long boom, and a huge gaff-rigged sail. It was, once removed from its natural habitat on Chesapeake Bay, what we called a character boat, one that

people would stare at as long as it was in view. My memory of sailing on it serves as an example of the joyous abandon of youthful adventurousness: Stu and I and a couple of others set sail late in the day with no provisions but beer and sandwiches and, as best as I can remember, no destination in mind other than to cross Long Island Sound. By the time we were mid-Sound, darkness had set in. Soon afterward, a thunderstorm burst forth, with squalls, thunder, lightning, rough waves — the works. We were drenched and cold. Lightning flashed on all sides of us. Isn't there a danger of being struck? The mast sticks up like a lone tree in a meadow, steel wires (called stays) to support it running from near the top of the mast to the sides of the boat. Should we have been scared? I wasn't. This intimacy with nature in its violent mode elicited in me a fatalistic feeling. End of memory. Eventually we must have made it home.

When you're young, you can have almost transcendental experiences without realizing it. Your sense of appreciation of beauty and nobility and elegance in art, music, nature, and human and even animal behavior, and what you can do with your body, increase as you age, in most instances, I imagine, at about the same rate as opportunities to have sublime experiences decline.

One day when I was probably 17, I was sailing in my Lightning alone in Huntington Bay, when dolphins appeared and swam along on either side of the boat, amusing themselves a few minutes escorting me before vanishing from sight. In the subsequent sixty years I spent a lot of time sailing and swimming in Long Island waters but never saw dolphins again. Looking back on that moment, I feel no less reverence than if I had seen angels stepping out of the clouds.

My favorite boat of all time was also the smallest sailboat imaginable. This was the Sailfish, a popular boat — really no more than a hollow fiberglass board — that came on the scene after World War II and became extinct only a few years later when it was superseded by the larger, more comfortable, Sunfish.

The Sailfish was like a windsurfer, except designed for sitting or lying on a flat board, rather than standing. I'd lie on it, prone, head forward, steer the tiller with my feet, hold the sheet with one hand, and skim along on the water. One warm day in a light breeze I got so relaxed that I fell asleep and only woke up when the boat tipped over and I found myself submerged. It's not a problem when such a thing happens on a Sailfish, or on a Sunfish either — you put weight on the centerboard, the boat rights, you flop onto it, and you're instantly sailing again.

The Sailfish could not take on water, swamp, or sink. It glided along in a light breeze as if propelled by a magical force, silent except for the water rippling by the hull. Its special appeal was the sense of intimacy you had with the water. Sailing it, I

was like a flying fish, skimming across the waves.

I never owned a Sailfish, but I borrowed one occasionally that belonged to my friends the Latham brothers, Robert, Kenneth, and Peter. The three of them also had custody of — I think their father owned it — a VW "bug," one of the first that came on the market after World War II — list price $1,500. None of the Latham boys wanted to buy gas for their brothers, so whenever one wanted to use the VW and needed gas, he would only buy 25¢ worth, then about a gallon. I don't think the tank was ever more than a quarter full.

The Latham boys' father was very successful at business and quite rich. Once when I was playing poker with one or more of the brothers, as he was raking in the chips after a successful bluff, he said, "As Dad says, 'Play 'em as if you got 'em.'" That stuck in my mind, and came to the surface thinking about Trump when he blazed forth on the political scene: He's a play-em-as-if-you-got-'em type of guy.

The Lathams's house was in an upscale area near the water called Wincoma. A few elegant houses away from them lived a girl I knew named Anne Findlay, whose grandfather was the biggest real estate operator in lower Manhattan. Her father was no slouch in business either; yet these people were down-to-earth, unpretentious folk, antipodes of Trump. I was once invited to an outdoor cookout at the Findlays. Mr. Findlay was the chef. At some point I got chatting with him, and, I don't remember what was on the menu, but I said to him that what he had served up was delicious. He looked at me, smiling, wiping his hands on his apron, and said, "There are two things I'm good at — cooking and making money."

In those years we had beach parties. We'd drink beer and sing dumb songs, though we knew a few delightful ballads, including, "Oh they built the great ship *Titanic* to sail the ocean blue / And the people said the water would never come through," "I'm my own grandpa," and "Me father was the keeper of the Eddystone Light / And he slept with a mermaid one fine night." I could accompany these tunes quite well on my four-string banjo — only three or four chords were involved.

In Huntington Bay, sailboats that were left on their moorings over the summer required anti-fouling paint to reduce the buildup of slime, seaweed, and barnacles. This protective coating was known to slightly increase drag, slowing a sailboat by maybe a twentieth of a knot (roughly a twentieth of a mile an hour), nothing that would perturb anyone sailing for the pleasure of it, but enough so that, in competition, it could make the difference between wining and losing a race.

Dedicated racers took the trouble to keep their boats at boatyards and haul them in and out of the water before and after racing. They could then apply low-friction hard paint to their boats's hulls without worrying about slime build-up. But what a

time-consuming nuisance, and an expensive one as well, because you had to pay added fees to the boatyard. "Why bother?" was the attitude of most Lightning owners in our little fleet. Only a couple of guys went to this extreme, and they were rewarded by winning most races. I usually finished in the middle of the pack, which suited me fine — I lacked competitive spirit. And I knew that I could always finish ahead of Mary Anderson, who nearly always came in last. Mary enjoyed getting out on the water and lounging back with a can of soda and sailing in company, more or less, with others. Sometimes, when I could tell I was out of the running, I'd luff my sail a bit to slow down so I could sail alongside Mary's boat and chat with her and whoever was crewing for her.

We had a Lightning Class Owners Association and held a few meetings each summer at the house of one or another of the members. When I was sixteen — an age when I had gotten a driver's license, but it wasn't valid at night — my father drove me to the house where the annual meeting was held. The main event was the election of the president of the Association for the coming year. Each member voted by writing the name of his or her choice on an index card and dropping it in a container someone passed around. It was intended to be a secret process.

I wanted to be elected president, and I had a sense that, most likely, either I, or another candidate, Larry Foley, would be elected. As I readied myself to write the name of my choice on my card, the thought crossed my mind that it wouldn't be polite to vote for myself. This was a totally spurious motivation — no one had ever apprised me of such a rule of etiquette. Nonetheless, without further thought, I wrote "Larry" on my card and dropped it in the container. A few minutes later, the winner was announced — Larry Foley. I felt a little depressed, thinking how I might have won if I had written my name on my card, or at least tied if I'd written the name of someone other than my most formidable opponent, in which case I would still be doing "the polite thing" of not voting for myself. I didn't tell my father how I'd voted or my misgivings about it.

I didn't realize it at the time, but this incident had significance that went beyond the question of who would hold the office of presidency of the Huntington Bay Lightning Owners Association for the year 1948. Looking back decades later, I could see that it was part of a pattern of irrationally backing away from an opportunity because of a feeling of unworthiness. Voting for my opponent in the Lightning Owners Election episode and declining to kiss Carmella Piliciari in the school play episode were the first two of many instances of the defect in my character, aptly called fear of success, that I remember.

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Despite his sterling qualities as a hard-working man devoted to his family, not lacking in grit, and having a gentle nature, Pop harbored a bitterness that he kept to himself, though occasionally it emerged in the form of a barbed remark. Some of my memories of him are of negative incidents, some of neutral ones, none of exultant ones. One imprinted memory was of an event that occurred when I was about eight years old. One summer Saturday morning, Pop took me for a drive. The idea was to explore the upscale Lloyd Harbor area a mile or two north of our middle class neighborhood.

Perhaps fifteen minutes into this expedition, Pop turned up what he thought was a road, but happened to be a long, paved, private driveway. We drove up to elaborately landscaped grounds and a sumptuous garage and guest cottage. A large house lay beyond. Pop, realizing his mistake, was maneuvering to turn around, when the owner appeared and started berating Pop for having driven on his private property. Pop, of course, said, "Sorry, I thought it was a road," and continued to try to turn around, but the man kept with him, yelling at him — "You could have told it wasn't a road! You have no right to be here! Now get out!" This was an unnecessary exhortation, since, as was obvious, Pop was already doing his best to turn around. We exited, and Pop drove directly home without another word, the expedition having ended, to my mind, in ignominy. It was as if Pop had been a child who had misbehaved and been sent to his room.

This incident was characteristic of Pop's inclination to clam up. He had a wonderful opportunity to talk to me about the obnoxious man who yelled at him; he could have pointed out how any decent person would have perceived that this was not an intentional trespass and, upon hearing Pop's apology, would have said, "It's okay. No problem.'' I've often wondered why my father was so repressed. Did he feel unworthy too?

Another occasion with Pop when I felt humiliated occurred when he took me fishing on his little outboard motor boat. We came up to a dock and were getting our gear organized preparatory to getting out of the boat, when another boat came up at high speed and executed a 180-degree turn, kicking up a wave that violently rocked our boat. Pop muttered something like, "That mean fellow." There was nothing much else he could do — the problem was his tone, which communicated to me a feeling of helplessness and of being a victim. Again we drove home in silence.

Pop was a gentle man, but there was an acidic spirit inside him. When I was growing up there was much talk of Communists. Pop was strongly anti-Communist. For him, Communists, even "pinkos," or "fellow travelers," were the lowest form of life. After Japan surrendered, Pop said we should bomb the Soviet Union while we had the A-bomb and before

they could get it. I don't think he was serious, but I thought it alarming to put forth such a suggestion even in jest. Pop had that feeling of being oppressed or abused that sets up an urge for vicarious aggressiveness, a phenomenon that in his case made him champion General Douglas McArthur for the presidency in 1948. I suspect that the same psychological mechanism generates much of the enthusiasm for Donald Trump. Pop might have approved of Trump in some respects, for example, even in barring Muslims and building walls on the Mexican border. But he wouldn't have liked Trump's boastfulness, his dishonesty, his dissimulations, his crudeness, his vulgarities, and his bullying, narcissistic, mean-spirited nature. Pop was what my mother called "refined." I never heard him curse or raise his voice.

Pop's non-communicativeness inhibited me from talking to him. When I did try to engage him, he tended to respond in a way that cut off further conversation. Once, probably when I was in sixth grade, I said to him, "I'm interested in statistics." He said, "Maybe when you grow up you'll be a statistician." There was nothing wrong with that remark, and if I'd had any grit, I would have probably asked, "Do you know any statisticians?" "What do they do?" "What sort of training do they need?" If I'd asked any of these of these questions, Pop would have done his best to answer them. But I didn't, and he seemed to have no interest in pursuing the conversation. I remember feeling let down.

I never learned what it was about Pop's upbringing that produced such a repressed personality. My grandfather Edward H Packard's book, *New England Essays,* is revealing in what it's missing. It has no introduction, no note "about the author," and no statement of when the individual pieces were written or where they first appeared. Edward H. was voluble enough to set down his views in writing, but he too seems to have been contained.

Some years ago, I received a communication from someone I'd never heard of before, Andrew Packard, the grandson of Frederick Packard, my grandfather's brother and partner in the "Packard Bros. Scenery of All Kinds for Halls, Private Theatricals and Theatres." (circa 1904). Andy knew little about his grandfather and nothing about my grandfather other than of his existence. More recently, I've been in correspondence with my cousin Ronda, who, as I mentioned, was the daughter of my father's brother Theodore. Ronda told me that she regretted that her father never talked to her about his family. Something there was about Packard men that turned them inward, that bottled them up.

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My mother was an estimable person in many ways. Many people were fond of her. She was a "gray lady" helper (wore a

gray hat to identify her role) at Huntington Hospital during World War II, and, afterwards, with a couple of friends, volunteered at a veteran's psychiatric hospital about fifteen miles from us, where she played cards and talked with men who, in our era, might be said to have debilitating post-traumatic stress disorder.

Mom often had occasion to enjoin me and my brother: Before setting out for the beach, "Be sure to bring a sweater"; when adversity beset the family, "We'll just rock along"; and, upon hearing us complain, "Count your blessings." They were precepts that had wider application than to the occasion that prompted them and doubtless contributed to such measure of good sense as I possessed. She was often effusively polite to people, and talkative. I remember being made to go to church services, which I thought of as enforced boredom. After services ended, instead of hurrying out of the church, as I would have liked, it seemed to me that we stopped alongside almost every pew between ours and the entrance to the church while Mom exchanged pleasantries with anyone of the same mind, which included nearly all the parishioners. I think that, for many of them, such conversations were their greatest pleasure in attending church.

I was heavily indoctrinated and required to attend Sunday School, and in church to recite the Apostles' Creed and at times the Nicene Creed and the General Confession, which included a line, "We are unworthy to gather the crumbs under Thy table." *Huh?* I thought. I can see why I'm unworthy of dining with You, like the disciples do, but am I unworthy even of gathering crumbs under Thy table? I didn't dare raise this question to my mother. She would have thought it was blasphemy, and I suppose it would have been. Love and humility and generosity seemed like good things, and the implied message of it all was that being a Christian is the best thing to be. It seemed too bad that unworthiness came with it.

Mom's rule was that I had to go to church about twice a month. On my off Sundays, she would usually go to the 8:00 a.m. communion service alone. Pop was exempt from attendance, except on Easter. I consoled myself about having to go to church with the thought that Catholic kids had to go *every* Sunday. St. Patrick's Catholic Church was practically next to ours, and, one Easter, I learned that one of the secrets of their success is that when we were getting out of our seemingly endless 11:00 a.m. service, they were getting out of their 12:00 mass.

My mother had a Scotish Terrier. One day, when I was about ten or eleven, I watched as Mom put a bowl of dog food out for it. I looked away for a brief interval, then looked back and exclaimed, "God, he's finished!" Mom blew up at me with unprecedented fury. "Don't you *ever* take the name of the Lord

in vain!" "Okay, okay," and I slunk off, as she followed up with further reproof. This incident didn't inspire me to become more devout; rather it produced lingering resentment. The wrath of God is enough without having the wrath of Mom on top of it.

Mom's devoutness had its limitations. One evening at dinner, she remarked that the beautiful twenty-year-old daughter of a woman she knew had decided to become a Catholic nun. "It's so tragic," Mom said. "She had her whole life ahead of her, and she's giving it up." I thought, well, if you really believe that serving God in this way is the most meaningful path you can take, and that you will go to heaven when you die if you serve God and live a pure life, and that life in heaven lasts forever, then what she is giving up is a trifle in comparison. As so often happened, I kept silent, though I had thoughts that could have been the basis of a meaningful conversation.

Though Pop didn't engage in discussions, he made revealing remarks from time to time. One that struck me I only heard about in later years when I was visiting my brother, Dick, in Florida. We were talking about sailing, and Dick said, about our parents, "They came close to getting me a sailboat when I was about fifteen, but Pop said that Tony vetoed it." Tony, the reader may recall, was my mother's oldest living sister. She was not as influential with Mom as her other two sisters, Libby and Toots, were, but she must have persuaded Mom that getting Dick a sailboat was not a good idea. The year would have been 1938. Pop's business was doing better than in the depths of the recession, but I can imagine there was a sensible case to be made against buying a sailboat for Dick, especially since, during this period, he was spending most of his summers visiting Toots and Jul at their place in Michigan. A normal father would have told Dick that he and Mom had decided it would be too expensive, particularly since Dick was away for much of the summer. Saying "Tony vetoed it," made it sound as if he was so ineffectual that his sister-in-law made decisions that would normally be in his and Mom's province. At least on some occasions, Mom's thinking seems to have not just been affected by the opinions of her sisters, but controlled by them. Pop's remark, "Tony vetoed it," reflected badly on Mom. It didn't say much for Pop, either. On the other hand, it was witty.

Mom had a complex persona. She was unfailingly polite to people and would ask how they were feeling and how their families were, and would express sympathy on hearing of any adversity. And, as I mentioned, she volunteered in hospitals. I'm sure she considered herself a good Christian woman. Nonetheless, she was blind to the non-Christian character of her prejudices toward Jews and people of color, and she was class-conscious; she wasn't a social climber, but wanted to be associated in the minds of others with people of high social standing. Once, when I was eighteen or nineteen, Mom said that

she had heard an amusing remark at a meeting of the Nathan Hale Garden Club. Referring to people who lived in a part of Huntington called Bay Crest, a garden club-woman had said, "They are common stock preferred." I translated this to mean that the speaker did not think there was a great difference between Bay Crest residents and comōnes. As it happened, I thought that Bay Crest was a more upscale part of town than where we lived, so perhaps the woman at the garden club thought that we weren't even common stock preferred, just common stock. I also felt a little depressed that Mom had quoted this woman approvingly and that she thought I would be receptive to hearing it. As was my custom, I didn't see this as an opportunity to have an interesting discussion. I only said that there was preferred stock and there was common stock, but there was no such thing as common stock preferred.

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I learned from Pat, my sister-in-law / second cousin, that my mother had been teased in high school. Apparently, some of her classmates thought she was Irish, which evidently for them was what in later years being a comōnee was for her. Mom never told me that she'd been in any way discriminated against, but she may have been nettled by it, because she often emphasized that, even though her father had been born in Ireland, people should know that he was from *Northern* Ireland, and that the family was *Scotch Irish.* Another thing I never learned until after Mom died was that her father had gone to Trinity University, in Dublin, the most Irish city in the world. She could have explained that, despite its location, Trinity University is a protestant institution, but she never talked about the subject, perhaps afraid that the taint of being in Dublin would cling to my grandfather, and thus to her, no matter what anyone could say. These revelations were in the earlier edition of this memoir. Subsequently, from a relative I'd met only recently, I learned the even darker secret that my mother's father was born in Dublin!

Mom was firmly a member of her middle-class socio-economic cultural milieu, if there is such a thing. I remember her saying that she didn't think much of "intellectuals," even though two of her sisters would have been so classified, and she let it be known, more often than I think was necessary, that she was a graduate of Smith.

Maybe Mom had some reason to think I would be receptive to hearing what this garden-club lady had said. I was in some respects in awe of the upper regions of society myself. We were reasonably respectable exemplars of bourgeois culture during these post-war years, but financially we were scraping along. Pop was making barely enough to support the family, and, as Mom once said to me, speaking of financial assets, "We have nothing behind us." No safety net. Yet, during those years,

through happenstance, I got a first-hand glimpse at the lives of people that F. Scott Fitzgerald noted "are different from you and me." This occurred because of the phenomenon of debutante parties. In June, 1949, after graduation from Andover, I was invited to a number of them, scattered about on the north shore of Long Island, a strip about twenty-five miles long, which in some quarters was referred to as the Gold Coast. Some of the girls I knew were from very rich families and lived in enormous houses, and they had society orchestras, most famously Lester Lannin's, play at their "coming out" parties. Seemingly unlimited cheap champagne was served, and music played till about one a.m. whereupon the band struck up with "Good night, ladies, good night ladies," and that meant it was the last dance, and they started blinking lights, and eventually I got home to bed unless I was staying over someplace. These affairs might be held at a fancy club or at the sumptuous home of one of the debutantes. I remember going to one of a girl named Ann Phipps. Her family had what may have been the biggest estate in Nassau County. I remember the tremendously long, straight driveway bordered on either side by magnificent trees, the mansion with a portico supported by great white pillars, the butler (or footman, perhaps, as such individuals were called in European novels), checking invitations. How I got admitted, I don't know. I'm not sure I ever met Miss Phipps, even at her own party. Some of these girls were snooty, but most seemed unaffected by their wealth, including one I knew well, whose house must have had twenty rooms or so.

At that age one has unlimited stamina. I remember once, after "Good night, ladies," going sailing by the light of the full moon and not getting home until about four or five a.m. The romance of this escapade wore off even as it began, because the boat was soaking wet with dew.

I've always tended to be an early riser, and I found it unsettling to get home after it was getting light in the morning. I was sometimes one of a bunch of kids in a car with some slightly tipsy guy driving, and this was before the days of seat belts, air bags, and anti-lock brakes.

Life was on the frothy side that summer, but friendships were real, and some of these girls were sweet as could be. I had a girlfriend named Laura whose family had a box at Yankee Stadium and I attended a game with them. There was not the remotest thought that such a relationship would be enduring. I had ahead of me four years of college, then three years of Navy service that there was no way I could get out of, and then three years of law school, every inch of the way on a tight budget. As for many of us in those days, a romantic involvement could never be more than "just one of those things . . ."

Which reminds me that there are some books I like to re-read every twenty years or so, and it's time to revisit *The Great*

Gatsby, the title of which reminds me of a song we sang at beach parties and other slightly sloshed gatherings to the tune of *Take Me Out to the Ballgame:* "Let's have parties and banquets / parties, banquets and balls . . ."

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By the time I reached college age, I sensed that my mother was missing some kind of instinct such that, if you possess it, you'll be sensitive to how you will sound to your interlocutors, what reaction they will have to what you say, or don't say, and how you act, and a sense of what the context is and what you are trying to accomplish when you say something. I witnessed a memorable example of this limitation of hers when a college friend happened to stop by our house. His name was Mike Whitney. My mother greeted him warmly. "Where did you go to school before Princeton, Mike?" she asked. "Saint Paul's School — in New Hampshire," said Mike. "Oh, really!" Mom exclaimed, brightening. "My nephew Jack Ordeman is at Williams, and his roommate went to Saint Paul's School. They are in Saint Anthony's fraternity, and at the fraternity house they have a big Saint Bernard dog named Hannibal. They all enjoy having Hannibal there — he's such a big friendly dog."

I think the reason this stuck in my mind is that, as my mother was talking, digressing on her digression, I was watching the expression on Mike's face, which segued from courteous attentiveness, to puzzlement, to alarm. It wasn't until decades later that it occurred to me that what I thought of as Mom's eccentricity may have been a precursor to the dementia that stole the last few years of her life. It took me an even longer time to realize that I possessed a somewhat similar, even more destructive, deficiency, which I describe in my essay "Nine Things I Learned in Ninety Years."

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Not only my mother, but everyone in our family, including me, was to some degree socially awkward. I had a girl friend for a while named Suzie Palmer. Suzie was unusually smart, vibrant, and attractive, but not notably possessing the milk of human kindness. (In that era, among some of my contemporary male friends, there might have been substituted for that characterization a two-word appellation, the first word of which is "total."). In any case, my brother had met Suzie briefly at some point when she had visited our house. Some considerable time afterward — I think after I had started college and he was in law school, or just afterward — he inquired about her, and when I said that I hadn't seen her in a long while, he said he'd like to call her and asked me for her phone number. He had one date with her and said nothing about it. Later, I saw Suzie and she said, "Your brother is weird. In fact your whole family is

weird. There's something wrong with all of you." "No kidding," I said, unable to think of anything else.

I don't remember having any further conversations with Suzie. She had taken her junior year in college in France and soon after the above described incident moved there and, as far as I know, became a permanent expatriate. Of course, she was outrageously rude and unkind making such a remark, but, unsurprisingly, it stuck with me, and I've always felt there was some truth in it.

Continuing about Mom, she without doubt tried to be a good mother to me. An example of her devotion I remember occurred when I was seventeen or eighteen. I threw a party at my house after summer vacation started and asked just about everyone I knew. It was good weather, and most of the activity was outdoors. Mom worked tremendously hard to set out enough food and beverages for everyone and keep the place from becoming a garbage dump. The party was scheduled to last from about five to nine, and there was still light in the sky as it was winding down and people were leaving. I couldn't find Mom around and went upstairs, and she was lying face down in bed crying. "What's wrong, Mom?" "I'm so exhausted," she murmured. "Sorry." I belatedly realized how thoughtless I'd been in laying so much work and responsibility for the party on her, and how unthinking she had been in taking it on and putting up with me. It wasn't for lack of trying that my mother let me down. It was because of her parochialism, her inability to be a mentor as well as mother, and a trait that for a long time I shared with her, a lack of sense of how what one says and do will affect others.

At one point my mother said to me, "I don't know what's going to become of you. You're not particularly good looking." It was a weird thing to say. What was the purpose of it? I can see, looking back, that there were times when she might justifiably have wondered what would become of me, but what did my looks have to do with it? I don't know, but I have a feeling her remark reinforced my subconscious feeling of unworthiness. Success for a person like me would be inappropriate; indeed, something to fear.

I didn't always give in to a feeling of unworthiness. In my last year of Robert K. Toaz Junior High School it was time to think about high school. I assumed that, like my brother and my cousins Skip and Jack Ordeman, I would be going to Andover, and I was surprised when Mom said, "Do you think you'd rather go to Friends Academy instead of Andover?" Friends Academy was a good day school, though at considerable distance and would require a long daily bus commute. To my mind, it offered an inferior educational experience to Andover. Did Mom think that, unlike my brother and my cousins, I was unworthy of going to Andover? More likely she felt that at

Andover I would be more at risk of having a mental breakdown such as I'd experienced in seventh grade. I'd heard her say more than once, "At Andover, it's sink or swim." I could understand her thinking that I had sunk in seventh grade, and Andover was a more challenging environment than Toaz Junior High.

I felt offended. "I want to go to Andover," I said.

Mom didn't know it, and it didn't occur to me at the time, at least not consciously, but I think I'd have been more likely to sink if I'd gone to Friends Academy. I might have gotten bored and depressed and refused to go to school each day. At Andover when I woke up in the morning, I'd already be at school.

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My parents didn't in any sense have philosophical minds. They never asked "What do you think of . . .?" What would you think if. . . ?" For them, life was a script to be followed. You should work hard and get good marks in school and be courteous to everyone, and then you can get a job with a big company and marry a lovely, refined girl and have children and continue working hard at the big company (like Mead Paper Company, where (Uncle) Lee worked, or Standard Oil of New Jersey, where (Uncle) Jinx worked, and then you can be sure of a good pension so you can live comfortably and respectably in retirement until you die and have a proper funeral and burial service. That was Mom's prescription. Pop's was somewhat different. Yes, a good company might be all right, but if a depression comes — and we're likely to have another great depression — you can't be sure, or, rather, you *can* be sure — it's just a matter of time — the best security is being a lawyer — there always seems to be work for them. Better play it safe.

Later, I learned that there is no way to play it safe. In what was perhaps the last interview he gave, Joseph Campbell talked about how many people put their ladder up against a wall and climb it step by step, and they almost reach the top only to find that they put their ladder up against the wrong wall. Reading this, I remembered that, while still in the Navy, I told my mother that I'd been thinking I might want to become a doctor rather than a lawyer. She said wearily, "I don't think that would be a good idea. It takes so long to get through medical school, and then you have to be an intern, and then residency. It's such a long haul." She was thinking of how long it would take to climb a ladder, not about which wall you should put it up against. After hearing this, in a typical display of lack of true grit, I said, "Yeah, I guess so."

I spent no time on further examination of the question until I was in Columbia Law School and, at some social function, got into a conversation with the husband of a law school classmate of mine. He was a professor at Columbia University's medical school. We were getting along fine, better I guess than I

realized, because he suddenly said — "Why didn't you go to medical school instead of law school?" That shook me. I don't know if medicine would have been the right career choice for me, but at that moment I realized that I'd had no particular reason for going to law school — it just happened to be the place where I was at the time, the handiest wall to lay a ladder against. I can't remember what I had previously been talking about with this man, but he may have developed a better insight into my psyche than I had, enough so his remark found its way into that mysterious repository in the brain where memories are stored that, every once in while, leap into view.

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Because my parents never had much money, and in those days Huntington was such a pleasant place to be in the summer, our family rarely went away on vacations. I remember two one-week summer trips with them. The first of these was to the White Mountains, in New Hampshire. Mom and Pop weren't hikers, except for Pop's hikes around the golf course. I was thrilled by my first excursion outside Long Island or Manhattan, which I'm pretty sure happened in 1937. It was my first chance to see a river! And a hill! (Long Island has lots of hills — as I mentioned, we called my grandparents' place "the house on the hill" — but, where we lived, there weren't hills rising against the landscape, breaching the horizon). As we drove north through western Connecticut, I gaped with wonder at land rising at an angle, silhouetted against the sky.

Our destination was Mount Washington, the highest peak in the northeastern United Sates, celebrated for having "the worst weather in the world." On the way there, we passed the odd rock outcropping forming the much-photographed profile of a man's face, called "The Old Man in the Mountains." What then seemed to be a timeless feature of the Earth's surface is no more. It collapsed in a rock-slide a some years ago.

We drove up the road to the summit of Mount Washington. This was rather daring of us, not because the road was treacherous or the weather the worst, but because radiators could boil over; drivers would have to abandon their assault on the summit and turn back. That's why for several decades, at least in the northeastern United States, you would see bumper stickers that proclaimed, "This Car Climbed Mt. Washington."

I don't remember whether the Ordemans journeyed to the White Mountains the same summer we did, but I know that their car did not climb Mount Washington — they were not eligible to affix this sticker to their bumper. They took the alternate route — the cog railway. I often wondered, but never learned, which was the most splendid way to ascend. What about climbing the mountain on foot? That wasn't in our

culture. I climbed it with my son, Wells, about forty years later, staying overnight on the way at a communal cabin a thousand feet below the summit.

On that first ascent, with my parents, after reaching the parking area at the highest point on the mountain, we got out of the car and looked around. Because of the tilt of the topography, the top of nearby Mount Adams looked higher to me than the point where we were standing. This caused me great distress, but I got over it, excited to be above the timberline.

In 1938, my father's business had improved so much that my parents decided to take a one-week August cruise to Bermuda. The ship on which they booked passage was the German ocean liner, *St. Louis*. In those days, passenger ships looked like ships rather than floating hotels. The *St. Louis* was a trim, medium-sized liner, well suited for short cruises such as from New York- to Bermuda and back. Dick was spending the summer with Toots and Jul at their place in Michigan, so it was just Pop, Mom, and I who went along.

Hitler was ascendant. The Nazi war machine was gearing up, the Germans striving day and night to achieve the capacity needed to plunge the world into the worst horror in history, but a lot of people, including my parents, must have thought there was nothing wrong with traveling on a German ship. Our voyage took place a bit over a month before the capitulation of the Allies at Munich and two months before *Kristallnacht.*

At age seven, I was thrilled as we steamed out of lower New York Harbor and I had to take care to keep my balance, astounded that even a big ship responds to the motion of the waves. The next day, en route to Bermuda, my parents took me up to the bridge. The ocean was placid, and the captain invited us in and asked if I would like to steer the ship. Sure! Following instructions, I gripped the big wheel, and for my ten or fifteen seconds tenure as helmsman, kept the *St Louis* on as steady a course as I could. When I got home, I told my friends that the captain of an ocean liner let me steer it. No one believed me. They didn't realize how little skill was required to hold a big wheel briefly and keep it steady in a calm sea.

After the war began, I remember my mother saying that, although, like everyone else, she was against the Germans, she was glad to hear that the *St. Louis* made it home before hostilities began. She was either unaware of, or thought it best not to mention, reports in the newspapers that, about nine months after we had disembarked from the ship, it made an ocean crossing steeped in tragedy.

From a United States Holocaust Museum publication:

> On May 13, 1939, the German transatlantic liner *St. Louis* sailed from Hamburg, Germany, for Havana, Cuba. On the voyage were 937 passengers. Almost all were Jews fleeing from the Third Reich. Most were German citizens, some

were from eastern Europe, and a few were officially "stateless . . ."

Only a handful of refugees were allowed to land in Cuba. The *St. Louis* sailed within sight of the lights of Miami, but the United States denied entry to passengers. The ship sailed back to Europe, where most of them found refuge, for many very brief, in Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Belgium.

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I'm pretty sure it was the summer of 1937 — the year before my voyage on the *St. Louis*, that Uncle Jul and Aunt Toots took a trip to Europe, in the course of which they visited Nazi Germany. This would have been a year after the famous 1936 summer Olympics in Berlin, where Hitler became infuriated that the U.S. track star, Jesse Owens, who was so conspicuously not a member of Hitler's proclaimed master race, broke the world record in the 100-meter dash and accumulated four gold medals. Sophisticated people like the Goebels, who were history professors and fluent in German, should have had strong intimations of where Germany was headed — had already traveled — under Nazi rule. I never heard what impressions they formed, but I do remember a present they brought me, a toy tank. It was like no toy tank built in America. It was beautifully constructed and detailed. It moved along imperturbably and shot sparks from a cannon mounted on a swiveling turret. It was presumably displayed in shop windows in Germany, an emblem of growing military might. What better toy could be imagined than a toy tank more advanced and well-built than any other toy tank in the world? If kept in mint condition, it would probably fetch an impressive sum at auction. I played with it, left in the rain and let it rust.

At the time of the Goebels' visit, Germany had re-occupied the demilitarized zone in the Rhineland in violation of the Versailles Treaty. Rearmament was in full swing, as was persecution of Jews. It was only years later that I began to wonder why Toots and Jul weren't alarmed, indeed repulsed, at the sight of this exquisite model of a war machine. Having recounted this, I should note that, once the war began, the Goebels were as strongly opposed to the Nazis as anyone, and they suffered some abuse themselves. My mother said that they had to endure insults and hostility because their name resembled that of the Nazi Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels.

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The war ended with Japan's surrender in August, 1945. About a month later, I started at Andover. As I recall, Pop and Mom drove me there, along with Libby and Jack, who was beginning his second year.

I had been told to wear a necktie and sport coat and had buttoned all three buttons. When we arrived and were about to get out of the car, Libby told me I only needed to button the middle button. I remember wondering, if that's the case, why do they make sport coats with three buttons? I also remember that someone told me that they put buttons near the end of the sleeves to discourage people from wiping their noses on them. I still don't know whether that's true.

I spent my four years at Andover in an intermittently anxious state. I tried to be diligent in my studies, but was in fear of being classed as a "grind." I was sick more than the average student. Andover's academic year was divided into three terms. My senior year I spent a third of the winter term in the infirmary. Campus bullies spotted me as a target. An Alpha-dog type harassed me. A couple of decades later, it was interesting to attend a class reunion and observe that the nerds who had returned were doing fine. The alpha dog appeared, and was still menacing, but he had lost his ability to bite. Despite my social insecurity, I made good friends. All four years at Princeton, I roomed with former Andover classmates.

The headmaster when I was at Andover, Claude Moore Fuess, was a short, bald, bulky, imposing character who gave off an aura of uncompromising rectitude; he might have been lifted out of the same job at Eton or Harrow and dropped onto this more-recently-hallowed patch of New England ground. One morning my first or second year there, I was walking by myself from the Oliver Wendell Holmes Library on a path bordered by stately elms, still kept alive and healthy last time I saw them thanks to plenteous income from Andover's endowment fund. I was approaching the Addison Art Gallery, which houses a remarkable collection of fine American paintings, including Homer's celebrated work, *Eight Bells,* when I saw, coming my way, also alone, striding vigorously and purposefully, as I would have expected, Dr. Fuess, himself. I suppressed a shudder and steeled myself. An exchange of salutations was inevitable. When it seemed we were at an appropriate distance, I managed to emit a meek and feeble "Hello, sir." Then we were almost abreast of each other, and he responded in a booming voice invested with thunderous authority, "Good morning!" A second later we had passed. I wondered if I should have said, "Good morning, sir" in a loud voice instead of "Hello, sir" in a weak one. In the years following, this trivial incident grew in importance in my mind.

Weekdays at Andover all students were required to attend an assembly, held mid- or late morning every weekday. Dr. Fuess and Mr. Benedict, the dean of students, presided. These

gatherings began with everyone singing "Praise God from whom all Blessings Flow." I found this enjoyable to sing because it was one of the rare hymns that hewed to my limited vocal range. The next line: "Praise Him all creatures here below," always elicited in me the same thought: How can creatures other than humans praise God? I conjured up mental images of horses, or sheep, or rabbits, adopting reverent poses. Every day the same line. Every day my same mental response, varying the worshiping creatures I visualized. Next: "Praise Him above the heavenly hosts." And every day I would wonder afresh, who are these heavenly hosts whom we should be praising, though not too strongly, lest . . . But we were already singing the last line, "Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." The Holy Ghost again: that mysterious figure, who was clearly more important than the heavenly hosts.

You might imagine from these comments that at the time I was a non-believer. Not so! I didn't dare imagine that there might not be a God, and a risen Christ too. In certain realms, thinking, rational analysis, speculation, and questioning were suppressed.

There were a few Unitarians in our class, at least one Quaker, and a number of Jews. Such people were considered to be somewhat aberrant, but basically normal. What wasn't normal was the atheist. He was the only one who wouldn't bow his head, or pray, or sing, "Praise God. . ." All the 160 or so other boys in my class were believers, so one would think. But who knows how many were? As is the case with many worshipers, regardless of faith, devoutness is a mask.

I don't remember the atheist's name; he was a big fellow, and so, wherever he happened to be sitting that day, highly visible. Drawing himself up from his conventional adolescent slouch, he would sit conspicuously erect as if to proclaim his non-faith whenever at some point in the proceedings Dr. Fuess began a prayer. Like everyone else, I bowed my head, but soon tilted it enough so I could behold the atheist, and, except on days when I had the misfortune to lack a good vantage point, I would keep my gaze fastened on him, as if contemplating a magnificent natural spectacle.

The assemblies were also the occasions for announcements of one sort or another and a brief reading from Scripture. Of these, the one that I remember, because its recitations far outnumbered those of any other, was from a letter of St. Paul to one of the communities he wrote to. The memorable portion of this favorite of Dr. Fuess's was, "When I was a child, I spake as a child, but when I became a man I put away childish things . . . ." After uttering these sententious words, Dr. Fuess would cast a severe look over his spectacles at the hundreds of adolescents, all, including the atheist, staring blankly back at him.

My misgivings, fear, and trembling at Andover were not about the academic regimen, but about the social expectations, which I could never seem to get a grip on, and to make things worse, in my academic work I developed the habit of letting my mind drift when I was reading. While I was in this state of distraction, my eyes kept moving down the page, and sometimes I even turned a page or two before I began once again to take in the sense of what I was reading. This might not seem like such an astonishing aberration for an adolescent reader, but there was a pathological element in it, as well: Instead of going back and reading what my eyes had passed over and my brain had not taken in, I sometimes kept reading even though I might have missed something important.

This bad habit persisted in college. Why, in all those years, didn't I demand of myself that I reread any material I had not taken in though my eyes had passed over it? Why didn't I adopt a policy of making sure I finished absorbing a page before I turned it. Was fear of success the problem — a sense that I was unworthy of gaining a good understanding of what I had been reading? Could there be another explanation, like sheer sloth?

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Having been so interested in science in my preadolescent years, I've sometimes wondered why I didn't take more science courses at Andover, particularly since I took physics and got a high mark in it, which I had not gotten in the humanities courses. Why didn't I take chemistry and biology? Dunno. I think Andover's faculty wasn't as strong in science as in history and literary studies. My physics instructor, Freddie Boyce, was probably the oldest member of the faculty, and I think of him as a relic of the 19th century. In the last week of the course, he could have spiked our interest in science by mentioning the achievements of Einstein, and he could have said something intriguing about quantum mechanics. There had been stunning developments in physics in the first half of the 20th century. We never heard about them. The "atomic age" had gone public a few years earlier. Instead of alluding to it, Mr Boyce wrapped up the year with a homily that smacked of "intelligent design" (a term that had not then come into general use), pointing out that water, like many substances, contracts (though in the case of water very slightly) as it cools, but then, just before reaching the freezing point, begins to expand, and because of this anomaly ice forms at the surface of a body of water rather than at its lowest depth. Were it not for this, Mr. Boyce said, fish would freeze to death rather than survive in the depths of lake bottoms. "You should think about this anytime you're inclined to doubt the existence of God," he said. The implication was that God had set up the laws of physics, but then realized He had to tweak them in this way to achieve the results in nature

He wanted. I wonder if this argument is still used by proponents of intelligent design. Even with my 19th -century physics education I could think of why it's not a good one.

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Sports were important at Andover. (As the old saying goes, "Wars are won on the playing fields of Eton") The idea was to try to make the team in whatever sport you went out for. If you didn't make varsity, there was junior varsity. If you didn't make junior varsity, you played on a club team. In baseball, my training in the back yard of my house in Huntington, which featured the rule that if you hit the ball over the fence, you're out, coupled with below-average agility, resulted in my being consigned to a club team. In football I did better, making the J.V.B. squad. For the winter term, I went out for swimming. I was mediocre at crawl and backstroke but, I suppose because of fortuitous bodily construction, I was good at butterfly, and made the varsity team. We had swimming meets each Saturday with teams of other schools as far away as Portland, Maine. On Wednesdays, the coach held time trials, which would determine who would be chosen to swim in the meet scheduled for the following Saturday. In what in retrospect strikes me as an indicator of fear of success, I nearly always did better in the time trials than I did in the meets where I competed against teams from other schools.

Despite my mother's ominous observation that at Andover "it's sink or swim," in these years after World War II, I found the place congenial to students like me, who neither swam nor sinked, but just floated, occasionally paddling a few strokes and gently fluttering their legs. I was, after all, a member of the "baby dearth," conceived in 1930, months after the stock market crash of 1929 and just as job layoffs were soaring, the Great Depression was deepening, and there was no bottom in sight. A lot of people didn't want the burden of an extra child. Competition among my peers was limited, and, of course, in these years, there was little or no competition from students of Asian origin. Moreover, I suspect that admissions directors of many colleges, though they may not have had established quotas, thought it best not to admit "too high a percentage" of Jews.

It helped, too, that Andover was regarded as one of the top prep schools in the country; it was the biggest feeder school for Yale, that same institution to which it fed George H. W. Bush and George W. Bush.

My impression was that in my class, 1949, graduating from Andover practically ensured admission to Yale. If you wanted to go to Harvard or Princeton, it was probably prudent to be in the top half. I applied to Princeton and nowhere else. I never visited this institution, nor was I interviewed by anyone. There was

about as much stress involved as in obtaining a dog license. The basis of my choice had to do with what some of my friends told me: Harvard is too rarefied, or effete, Yale too ordinary, too *boola, boola.* Guys who seemed to know what they were talking about made the Goldilocks pronouncement that Princeton is just right. All nonsense, of course. Those going to Yale tended to refer to Princeton as "Boys Town." Those going to Harvard probably didn't stop to think about it. Another possibility was Dartmouth, where my cousin Dr. Sam had gone, but I was a swimmer, not a skier or hockey player. Dartmouth struck me as too remote and too cold.

The thought of going to Harvard skirted along the periphery of my mind. My father was an alumnus, so I would have floated in, being a "legacy," a form of affirmative action for the lucky. But, as I've noted earlier, Pop and I were strangely non-communicative. A chasm existed between us, just as, I suspect, had existed between him and his father. I never asked his opinion as to what would be my best choice for a college, and he never volunteered his thoughts. It was another indication of how Pop was bottled-up, and how I was too. Years later, when I was working as a lawyer for RCA Records, my boss, who was so smart and perceptive that he retained his job even after years of two-martini lunches, said to me after one of them (I don't remember in what context), "Ed, you play it awfully close to the vest." I was too bottled-up — playing it too close to the vest — to ask him to elaborate. Too many of the thoughts traveling around in my brain were walled in.

A single incident starkly illuminates what I mean about being bottled up. My senior year at Andover I roomed with a congenial fellow named Ken Johnston. This being Andover, we each had our own bedroom and shared a sizable living room. When I returned to school from Christmas vacation, my housemaster, Mr. Freeman, took me aside. "Ken will be a few days late getting back," he said. "His brother was killed in a car accident."

"Oh," I replied and shuffled back to my room. A couple of days later, Ken returned to school, and, though it now it seems aberrant beyond belief, I greeted him and he greeted me, and I failed to express my sympathy, instead treating the subject as one it's best not to discuss. Today, that incident stands out like a blinking light in my eyes, reminding me how repressed I was. Ken never showed any sign of resentment toward me for my appalling lapse of decency. He was a good-hearted fellow, and I think he sensed that I felt sympathy for him, but was incapable of expressing it.

Years later I learned that Ken was a homosexual, and, like many gay people of his generation, he was done in by AIDS at an early age. I knew that I should have guessed his orientation. It was Ken who had introduced me to Suzie Palmer, the

electrifying girl I talked about earlier, who was from his hometown of Forest Hills, in Queens. Soon after I met her, he said to me, "Suzie likes you — you ought to ask her to the prom." I was surprised that he was practically handing Suzie over to me instead of protecting his territory.

In that era the terms "gay" and "coming out" had not yet been invented. At Andover, calling someone a "fairy" — code for homosexual — was the worst term of opprobrium imaginable, so it was a tremendously popular insult. Anyone who breached certain unwritten laws of social conformity risked having this epithet hurled at him. I had it directed at me more than once, and gritlessly winced when I heard it.

How one reacts to such snarky remark — how it makes you feel — makes all the difference. There was a slender, slightly ungainly fellow in my class some of the boys who composed the social put-down squad referred to as Fairy John. Fairy John, however, knew how to reduce slanders to irrelevance, and he was admitted to the most elite fraternity at Andover and an elite club at Princeton.

To return to my account of what was involved in transitioning from Andover to college: my brother had gone to Amherst, and my cousin Jack, just a year ahead of me, to Williams. Both these schools had reputations equivalent to Ivy League universities, but I had to rule them out, because Pop's business had gone into free fall, and I needed a full scholarship to attend college. The only financial bailout that seemed attainable was the NROTC scholarship, which, with few exceptions, was only offered at larger institutions. This program required that each term in college you take a course in "naval science" and each summer go on a six-week cruise on a Navy ship or undergo a similar period of training at a Naval shore installation.

The deal was that upon graduation you would get commissioned as an Ensign and serve two years on active duty. (This was extended to three years after the U.S. entered to Korean War in June, 1950.) A couple of naval officers came to Andover to interview applicants. The program appealed to a lot of students throughout the country because of the full scholarship, including room and board, that came with it, so it was quite competitive. I couldn't be sure I would be admitted as I sat across the table from the stern-looking Navy commander assigned to interview me. I might look all right on paper, but I knew that, if he didn't "like the cut of my jib," as sailors say, he would blackball me.

He studied my application, frowning a bit, then asked, "What is it that makes you want to join the Navy?" I got off to a good start talking about my love of sailing and the sea; then I upped the ante by talking about my brother, and how he had

been a member of Underwater Demolition Team 12 and how he had swum into the beach at Iwo Jima the day before the first marines landed and thankfully was able to swim back to his ship unscathed and was awarded the Silver Star. I added, unnecessarily and imprudently, how much serving in the Navy had meant to him.

The Commander listened intently; then, with great emotion, he said, "I covered those boys from my destroyer." At that moment, I knew that I would be admitted to the program, *unless I sabotaged it.* I sensed danger, and wisely so. I must have also mentioned that Dick was no longer in the Navy, for the Commander then looked at me quizzically and said, "Why didn't your brother stay in the Navy?"

Hearing this, I thought, *Who wouldn't want to get out the Navy the first chance they had?* On this occasion, an angel of the Lord was watching over me. I retracted the words forming in my mouth and managed to substitute for them, "He'd always had his heart set on being a lawyer." I even managed to achieve a tone of regret. "Oh," said the Commander, and together we observed a silent moment of lament.

Why my fear of success caused me to sabotage myself so often, but not invariably, is something I've thought about. In this instance, it was not just a case of passing up a terrific opportunity. Survival was at stake: "survival" meaning able to go to college. Without a hefty cash inflow from a scholarship, I would have been drafted or out on the street looking for a job with only a high school diploma.

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During my Andover years I had some slight success getting summer jobs. When I was sixteen, I developed a lawn-mowing business in the neighborhood using our power mower. This would have worked out well economically, but it exacerbated my hay fever, so I had to sharply limit the number of clients. The following summer I got a job in a small boat yard on Huntington Harbor. My duties were to help get boats — mostly sailboats — spiffed up, help launch them and haul them out, plus perform miscellaneous chores. The owner of the business, Bill Potts, was a semi-aristocratic fellow of about sixty, who I thought it likely didn't have to work for a living but had bought the boatyard so he could occupy himself with a little business venture. He had his own very expensive sailboat with an experimental rig that he kept in Cold Spring Harbor, to the west of us.

One of my first jobs was to sand and varnish a wooden mast that looked like it might go on a pretty big sailboat. The mast was supported by several sawhorses. It was quite a job sanding it, and I was glad when that was accomplished and I could begin giving it the first of several coats of varnish. I had

almost completed applying the first coat when I started to step back to admire my work, but had forgotten about the spreaders and stays projecting from the mast. I brushed against them in a way that caused the mast to fall off the sawhorses onto the sandy ground, causing grains of sand and dirt to adhere to the fresh varnish. After excoriating myself for my clumsiness, I went into the office and confessed to Mr. Potts. "Well," he said without a trace of anger or annoyance, "you'll just have to start over and sand it again when the varnish dries." And so I did, and finally got the job done right, and because business at the boatyard was slow, I didn't even have to work overtime to make up for this blunder.

This was the summer of 1948, and Mr. Potts was interested in watching the political conventions on his new television set. Things continued to be pretty slack at the boatyard, and he invited me into the office to watch with him. For the rest of the summer my job wasn't much more taxing than that.

The following summer, after graduating from Andover, I was able to get a job at the Palace, a sundries and soda fountain shop, with items for sale of the sort you'd find in a drugstore, but with no pharmacy and a long counter with stools where you could order a soda, ice cream, sandwiches, and the like. Mr. Faubus, the owner, sat at the cash register. I was hired as a counter man for the 2:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. shift. Working with me was a woman named Donna, who was maybe in her mid-fifties and had been running that part of the business for several years. The pay was low, but Mr. Faubus said that if I performed okay he would give me a raise after three weeks. This was a great job for me because of the hours, and because the place was across the street from the movie theater, and kids I knew would come in and have a soda and shoot the breeze. I got along very well with Donna. Her relationship to me was more like that of a warm-hearted older sister than a colleague, much less a supervisor. There was some fancy sandwich I had trouble making without it looking sloppy. Donna laughed and said not to worry, she would make it anytime it got ordered. I felt I was lucky to have her to work with, and I enjoyed chatting with customers. There was a girl close to my age who came in from time-to-time, and she'd sit on a stool near the end of the counter and always order a ginger ale. Then she would watch me a lot. She had nice features but looked sallow, as if she wasn't in great health. I decided that she didn't have a good diet. She would just have one glass of ginger ale and take about half an hour sipping it. After a while I realized that she liked looking at me. It made me realize how women must feel when men fixedly gaze at them. I didn't mind, but it seemed odd.

After three weeks I asked Mr. Faubus if he was going to give me a raise. He said, no because I hadn't learned to make the fancy sandwich. I'd forgotten the lesson I learned in

elementary school: neatness counts. I didn't mind much not getting a raise — it was a cushy job, and much more sociable than the one at the boat yard.

At the end of the summer, the day my term of employment was to end, Donna came up close to me during a lull. I looked wonderingly at her. "Remember this," she said gravely, "To thine own self be true." I nodded appreciatively. It may have been just as well that I was not yet equipped to add, "And it must follow, as night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man."

A job I thought of for myself freshman year in college led to my getting in touch again with Mr. Potts. I'd made friends with a guy named Skip Goff, and we got talking about how we could make some money over Christmas vacation. Skip's uncle lived in Vermont and knew a farmer who owned a hillside with a lot of evergreen trees on it. At Skip's behest, his uncle made a deal on our behalf whereby we would pay the farmer five bucks and he would let us chop down and haul off all the trees we could take in one day. Skip and I rented a truck from someone he knew and went up there and, because at that age one's energy supply is pretty close to infinite, we were able to chop down and load a great number of trees onto the truck. We stayed overnight at Skip's uncle's house and drove to Long Island the next day. Of course, we needed a place to display and sell the trees. Mr. Potts's boatyard was dormant and it faced a well-traveled road, so I had called him earlier, and being the super-nice guy he was, he said, "Sure, you can set up there, and no need to think about paying me anything. Good luck."

We did have good luck and sold most of the trees, but a few days after Christmas I went to a small party given by a friend of mine, Lee Greef, who was also one of my Christmas tree customers. Under the tree was tin foil, and I noticed that the tree had already lost a lot of needles, and all through the party I watched needles falling from the tree and landing on the tinfoil like new-fallen snow, or, rather, like sleet, because you could hear the needles landing, and I thought of all the people I'd sold trees to and how in each of their houses, needles must be dropping from their trees. I learned later that this kind of spruce tree had encapsulated needles — the capsules open in the dry air of heated houses and the needles drop. I apologized to Lee and her mother. They laughed and said it hadn't dampened their Christmas spirit. By this time, I should have had some intimation that I wasn't good at working for others and wasn't good a running my own business. But I didn't have to think about getting summer jobs anymore, because every summer at college I would be going on Navy duty for six weeks.

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I've been blessed with rich experiences and soul-nourishing relationships, wonderful kids and grandkids, and forty-three

years of loving adventurousness with my sadly departed mate. My missteps and mishaps seem outweighed by extreme good fortune; yet, glaring back at me from the past, exemplified by my declining to kiss Carmella Piliciari in the play-rehearsal at Robert K. Toaz Junior High School and voting for my opponent in the presidential election at the meeting of the Huntington Bay Lightning Owners Association is the pattern of sabotaging my chances for success. On some occasions my behavior wasn't just irrational: It was a matter of sleepwalking in what any half-awake and aware individual would see was the wrong direction.

I could cite memorable examples from subsequent decades, but I've already strayed beyond the bounds of this memoir, which is supposed to be about growing up in the 1930s and 1940s. Suffice to say, fear of success can be an emotional law so brutally enforced that no pearl is so rare, or so beautiful, or of such exceptional quality as to deter one so afflicted from throwing it into the sea.