Trajectory

of a Life

Jack Cohen

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This fictionalized autobiography contains edited excerpts from previous publications by the author, namely:

Amanuensis (2009)

Discovering America (2009)

Trove (2009)

Confessions of a Jewish Activist (2010)

Antisense (2014)

Life on Planet Alz (2017)

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*Preface*

In this book I have collected those of my previously self-published stories that are autobiographical in nature. In doing so, I thought it would be interesting to have a roughly continuous chronological development of my life and experiences.

The arc of my life begins with my incredible journey from poverty in the East End of London to attending Cambridge University. I moved to Israel with my wife Naomi and two-month-old daughter Miriam then with the birth of my son Simon, to the US where I worked at the NIH in Bethesda, MD, and as a Professor at Georgetown University. Then back to Israel as Chief Scientist at the Sheba Medical Center, Visiting Professor at Hebrew University, Jerusalem, to Ben Gurion University, Beer Sheva. *From Brick Lane to Cambridge to Bethesda to Beer Sheva!*

My life has been rich in experiences on three continents and includes many fascinating people. It has been a rough ride at times but a tremendously enriching and exciting one. Growing up as a poor deprived child in the East End, I could never have dreamt that this would be my *trajectory*.

Contents

[Amanuensis 10](#_Toc49095740)

[Brick Lane 11](#_Toc49095741)

[Julian 21](#_Toc49095742)

[Mick 37](#_Toc49095743)

[Passages 43](#_Toc49095744)

[Spe, Labore, Fide 50](#_Toc49095745)

[Nightmares 60](#_Toc49095746)

[Brothers in Adversity 76](#_Toc49095747)

[France, 1958 102](#_Toc49095748)

[The Reality of Experience 114](#_Toc49095749)

[Germany, 1959 119](#_Toc49095750)

[Naomi 126](#_Toc49095751)

[Milly and Hilly 129](#_Toc49095752)

[The Accident 136](#_Toc49095753)

[An Antisemitic Incident 141](#_Toc49095754)

[Cambridge, 1961 146](#_Toc49095755)

[Marriage 186](#_Toc49095756)

[The Grand Tour, 1963 188](#_Toc49095757)

[Birth and Renewal 225](#_Toc49095758)

[Israel, 1964 227](#_Toc49095759)

[An Attack? 228](#_Toc49095760)

[Death 230](#_Toc49095761)

[In the Land 241](#_Toc49095762)

[Discovering America, 1966 243](#_Toc49095763)

[Moving to the NIH, 1969 250](#_Toc49095764)

[Frank Portugal 255](#_Toc49095765)

[Confessions of a Jewish Activist 258](#_Toc49095766)

[Beginnings 259](#_Toc49095767)

[Getting Arrested 263](#_Toc49095768)

[The Soviet Jewry Movement 267](#_Toc49095769)

[Secret Briefing 270](#_Toc49095770)

[Moscow, 1972 278](#_Toc49095771)

[The Refuseniks 287](#_Toc49095772)

[Returning home 298](#_Toc49095773)

[The Brezhnev Demonstration 304](#_Toc49095774)

[Antisense 308](#_Toc49095775)

[Introduction 309](#_Toc49095776)

[Antisense – Genetic Drugs 311](#_Toc49095777)

[Antisense against AIDS, 1986 317](#_Toc49095778)

[Fateful decision 323](#_Toc49095779)

[Sam Schwartz 325](#_Toc49095780)

[Setting up the laboratory 328](#_Toc49095781)

[The call from California 331](#_Toc49095782)

[Lecturing 333](#_Toc49095783)

[Akademgorodok 336](#_Toc49095784)

[The Medicine Branch 342](#_Toc49095785)

[Foxhall Road 346](#_Toc49095786)

[Antisense Therapeutics Inc. 349](#_Toc49095787)

[The falling out 352](#_Toc49095788)

[Leila Subramanian 358](#_Toc49095789)

[The Grievance Hearing 360](#_Toc49095790)

[Sabotage 365](#_Toc49095791)

[The CIA 367](#_Toc49095792)

[Leaving NCI 370](#_Toc49095793)

[Georgetown University, 1990 373](#_Toc49095794)

[Glossary of scientific terms 376](#_Toc49095795)

[Moving to Israel 378](#_Toc49095796)

[Meningioma 379](#_Toc49095797)

[The National Science Foundation 388](#_Toc49095798)

[Aliyah, 1996 391](#_Toc49095799)

[Life on Planet Alz 397](#_Toc49095800)

[Planet Alz 398](#_Toc49095801)

[What is Love? 402](#_Toc49095802)

[Commitment and Duty 405](#_Toc49095803)

[Onset and Diagnosis, 2011 408](#_Toc49095804)

[The Bureaucracy of AD 412](#_Toc49095805)

[What are you doing in California? 417](#_Toc49095806)

[Daily life on Planet Alz 419](#_Toc49095807)

[Conversations with myself 430](#_Toc49095808)

[We hold hands 432](#_Toc49095809)

[Visiting Naomi 433](#_Toc49095810)

[In a Time of Plague 441](#_Toc49095811)

[Be Creative! 443](#_Toc49095812)

# **Amanuensis**

If the balance of our lives had not one scale of reason

To poise another of sensuality,

the blood and baseness of our nature

Would conduct us to most preposterous conclusions

*Othello*

William Shakespeare

### Brick Lane

One of my earliest memories is of my father Mick waking me in the middle of the night and giving me a piece of shrapnel. Half asleep, I stretched out my hand to grasp the gray, metallic object. It was heavy and hard and the light glinted off its irregular surfaces. I still remember the feel of it sharp and warm in my hand.

Many years later he told me how he had acquired this fragment of a German bomb. He had been on patrol as a Civil Defense Guard in the East End of London during World War II.

“One night during an air-raid I was standing on Commercial Road near the railway lines into Liverpool Street,” Dad explained. “It was completely deserted. And I ‘eard this plane comin’ over low, an ‘e’s droppin' a stick of bombs, an ‘e’s comin’ closer, an’ I could feel the ground shake, and the shock waves and ‘eat started to ‘it me, an I could tell from the delay between the explosions that the next one was goin’ to ‘it me, an’ I thought to myself 'blimey, this is it,' an’ I grabbed ‘old of a lamp-post and waited. And all of a sudden it stopped!"

The string of bombs had run out before reaching him.

Fortunately, everyone was in the shelters because there had been an air-raid warning. But Dad investigated to make certain no one had disobeyed the siren. That was his job. As he examined the wreckage of a bombed, smoldering house, shouting and then listening for survivors, he saw a piece of shrapnel glistening in the moonlight.

"When I picked it up it was still ‘ot," he exclaimed.

Although he was on patrol all night, he rushed home and woke me to give me the shrapnel. Perhaps he wanted to communicate the miracle of his deliverance.

For many years I treasured that odd-shaped hunk of metal sent from Germany to kill. I imagined a being wrapped in darkened shrouds hunched over his weapons. Motivated by strange beliefs he dropped his bombs over the blackened city, now alight with spreading explosions scattered like dice on a vast checkered board. Swathed in darkness he finished his deadly business and flew on. He came to kill my dad, but Dad lived.

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During World War II, the East End of London was devastated by German bombs. Whole neighborhoods were reduced to ruins. Brick Lane is a narrow scar that winds through the East End connecting the districts of Bethnal Green and Whitechapel, their bucolic origins long since submerged under layers of decaying slums and bombsites. The Bethnal Green end of the Lane was the center of the woodworking and furniture-making area. It was honeycombed with hundreds of shops of all sizes, making cupboards, tables, chairs, and during the War even Mosquito aircraft.

My dad’s Hebrew name was Meir (Myer in Yiddish) but everybody called him by his nickname, Mick. Dad’s workshop was a single room directly on the Lane itself. Wood of all types and sizes was stacked around every inch of it. I was fascinated by the different types of wood and loved to repeat their strange names, "sycamore, mahogany." I never envisaged them as trees. A huge bench covered with tools dominated the dark room.

When he was not there, I would quietly enter this sanctuary and gaze around in awe at the strange objects. I loved to see the planes hung in ascending sizes, their flat shiny surfaces reflecting my distorted face. Curly shavings and sawdust crunched under my feet. I carefully grasped the bradawl and, mimicking Dad, dug a hole in a piece of lumber.

The shop contained no wood working machinery since my father could not afford it and preferred to do as much work as possible by hand. He only used the machines in adjoining shops when he had to; and then he paid for them. He considered himself to be a cabinetmaker and was insulted if anyone referred to him as a carpenter. Sometimes I would have to help Dad. The smell of the hot glue repelled me yet for years that pungent, acrid odor brought a flood of memories.

As he poured the molten glue Dad yelled, "nah rub it in."

I hastened to obey his commands, brandishing the sharp-bristled brush.

"Spread it, spread it all over."

I spread the gelling, brown goo, while he carefully retrieved a piece of veneer from the tub of water. Then he quickly and expertly laid the precious fine sheet of wood onto the sticky surface. Using a flat-edged tool he began to express the glue from between the two pieces of wood. It was crucial to prevent air bubbles and to remove lumps of undissolved glue. His forearm muscles bulged and the veins in his hands stood out like blue rivulets as he applied all his strength. In the small, hot room his hair hung down in dank strands, acting as conduits for the sweat that poured from him. It dripped steadily onto the veneer, becoming one with the glue. When he was satisfied, he took the huge iron off the gas ring and pressed the veneer until it was bonded with the wood beneath. Then he trimmed the edges and raised the veneered wood high in both hands like a Torah to see its beautiful grain etched in the dim light.

The Lane was a drab, dull, bricked-in place. During the week, great rumbling lorries filled the narrow street, hardly able to turn the sharp corners. But on Sunday, there was a market that extended all the way down to Sclater Street and into Petticoat Lane. Then I loved to hang out of the window where we lived above the shop and watch the throngs of people go by. The buskers worked their way down the Lane, entertaining the crowds. I knew them all by now: the old lady with the straight gray hair who sang the old favorites in a high, shrill voice; Prince Monolulu, the black man dressed in Hawaiian costume with colorful feathers, who kept up a continuous patter. Best of all was the song and dance group called the Happy Wanderers who dressed like the Marx Brothers. If I was lucky, they would stop directly under my window and do their tap-dance routine on the cobble-stone street. Then I, an only, shy child, pretended the show was just for me and magnanimously threw a penny down to the fortunate performers.

Occasionally I stood in the midst of the crowd streaming past my home and sold odds and ends, comics or stamps. Boys going by looked at my offerings and sometimes bought or exchanged items. I was too embarrassed to shout the value of my wares like the real barrow-boys. One nice Sunday afternoon as I wandered along, a boy I did not know, slightly older and taller than me, came over.

"Let's see yer comics then," he said.

"I've got some Dandy, Beano, and Captain Marvel," I shyly replied.

"Gor, I'd like ter buy some o' these, but I don't 'ave me money wiv me. D'ye wanna come 'ome wiv me an I'll get it," he persuaded.

"Nah, why can't yer bring it 'ere." I didn’t trust him.

"Whassamatta, don't yer trust me,” he asked innocently. “Look I'll call me friend over an' we'll buy all yer comics for a shilling."

"I dunno,” I said. “Why can't yer bring yer friend back 'ere?"

"It’s too far,” he explained. “I tell yer what, ahs abaht comin’ wiv me as far as the buildings on Buxton Street, and then yer can wait there fer me an me friend."

I was hesitant, but it would be good to go home and tell them I had sold all my comics, and it didn't look good to say no. That might mean that I was scared. So I nodded.

"OK, I'll race yer there." The boy took off. When we arrived, the boy indicated an area in the playground behind the buildings.

"Alright,” he said, “wait 'ere, I won't be long."

I stood in the warm sun feeling apprehensive.

After some time, the boy reappeared between two air-raid shelters which guarded the edge of the playground. He beckoned to me and showed the money.

"See," he shouted. Behind him another, darker haired boy lurked in the shadow between the squat concrete shelters. I started towards them.

"I brought me friend, like I said,” the boy menaced as they advanced towards me.

"Let's see yer comics then." the other boy said brusquely.

Feeling more scared by the minute I handed them over.

"OK, let's go up there an' we'll decide what to pay yer for 'em," the boy said.

"'e said you'd give me a shilling for the lot," I quaked.

"Nah, I'll decide what ta give yer when I've 'ad a look at 'em mesewf."

"No, they're mine, give me a shilling or give 'em back," I yelled.

"'ere 'oo you shoutin' at," he threatened as he gave me a shove.

Before I could make up my mind what to do, they grabbed me and hustled me into the space between the shelters. I struggled to release myself, but they overpowered me and threw me onto the dusty ground. They punched and kicked at me a few times, then the dark-haired boy sat on my chest.

"Give us yer money, Jew-boy," the dark-haired boy sneered.

"'Ow can I, I can't move me arms," I asked, trying to wriggle away.

"Yer a Jew-boy, aren't yer?" the other one said.

"Yeah, so what's it got to do wiv you," I countered.

"OK, now let's see," and he felt behind him and began to unbutton my flies.

"Ay, what yer doin' Bert?” the first boy asked uncomfortably. “Why doan we jus' take 'is money and scarper."

"I wanna see what a Jew-boy's cock looks like,” Bert declared. “I ain't never seen one before."

I struggled as Bert unbuttoned my trousers and fished around inside.

"'ere Joey, 'elp me come 'on," Bert demanded.

"Nah, I jus' wanna get out of 'ere," demurred Joey.

"What yer scared abaht,” insisted Bert. “I jus' wanna see it, an 'e ain't gonna 'urt yer."

Suddenly finding the hidden prize, he grabbed my penis and pulled it out into the open. I wriggled under him in a desperate effort to get away but Bert squeezed.

"If you doan keep still I'll pull the fucker off," Bert ordered. Then he twisted around to view the treasure.

"Cor, it’s a silly little bleeder, ain't it,” he said, “an blimey it is different like they say, but it ain't bigger, its smaller."

Joey bent over to see the strange object. Perhaps this revelation satisfied Bert because he now responded to Joey's entreaties.

"OK, take the money 'aht of 'is pockets," commanded Bert.

While Joey fumbled around extracting the coins, Bert continued to hold my limp member in his grasp.

"It's over two bob," whistled Joey excitedly.

"Arright then, let's go," Bert said as he released his hold and jumped off me, turning back to issue his last order. "If you tell anyone abaht this, next time I'll cut the little bleeder off."

They raced over the hillock and through the fence behind the shelters leaving me sprawled in the dust. The release of the weight on my chest was an immense relief but, mainly from the emotional release, I burst into tears. Slowly I raised myself upright and carefully tucked my penis back into its place. They had taken my comics, my money, everything. Checking to see that they had gone, I edged towards the playground. Noone was about. Noone had seen my predicament.

When I arrived home my mum, Marie, asked me why I had been crying, a big boy like me shouldn't cry. I told her about the boys and the robbery but carefully omitted the exposure of my genitals. Mum quickly roused my dad from his nap. He came downstairs buckling his trousers.

"Right, nah then," Dad said, "where'd this 'appen?"

"Let's go,” Dad continued as I explained. “If we're quick we might nab the little bastards."

As we walked along I expressed my doubts. "'ow could we ever find 'em?"

"They can't 'ave gone far,” Dad explained. “They probably lives near 'ere."

"Suppose they 'ave fathers wiv 'em,” I fretted."

"We'll worry abaht that if it arises."

We reached the spot where I had been robbed and followed the direction the two boys had taken over the hillock and through the fence. Then we criss-crossed a complex of narrow alleys and came out onto Hackney Road. This was the edge of my circumscribed world. As it was beginning to get dark, a feeling of dread was growing inside me. I wanted to give up and go home. But Dad insisted and we crossed Hackney Road. We were just passing in front of the huge Odeon Cinema when I glanced over my shoulder and saw him. It was the fair-haired boy Joey walking along the side street next to the cinema.

"That's 'im," I yelled and pointed.

My father took off and grabbed the boy before he knew what had happened.

"'ere let goa me," Joey whined.

"You sure this is the boy?" Dad asked.

"Yeah, that's 'im,” I said, remembering all too clearly the degrading incident. “Look, 'e's got one of me comics in 'is pocket."

My father grabbed hold of the boy's ear. "OK, Sonny,” he said, “where do yah live?"

"What's it got to do wiv you,” Joey yelled. “An' let goa me ear, its 'urtin me."

"You takes us where you live, or your ear'll 'urt a lot worse,” Dad answered. “An' if you doan I'm takin' you to the police."

"OK, OK, but let goa me ear," he said, squirming under Dad’s fierce hold.

"Not likely,” Dad retorted. “I 'opes for your sake you live close by."

The three of us paraded down the street until the boy pointed to one of the tenements.

"I lives 'ere," Joey squeaked.

My father banged on the door.

"What's yer name boy?" Dad asked.

"Joe."

"Nah, yer surname, " Dad specified.

"Cummins," Joey complied.

The door was opened by a little girl wearing a dirty pinafore.

"Is yer farva in?" Dad asked politely.

The girl bolted into the dark interior.

"'Oo is it?" a woman's voice yelled out.,

"Aye, it's someone t'see Dad, an 'e's got our Joey by the ear," we heard her say.

There was some banging around inside,until a big man in an undershirt came to the door.

"'Ere what you doin wiv me son?" he asked.

"'E stole some comics an’ money from my son,” Dad explained. “I fort you should know abaht it, an’ we wants 'is stuff back."

"Let goa 'im or I'll knock your bleedin block off,” Mr. Cummins threatened.

"You an ‘oo else," Dad responded.

The two of them stood poised.

"Anyway, 'owd yer know it was my Joey," Mr. Cummins thought to ask.

"If we doan get our stuff in a minute I'm takin 'im over to the police station, an' you ain't gonna stop me," Dad said.

"Joey, did you take this 'ere boy's comics."

"Well, Dad..." Joey stammered.

"Tell 'im the truf," my father interjected, "an’ I'll let goa yer ear."

"Yerst, yerst, I got 'is lousy comics, only let goa me ear mister, it’s killin me," Joey blubbered.

Dad let go of Joey's ear but grabbed his arm instead. The boy pressed his hand to his ear and tears filled his eyes.

"Ow, ow," he moaned.

I stood behind Dad watching the little drama being played out with apprehension and amazement.

"OK, 'ow much did they take?" Mr. Cummins asked.

"'Im an anuver boy, they took seven comics an’ two shillings and tapence'apenny," I mouthed to Dad.

"Look, OK mate, we doan want no trouble,” Mr. Cummins stated. “'E'll go inside and get the money and the comics."

"No tricks nah, or I'll be back wiv the police, nah I know yer name an address," threatened Dad

"We've got enough troubles, mate, we're ordinary workin' people," answered Mr. Cummins.

"Well, whadya fink we are?” Dad asked “What ya stealin from us for, jus' cause we're Jews yer fink we're any better off? Well, yer wrong."

"OK, OK, mate, keep yer 'air on,: Mr. Cummins said. “But, if we gives back your boy's fings you ain't goin' ter the coppers then, are yer?"

"No, I ain't,” Dad said. “By rights it should be reported, but you wanna see 'e doan do it again. You brought 'im up, you tell 'im to keep outa our way, or 'e'll end up in jail."

Joey entered the house and returned with his share of the loot. He handed it over to my father.

"Bert's got the rest," Joey said.

"OK," his dad said, "scarper over to Bert's and tell 'im I said to return the stuff. And be quick about it."

Joey rushed out without looking at us. When he had gone, Mr. Cummins retired into his house, leaving my father and me at the door.

"Do you fink 'e'll come back wiv the rest of the money, Dad?" I whispered.

"Yeah, doan worry, Son, we taught 'em a lesson," Dad said.

We waited patiently for Joey to return, knowing that Mum would be growing frantic as it grew dark. Finally, Joey returned and handed over the rest of the money and comics.

"Is it all there then?" he asked me.

"Yeah, Dad," I answered.

"If I ever catch you bovverin’ my son again, or callin’ 'im or anyone else a Jew-boy I'll knock yer bleedin block off,” Dad thundered. “An’ I'll report you to the police, an doan you forget it."

With that warning hovering in the air, we turned and strode off towards home.

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### Julian

The light from the fire flickered in the darkened kitchen casting strange shadows. I undressed myself and sat on the edge of the table. The fire warmed me as Mum poured another kettle of hot water from the stove into the tin bath set before the fire. The radio played light music in the background. Mum had a round, plump, kind face, its roundness emphasized by the thick, round glasses she wore. She was a robust and gentle but determined woman.

Unashamed in her presence I stepped naked into the bath and Mum helped wash me. After the pleasant ritual, she wrapped me in a large towel, and I returned to my perch on the edge of the table. The radio announcer spoke but I paid no attention. As Mum was drying me, she suddenly lifted her head and listened intently. The melodic sounds of a guitar strummed from the radio.

"Julian," she said, "his name would have been Julian, like the man playing this music."

"Whose name?" I queried.

In the flickering gloom I saw a tear form in the corner of my mother's eye and slowly descend the curve of her cheek.

"We wanted to call you Julian too," she said without answering, "but we couldn't."

"I'm glad you didn't," I responded quickly, "it's a sissy name."

"Yes," she agreed, "now you'd better start dressing so I can clear up the mess and make supper. Your father will be coming up soon."

"Whose name?" I repeated, still puzzled.

"Never mind," Mum answered. "What do you know about underground airships? I'll tell you about it when you're older. Now run along upstairs and get dressed."

Of course, she never did tell me. It was one of those mysteries that all children wait to have explained, that they ponder in innocence. Over the years, from snatched, chance conversations or from occasional unguarded remarks by Mum, or obliquely answered questions by a few trusted aunts and uncles, I gradually came to perceive the mystery. It took a long time and I kept it secret, not to be divulged to anyone. It was like sex, something strange that only grownups knew about that was forbidden until one was old enough to understand. But by then it might be too late.

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On major Jewish holidays, such as Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, I accompanied my father to shool. To get there, we walked down Brick Lane, across Bethnal Green Road and through the market to Cheshire Street. I hated these trips. Dressed in my best clothes, carrying my talit in its velvet case, we passed by the vegetable stalls. The throngs of shoppers, dressed in their shabby, workaday clothes, crowded around. It made me feel conspicuous; it emphasized my distinctness. A few of the stall holders knew my father and shouted familiarly, "'ullo Mick, 'ow are yer," and he waved or stopped briefly to chat. Others glowered and shouted loud anti-Semitic remarks as we passed by.

Sometimes Dad did not shave before going to shool because of the particular holiday or in remembrance of his parents. His beard grew very quickly and formed a dark swath across his already swarthy features. His gray homberg hat and large, ill-fitting charcoal-gray suit made him appear an entirely different person to me. Even though I was constrained by my father's authority, I made it plain that I disliked going to shool. I was forced to undergo the gauntlet of the alien stares of the disheveled crowd.

"The United Workman's and Wlodawa Synagogue," read the faded sign. We entered the old, dim building which reeked muskily of age and books. Then we went through the prescribed rituals—putting on the talit, saying the prayers. These had little meaning for me, and I knew my father was not really religious. I had developed a strong skepticism early on which, if truth be told, derived more from the mixture of embarrassment and boredom that attended my visits to this sanctuary than from any rational basis.

It was all so mysterious to me. I did go to Talmud Torah twice a week after regular school. But I learned little more there than a rudimentary knowledge of Hebrew and scripture. There was a constant struggle with the impulsive teachers who seemed to have no idea how to teach. Everyone misbehaved and I was always having my hand slapped or my cheek pinched. This, I decided, must be a peculiar European custom of punishment, since it was not practiced in the regular schools. No amount of complaining by pupils or parents could stop this constant misbehavior and punishment cycle. The pupils resented having to learn what they felt was irrelevant and, which by their very presence, implied their difference.

Not only were the Hebrew prayers and much of the service a mystery to me but the very name of the place puzzled me. Who were the "United Workmen" and what was "Wlodawa?" It was not Hebrew, so perhaps it was Yiddish, which was often spoken between the prayers. Although Dad spoke Yiddish, Mum, who had grown up in an assimilated Dutch-Sephardi background, did not. Dad had made it plain that he did not want his son to speak Yiddish or to grow up with the kind of accent they were always ridiculing on the radio. Consequently, I learnt no Yiddish. The only words of English in the service were the prayer for the Royal Family. For the most part, the service remained incomprehensible to me.

To Dad’s annoyance, I continually requested permission to go outside to the toilet or for a break because I was bored. Outside was where I preferred to be for that was where another part of the mystery was enacted. The boys and girls gathered on the steps. All dressed up, they stood around and looked each other over. Although I was deeply ambivalent about the whole scene, the chasing about and discreet flirting were a lot less boring than the service.

Mum came occasionally and sat in the women's gallery upstairs. When I was small, I was allowed to join her there. I liked this because the women made a fuss of me and I could look down on the undulating white sea of men davening, see the gold-encrusted Torah scrolls in the Ark, and hear the deep melodic chants as they rose to me on high. It was the core of the mystery that really attracted me to the women's gallery. On Yom Kippur, as the Chazan chanted Kol Nidre, the once-again remembered melody etched itself internally. At the end of the holiday, as the shofar wailed it’s penetrating, primitive notes, the old women burst into tears. An emotional wave swept over the assembled Jews, some of whom broke down, wailing and beating their breasts. I could not understand this outburst. I looked on uncomprehendingly as women were wracked by sobs. What was it that caused them to react so extremely? What had happened to them? What infinitely deep suffering was there in life? Would I also have to experience it? The ultimate mystery was not this scene that was enacted before my eyes each year, nor the origins of the emotional outburst, but rather the fact that I was a part of it.

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Mum sat in the semi-darkness, a single light illuminating the area where her hands wove in and out as she sewed the hem of a man's jacket. I watched her, eyes squinting, head bent, as she gauged the size of the stitches. The smaller the stitches and the more regular they were, the more she would be paid. It was piece-work but it was quality work.

These suits cost 50 to 100 guineas. It was beyond my comprehension that someone could pay that much for a suit. Mum was an expert seamstress. Her final job was to sew the front edges of the jacket and around the collar. It was necessary that the stitches be so small that they could hardly be seen. Yet the effect of the stitches on the edge must be there to prove that it had been hand sewn. After she had finished, she called me over, and draped the jacket on my shoulders to admire her work. It was like an overcoat on me and we laughed together. I decided that when I grew up, I would one day be rich enough to afford such a suit, but I would never buy one. For if I did someone like Mum would have to sit at home in a dingy, ill-lit room and sew for hours and hours on end.

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Across from my home was a narrow alleyway and on the right-hand corner was a cafe where the workers gathered every day to exchange the latest gossip. Dad went there most days to argue politics. On the other corner was a closed-up shop where the family of the notorious Stoppo lived.

Stoppo was a large, brash, red-faced man of whom people spoke with a hushed fear. He had two enormous sons and the three of them constituted a formidable gang. Fortunately for the neighborhood, they fought among themselves as often as they did with others. Very often the police were at Stoppo’s separating them from each other or investigating a crime. When they were not fighting, they were washing their cars over which they lavished inordinate care. Beware the unfortunate driver who happened to scratch one of Stoppo's beauties. It puzzled me where they earned enough money to afford such expensive cars since they never seemed to work. This mystery was solved for me many years later when I turned a corner in Soho and came face-to-face with one of Stoppo's son's wives soliciting.

We owned a small mongrel dog named Brownie who had the temperament of many underdogs; he attacked the bigger dogs as if he were their equal. Stoppo owned a huge Alsatian which he also showed off proudly. Whenever the two dogs were in the street at the same time, Brownie went after the Alsatian. Although it was twice Brownie's siz,e the Alsatian always retreated in haste. This infuriated Stoppo who shook his fist at my father.

"You wait you fuckin Jew-boy, I'll get yer one night," he menaced.

"Wassamatta, Stop,” Dad responded. “Why not nah? Afraid like yer mutt?"

They almost came to blows but spent most of the time restraining their dogs. It was lucky for Dad that Stoppo didn't consider it important enough to use the knife that he was rumored to carry on him at all times. Mum spent a lot of her time trying to persuade Dad not to provoke Stoppo.

"Mick, ain't we got enough trouble without you mixin' it with him?" she asked. She also made sure that poor Brownie spent most of the time indoors.

Dad had been an amateur boxer and all-round athlete with the Mile-End Labor Club. He was a short—perhaps even squat--man with a flattened boxer's nose and black, shiny receding hair. One thing that distinguished him was his strength and stamina, resulting from years of outdoor manual work. He was also unusually courageous. He had left school at the age of 12 to be apprenticed to a cabinet-maker and had essentially no formal education. His family had fled from the pogroms in the Ukraine at the turn of the century. He had been brought to England as a baby. Dad had never become a citizen, which he attributed to his poverty during the 1920's when he had become eligible. It was also partly because he distrusted established authority. Officially he was "stateless." He lived in a world that he regarded as oppressive and largely alien and to which the only suitable response was a combative set of firm moral principles. Perhaps it was for this reason that he rarely showed affection towards me. Or was it because he considered it was not manly to do so. Or was there also another reason connected with the mysterious Julian?

Mum told me stories about Dad.

"You won't remember this,” she’d preface, “but when you were a baby I used to wheel you round in the push-chair to where Dad used to work at Kloss and Trusher and he used to come to the window and wave to you."

"Why doesn't he work there now?" I asked.

"Oh, that was years ago,” she said. “He left there because the Union made an agreement with the management to do piece-work. You know, getting paid for each piece separately rather than having a guaranteed wage. Your father said the Union leaders made the agreement in their own interests, and not those of the workers, and he wouldn't go along with it. The Union people, the shop stewards, forced the management to give Dad the sack. Everybody there was upset about it because they knew Dad was a good worker, the managers even apologized to him. But he was stubborn, he always has been."

She told me about Dad’s activities before World War II when Mosley's fascist Blackshirts fought in the streets to gain control. Dad belonged to the Jewish Lads' Brigade,and they went out almost every night after work and fought them. Whoever had a meeting in progress in a public place had the right to continue it. So when the Union Party were going to have a meeting on a street corner, the Jews arrived first. Then, when the Fascists came along, the police had to protect the first group, although often it broke down into violence. Many times they just went and heckled Union Party meetings which usually led to scuffles and beatings.

It came to a head in 1938, the year I was born, when Mosley announced that he and his supporters would march through the heart of the East End. This was clearly a provocation and word went around in the Jewish community, the same rallying cry as used in the Spanish Republic: "They shall not pass!" The police were supposed to protect the rights of the fascists to march. Mosley arrived in an open car to lead the procession. The Blackshirts had assumed the Jews were "law-abiding" and thought they would take it quietly. Their parade got as far as Gardiner's corner in Aldgate and there they were met by a huge crowd that completely blocked the street. The police attacked in riot formation but they couldn't break a way through for the fascists. Heads were smashed on both sides but the Jewish line held. Dad had been there. They had been throwing ball-bearings and marbles to bring down the horses of the mounted police who were riding into the crowd to disperse them. The incident became known as “the battle of Gardiner's corner.” Mosley’s Blackshirts never did get through and had to withdraw which made Mosley look a real fool.

Whenever there was a public celebration or a patriotic event of any sort Dad was the first to put out the flag. I hated this kind of display, but he knew the dangers. He was neither afraid or insulated from the Christian and largely prejudiced and ignorant community surrounding us. He had seen enough to know that it was better not to give them an excuse. So for the Queen's wedding and the Coronation, the ritual of raising the Union Jack from the highest window in the house was repeated. Even at that young age I regarded such displays of loyalty to a distant and alien monarch with skepticism.

I enjoyed the street parties that accompanied the festivities, although I stayed at the back and left the performing to others. As I watched the old dears from the neighborhood getting thoroughly soused on beer and dancing for the umpteenth time to the music of that era—“Knees up muvver Brahn," "Doin' the Lambeth Walk," or "Dahn the Old Kent Road,"—I was both attracted and repelled by their garish vulgarity.

"Look at them make fools of themselves," I thought.

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The bricks were rough. I loved to feel their pitted surfaces and to run my fingers along the gritty row of mortar between them. I stepped from one flagstone to the next in the uneven pavement being careful to avoid the cracks. Each day the walk to school lead me down Brick Lane to Virginia Road. On the corner was a large bomb-site where a whole block of houses had been demolished by a German bomb during the War. I carefully avoided bomb-sites, especially this one.

Across the road on the other corner was the block of flats where my family and I had lived up on the third floor when I had been a kid. It was strange not to live there anymore. I was glad that we had moved away from that dump. Yet, it cried out to me with a warm familiarity. Betty Bloom, my first love, still lived next door. Involuntarily, I pictured the stained green wall next to my bed, pitted and pockmarked with the remains of squashed bugs. My new tricycle had stood next to my bed, its handlebars glistening in the sunlight. Every morning I awoke to a new pattern of light streaming from the curtains illuminating the bare walls. On Gosset Street, which ran next to the building, my mother had grown up in an even worse slum.

Down Virginia Road on my right I passed the prefabs where one of my best friends, George, had lived. They were beginning to tear them down finally so that now the depressing bomb-sites spread on both sides of Virginia Road. Beyond the ruins of the prefabs loomed the dark red brick facade of the Shoreditch Mission Hospital. It evoked a particular kind of dread in me, a mixture of fear and hatred. One cause of my dislike of the hospital was the out-patient's clinic held there early every morning for the woodworkers. I had been there occasionally with minor cuts accompanied by my father. I had seen the results of some terrible accidents. Fingers cut off by band saws, hands gashed with circular saws, arms hanging, men lying on stretchers soaked in blood. That clinic put the fear of death into me. It was hated in the whole neighborhood. It was bad enough to be injured, but an accident serious enough to take a man there could put him off work for a long time. Then his family could face the prospect of slow starvation.

The ball flew over the big, rusty iron gate across from George's home. None of the others wanted to go over and get it. It was scary inside the gate. Since it could not be opened, no-one ever went inside there. With high walls on two sides the gate enclosed a triangular space filled with rubble just as the bombs had left it. Feigning bravery, I volunteered. I climbed the gate my shoes fitting between the uprights. I traversed the diagonals, stepping up one at a time until I reached the top, six feet above the ground. Carefully I stepped over the ominous foot long spikes that guarded the ruin from all intruders. On the other side I descended similarly and quickly stepped from slab to slab until I found the ball nestling in a crevice. I threw it to the boys outside and rapidly retraced my steps. I wanted to get away from that place where I imagined rats crouching in the darkness. Perhaps dead bodies remained encased under my feet, as my father had described them in his stories of the blitz.

Automatically I began climbing up the gate. My arms spread wide as I grasped the spikes and lifted myself to scale the top. Suddenly my feet slipped and I fell. I felt the spike tear into me. My arms lost their strength and I hung there suspended. A film covered my eyes. Dimly I perceived the boys and some others milling around below. I tried to look down, but the spike projected into my chin. I tried to move but could not, because my shirt was pierced by the spike. It held me there, my legs dangling below and my arms uselessly outstretched.

They were shouting at me, but I couldn't understand them. Slowly I moved my head to the side to avoid the spike and looked down. There was blood on my shirt. The spike, which now rested against the side of my head, had entered my shirt on my right side. I was not sure if I could move. Perhaps the spike had pierced my body. Looking down I wished my feet into a foothold and cautiously eased myself up. It didn't hurt so I continued, but I was still attached to the spike. As in a dream I saw myself moving my hands and legs, until I had surmounted the spike and released myself from its piercing hold. Now I stood unsteadily atop the gate looking down on the hazy crowd. Then I turned and slowly transcended the diagonals.

I ran home clutching the dark stain on my side. When my mother saw me, she blanched. She ran back with me to the Hospital, past the gate where I had been suspended. They rushed me into the emergency room and gave me a painful injection with a long needle. I was hanging in space. They put six stitches in me.

"He was lucky," one of the nurses told my mother, "last year we had a boy who fell on one of the spikes and it pierced his chin and he died of lockjaw."

For weeks I sported my bandaged side at school as a badge of courage. But in the privacy of my room I awaited the fateful signs. I imagined that my jaw was hurting and that I could not open it fully. I could not sleep.

"Oh, piercing spike, save me now and evermore from thy wrath,” I intoned.

Every word I uttered was not just a communication, it was an affirmation.

I had been in that Hospital several years before. I had developed a high fever, my bedroom had changed shape in my miasma. It had become somehow elongated, and my mother seemed so far away, unreachable. Everything was expanding and contracting. I was placed on a bed with lights moving over me. Later I discovered I was in the Hospital. I cried for my mother. There were large slogans written on the wall: "Jesus said, 'suffer little children to come unto me'." It was incomprehensible to me why they should want little children to suffer.

Some of the nurses were horrible but one was very nice. One evening, when they had changed my bed and given me fresh linen, they asked me if I wanted to go to the toilet, and I had said no because it embarrassed me. Then after some time I developed a stomach-ache. It would draw too much attention to myself if I called them now so I tried to suppress the feeling. But it got worse. I could no longer control myself and before I could stop I did it. I lifted the sheets to look. There it lay between my legs, a huge brown turd.

I tried to avoid it, to move to the side, but I had to be careful not to attract attention. So I gradually rolled it away from myself. It disgusted me. It smelt so badly. Fortunately it was dry. It seemed to be enormous and I had the distinct impression that it was growing. Oh God, how was I ever going to get rid of it. I would wait until it was dark and then I would sneak it into the toilet. After rolling it a bit further I carefully wiped my fingers on my pajamas. I glanced around to check that no-one was watching my surreptitious movements.

The nurses were making their last rounds before lights out. One of them said she could smell something, and they came towards my bed. I lay rigid with fear, hoping that somehow they would not discover my terrible mistake. The horrible nurse came over to my bed and sniffed. Then she grabbed the covers and yanked them off.

"There it is. I thought so," she exulted.

I covered my face and began to cry. "I couldn't help it, I couldn't help it," I sobbed.

The great turd now lay exposed on the pristine sheet.

"Now we'll have to remake his bed," the nurse shouted.

The whole ward was looking at me.

"You dirty little Jew," she said, "we'll make you eat it!"

The nice nurse came over and remonstrated with her. "Don't say that to the poor kid, he'll believe you mean it."

They took the covers off and pushed them into a hopper they had wheeled over. Then the horrible nurse grabbed me and put me in there too. Then they put the sheet with the turd in it next to me.

"I'll teach you to mess up on clean sheets," the nurse swore as she tried to push me down into the hopper.

I bobbed my head so that she could not catch me so she satisfied herself by slapping me on the head and face as she wheeled me down the middle of the ward to the toilets.

I could not remember everything that happened after that. But I did remember that the nice nurse reappeared and rescued me. She washed and dressed me and returned me to my bed between fresh white sheets. She tried to assuage the nameless sense of loss that consumed me.

It was my secret. My parents did not know about it, at least I believed so, since I never told them. As long as it remained my secret I could live with the memory of it and try to pretend it had never happened. Thinking about that Hospital, as I did every day that I passed it, I realized that it held a particular fear for me even before that terrible experience. I remembered my parents' anxious discussions with the doctor when I had had the fever. They had not wanted me to be taken to that hospital.

"We don't want 'im t'go there,” Mum said. “What abaht Bethnal Green Hospital? Anywhere but there."

Mum had cried. I could not understand why but I felt the fear expressed in her tone.

"We have no choice," the doctor had insisted, and left them in no doubt that he had decided the matter.

Thinking about it, over and over again, I realized that there was some deeper reason that had been responsible for my parents' fear of that hospital. In some inexplicable way, without ever having been told, I divined that the hospital was in some way connected with "Julian." Each morning as I entered Virginia Road Primary School, I glanced over my shoulder at the dark, threatening edifice of the hospital looming behind me. Buried deep within my being, in a place so secret and sensitive that I dared not acknowledge it, even to myself, was the inchoate understanding that Julian had been my brother.

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### Mick

Crowded into the aperture of my bedroom window was a furniture workshop, an apartment building, a large tree, and a church steeple. Each afternoon, the whine of the saws and the rasp of the planers fought my thoughts. Instead of doing my homework I hunched over my books and intently examined the view. The workshop was two stories, up to the level of my bedroom window. To get to the workshop one had to cross our little concrete backyard past the outside toilet. The doorway through the intervening wall was flanked high with planks of wood.

The back of the block of flats was across to my right. I watched the inhabitants on their tiny balconies hanging laundry, sweeping or lounging. They were sufficiently far away that they reminded me of caged animals, strange creatures accepting their confines. It occurred to me that they might be watching me and thinking similar thoughts.

To the left behind the workshop, and masking most of the church, was the tree. It was the only one for some distance around and I felt myself fortunate to have it. For long periods I sat mesmerized by the metachronal rhythm of its leaves, and I dreamed strangely. Watching the tree, my eyes were naturally drawn up to the tall spire of the church that stood behind it, dominating the scene.

Dad was constantly in and out through the back door using the machines and arguing loudly with the men working there. Many of them were Irish and most of them were bigoted. They argued with him about religion and politics amid great bouts of swearing and cursing. Nevertheless, they all seemed to enjoy these sessions, and I thought they grudgingly respected him for his lone obstinacy. One day he became very excited when he read in the newspaper that the Mayor of Dublin was a Jew and that he had led the St. Patrick's Day Parade in New York City. Dad quickly tore the article out of the paper and raced around the back to tell them about it.

I had heard many stories about Dad’s exploits as an air-raid warden during World War II. Apart from his routine job of making sure lights were kept out and listening to many tales of people signaling the enemy planes, he was involved in many fights while patrolling the streets of the East End. The area was full of Blackshirts in the first few years of the War, and they came in gangs to "throw the Jews out" of the shelters, particularly during air-raids. The Blackshirts had infiltrated the Civil defense and the Police. In one notorious case, a police sergeant in Bow kept a photograph of Hitler in his office until he was forced to take it down.

During the blitz, life became chancy. The doodlebugs and buzz-bombs, named with such familiarity in an attempt to neutralize the terror they instilled, flew overhead then went silent. At that moment, people were doomed. One day during daylight, a large apartment block opposite Shoreditch Church received a direct hit and many people were killed or buried. Hundreds of people labored for days to clear the rubble and unearth survivors. Dad went for days without sleep, coming home filthy and in a state of collapse.

On another occasion several incendiary bombs fell on the church which stood behind my home. The fire brigade was called but they refused to go into the church fearing the collapse of the smoldering roof. The one-legged vicar stood on the church steps and appealed frantically to them to save his church, but to no avail. Dad arrived with a young helper as the representatives of the Civil Defense. Taking their hand-pump and a bucket of water, they went into the Church and climbed the narrow spiral staircase to the roof. Thick smoke swirled around them from the incendiaries smoldering in the rafters. If the rafters had collapsed the two of them would have fallen. They managed to dislodge some of the bombs, which fell with a crash into the pews far below. Other fires they managed to put out.

Some incendiaries still burned. They ran back down to the street. Dad saw a bucket of sand being carried into the church. He grabbed it and raced up again to the roof where he dumped sand on the glowing beams only to see another fire flare up. With no more sand or water, he looked around desperately for something with which to staunch the flames. Then impulsively he yanked his tin hat off his head and shoved it down on the smoldering glow. His efforts stopped the roof from catching fire and saved the church. The vicar was beside himself with gratitude and offered my father anything he wanted for saving his church. All my father requested was a tricycle for me. For many years I rode that tricycle around the neighborhood but few guessed the story of how I had acquired it. For that action, my father was also awarded a medal; for some reason he never received it.

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VJ Day, 1945, Victory against Japan. The celebration of the final victory in the World War against tyranny. The swirling crowds commemorated the end of hostilities. There were fireworks and dancing and singing in the streets. Liberty and good had prevailed over evil. The whole family had gathered in my home after the street party at the bomb-site across the street. This included my maternal grandparents and most of Mum’s brothers and sisters, their spouses, and some of my cousins. Everyone was dressed in their best clothes for the occasion. Dad had been persuaded to buy himself a new white shirt. It was nice to be all together, forgetting family squabbles, and ignoring jealousies over who was poorer and who was better off. As usual, Aunt Essie let the children sit in her lap and play with her dangling golden pendants. She and Uncle Ivor were the only ones who owned a car.

All the children were to sleep on the floor in the front room and the babies were put to bed early there. Unable to sleep, the children hung out of the window, excited by the spectacle of the huge bonfire burning in the center of the bomb-site across the street. It was an historic occasion: The War was finally over and we had survived.

By the early hours of the morning, the crowd had thinned to a few dedicated revelers. As the time passed, the people in the flats overlooking the bomb-site tired of the noise. They too had celebrated but were now exhausted. The children needed sleep. At first cautiously, so as not to be considered spoilsports, and then more persistently, they called down for peace.

On this most auspicious day, the stragglers did not react sympathetically. On the contrary, they shouted abuse back at those who would curtail their pleasure.

"Why, don't yer mind yer own bloody business," someone yelled. "'Oo the bloody 'ell do they fink they are."

Unexpectedly from below came the yell that the people who were complaining were Jews.

"They're a load a Jew-bastards, thassa trouble," a voice exclaimed.

"Yeah, fuckin’ Jews wot ain't done no fightin’," another added vehemently.

Suddenly a brick was hurled, then another. Soon any window from which someone complained was a target.

One brick smashed through the window into my room where the babies were sleeping. Miraculously no one was harmed,even though glass was all over the crib.

"Lousy fascist bastards,” Dad cursed from the window to those below. “Go back to Germany where you belong."

That unleashed another barrage of rocks at the window. The small crowd remaining below taunted the cowardly Jews.

"Come on Jew-boy, what yer afraid of, come dahn an’ make us keep quiet," they jeered derisively.

Dad went alone to meet the challenge.

It was a horribly unequal fight. Two men and one woman were the protagonists. They violently attacked him while others stood around to watch the sport. Jews leaned from their broken windows above to see the show. But beating him proved harder than they had expected, and the struggle continued for some time. All three men were battered and bleeding. Whenever the two men circling Dad looked as if they might break away, the woman urged them on. She was merciless and flailed at his now naked flesh with the heel of her shoe.

I watched in utmost terror from above, powerless to help him. I felt dizzy and gripped the windowsill with all my strength until it hurt. I wished I could fly down and protect him. While I watched, tears poured from my eyes distorting the showers of colorful rockets that lit the night sky in fantastic mockery. Mum screamed hysterically. Only one person from the family group, Aunt Essie in her finery, ran from the room and went to Dad’s aid.

He was almost exhausted. The two men grabbed his arms and dragged him through the now dying bonfire. He managed to stagger out but they surely would not give him another chance. Essie arrived below and attacked them crazily, screaming and punching as if possessed. The two assailants suddenly lost their bravado and backed away, vanishing into the darkness.

From the rubble, beaten and bleeding, Essie lugged him home. As he staggered through the doorway he leaned for a moment against the doorpost. His shoes were burnt, his clothing was in rags, and his flesh was torn. Blood flowed from his wounds and down his face. His new shirt hung in ribbons around his waist.

### Passages

The alarm rang at 4:00 am. It was still dark and very cold. What an effort to get up. We drank a big mug of steaming tea that warmed our insides. We made our sandwiches and heaved into our overcoats. Then out into the misty dawn.

At 5:00 am not many people were about. Figures loomed out of the smog, swathed in scarves and caps and accompanied by the sound of hobnails striking cobblestones. Then they were gone, vanishing back into the mist, and all was quiet save for our own footsteps and breathing.

Above us out of the mist loomed the steeple of Shoreditch Church. Somehow it managed to appear fresh, an incongruous floating Wren fairy cake, despite its patina of soot. I remembered playing in the summer beneath its cool swath of shadow. In front of the Church we caught the bus to Liverpool Street Station. There we entered a small doorway and descended down ringing metal stairs into a black hell-hole of screaming noise and confusion. Engines were being coaled up and steam and sooty smoke were bursting up to the high-arched, blackened roof. People were bustling in every direction.

We pushed our way through in time to catch the 6:15 am to Slough. Once in the train, it was good to relax into the thick warm seats. The journey was made unpleasant by the discomfort of people squashed together. Everyone showed evidence of tiredness, yawning or closing their eyes, heads lolling. I watched the monotonous ugliness of the passing scenery. Squalid backyards stretched endlessly. Once in Slough, we extricated ourselves and rushed to another platform. To catch the local train to Marlow, we had to pass through dark, dank, echoing tunnels. I hated these tunnels; they were confining. I was glad to have an excuse to run through them to catch the train. The train was pulled by an ancient engine that was popularly known as "the Marlow donkey."

The "donkey" rumbled into the countryside, rocking back and forth down the single track. As we passed through woods, branches came within reach, and tranquil meadows slid slowly by. It was warm now, and when we finally reached Marlow, we took off our overcoats, stretched ourselves, and marched off down the green-hedged lane towards Aaron Brother's new factory.

Once again there were few people about, and as I strode I daydreamed of living a life of leisure among such idyllic surroundings. That feeling had long vanished when, after a hard day's work, we wended our weary way homewards. We retraced our steps back to the narrow, bleak, confining streets from whence we had come.

Sometimes, if there was time, we would visit Uncle Abe's shop for a cup of tea and a chat. Abe’s shop was tucked away down a narrow alleyway off Middlesex Street, across Bishopsgate from Liverpool Street Station. Normally such a location would have spelt ruin for any business. In Abe’s case there was no worry about that. The shop was situated on a corner at the intersection of two alleys that were short cuts between the main roads. It was a tiny hole of a place, dingy on the outside, but within it glowed with treasure.

Abe ran a watch and jewelry store. Two old watchmakers actually sat by a long window performing their art. People who passed by outside stopped to glance at them. Uncle Abe had done this work too before his eyesight gave out. The window gave them more light to see than the dark shop interior from which they were separated by a wooden and curtained partition. They wore tiny magnifying glasses attached to their spectacle frames and with tiny tools they manipulated screws that were almost invisible to the naked eye.

Inside, the store was quite unbelievable. Silver candelabras, gold bracelets, metal plates, trophies, and shiny articles of all descriptions were stacked almost to the ceiling. Cabinets and open cupboards overflowed with this treasure. Between the counter and the partition separating the watch-repairers it was only just wide enough for two people to squeeze by one another. It was always crowded.

On Sunday, this area was the center of the old gold and silver section of the market which sprawled through much of the East End. People stood on the pavements or set up small stalls hawking and trading silver cutlery or whatever else came to hand. To check the authenticity of their sterling silver, or the value of an old brooch that looked as if it had been lying in a ditch for a hundred years, a prospective buyer would invariably bring the object into "honest Abe's" for a quick but reliable test. They knew they could trust Abe; his shop had been there for as long as anyone could remember.

Uncle Abe and Auntie Debbie lived, like most of my relatives on Dad’s side, in the posh area of north-west London. Occasionally my family would make the pilgrimage there, involving several changes of bus and underground train. To me it seemed like a journey to another planet. Once, when I was very young, passing through sunny green fields while seated on the top-deck of a double-decker bus, I gave vent to the view.

"this is the best part of the world," I revealed.

My favorite aunt and uncle, Leah and Sid, lived in Golders Green. When we went there, I was always on my best behavior, almost reverent. The sumptuousness of their house and its furnishings overwhelmed me. Their beautiful garden was a sharp contrast to my own backyard. Usually I was by myself in their house, since they had no young children, and I would stand for what seemed to be hours just watching the trains on the viaduct which overlooked their garden, entering and leaving Golders Green Station.

When I became bored with that I would sit alone in the room with French windows and look at the books in their library. This was a collection of leather-covered tomes with matching gold lettering on the spines that were kept in a glass-doored cabinet. It included a multi-volume encyclopedia, the complete works of H. G. Wells, and a series about the World War II. It became a ritual for me to sit browsing for hours through these volumes and I looked forward in eager anticipation to these visits.

At home, I had no such books. My family simply could not afford them. From one visit to the next, it appeared as if the books were hardly disturbed. So, I concluded that they existed as a special God-sent favor for me. I learnt so much from them, about the wonders of the world, the battles of the war, the destruction of the Jews, and the power of the imagination in the writings of Wells. I also unconsciously connected the books with the affluence of the house. Perhaps the inaccessibility of those books added greatly to the fascination their contents exercised over me.

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The face stared up at me from the photograph, intense, solemn, slightly unfocused. The stare was direct, transfixing, yet somehow distracted. It was as if he knew: "I exist while this picture is being taken, then I will cease to exist. One day you will look at this picture and you will wonder how it felt." His intense stare haunted me. He had been one of my Dutch cousins on Mum’s side. Now he was a photograph, the only evidence that a whole family had once existed. They had lived in The Hague and Amsterdam, and before the War had occasionally visited England. During the war, they had all disappeared, murdered by the Germans. Fifty-one men, women and children.

How had it felt? How had it been for my cousin? Somehow the intensity in his dark gaze communicated to me in great urgency: "Live for me too," it said. "Live for all of us. Do not know ease uncaringly, Live life to the full for all of us. We will be there looking over your shoulder. But, do not be disturbed, we are part of you, and you of us."

Involuntarily I shuddered, "Julian. Is this how Julian would have looked...?"

Only one member of the Dutch family had survived. She had been packed inside a cattle car on its way into Germany when a detachment of British paratroopers dropped near the railway lines. They floated from the sky like a dream, great white billowing mushrooms with fiery orange stalks. They stopped the train, killed the German guards, and released the prisoners. It was a miracle. The rest of the family had been transported into oblivion, murdered at Auschwitz. She returned to Amsterdam but in a matter of days their house had been ransacked and shattered. What the Germans had not confiscated, the Dutch rushed in to take. Every moveable object was removed. Even the stairways and the paneling were torn down to burn for firewood. She was brought to England and lived among us, a silent witness.

Years before, my parents had taken me to a film at the Odeon. I couldn't remember the name of the film but one persisitent memory stayed with me from that night. After the movie, as we were leaving the cinema the news came on. It was Pathe’ News which invariably started with an insipid report about the Queen. It was dubbed “pathetic news.” Usually we stayed to watch it. This time my parents seemed in a hurry to leave. They engaged in quiet but animated conversation. Naturally, as we walked up the sloping aisle, I turned to see what would be coming up on the screen.

,Dad leaned over me in the darkness of the cinema and warned insistently.

I looked up anxiously at Dad’s face bathed in flickering images.

"Why not?" I asked.

For answer, my father grabbed my arm and squeezed it firmly, while watching me to ensure compliance. We approached the exit. I was petrified. If I disobeyed my stern, biblical father, and turned back, would I be transformed into a pillar of salt?

At the rear of the cinema, we reached the array of doors with push-bars. My parent's urgent conversation was suddenly renewed.

"'e's got to know some time," Mum whispered.

As we pushed the door open, the bar clanged. At that moment, my father released his grasp on my arm. Cautiously, I turned to view the screen, consumed with curiosity. As we went out, as the door closed, I saw on the distant screen a visage of horror. People who were as thin as match sticks moved. People in rags with black and white stripes, bodies in huge piles, bodies being burned, bodies being bulldozed. As a starved residue of humanity moved in slow motion, so the door gradually swung closed on the images of horror. Somehow, I knew they were Jews. There was an inevitability to it. The door closed with a loud clang. But the scenes repeated again and again before my mind's eye.

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### Spe, Labore, Fide

On passing the eleven-plus exam in 1949, I went to Central Foundation Grammar School for Boys, better known as Cowper Street (school motto: *Spe, Labore, Fide*, or “hope, work, faith”), named after the alley it occupied on the periphery of the City of London. The alley in turn was named after the English poet, Cowper, who had written pastoral epics. The name was somehow inappropriate.

On my first day at Cowper Street School an event occurred which, though apparently trivial, nonetheless influenced my life. The new first formers were arranged in serried ranks, resplendent in their navy-blue blazers, with the school badge shining grandly from their pockets. Quiet and overawed by the occasion we were marched, class by class, in single file from the hall to our rooms. It was a lot like prison—gloomy hallways, stairwells covered with bars, the teachers calling, "quick march, no talking."

As we climbed the stairs a Sixth-former, a Prefect, called out, "Cohen, step out here."

I was scared to death. I knew no one there. I was by nature sensitive and to be singled out on the first day before my new schoolmates was a catastrophe. Terrified over what unimaginable offense I had inadvertently committed, I reluctantly left the line and stood before the towering Prefect on the landing.

"Are you Cohen?" he asked.

"Yes sir," I quaked.

"Well, my name is Cohen too,” he said. “We have a tradition in this school that a Cohen must always excel. I want to make sure that you maintain that tradition. Will you give me your word on that?"

"Yes sir, honestly sir, I will try, sir,” I stammered.

"Not try, boy,” Cohen emphasized, “will, will!"

"Yes, sir, I will," I promised.

"Alright, dismissed, but make sure you keep your word," he said.

"Yes sir, thank you, sir," I responded.

I hurriedly inserted myself into the anonymous line snaking up into the dim interior of the school. The Prefect Cohen never spoke to me again but the effect of our brief encounter on me was profound.

Cohen is a Hebrew name. It means priest, but not priest in the modern sense, rather in the biblical sense. The *Cohanim* (Hebrew plural) were the priestly caste who officiated at the rituals of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem. While Cohen is a common name, it is not an ordinary one. It occurs in transliteration in many languages; Kohn in German, Kogan in Russian, and in many variants in English, Cohn, Kahn and so on. Since there were only male priests in the Temple the lineage of *Cohanim* is traced through the male line. In Jewish law, the requirement to be considered a Jew is to have a Jewish mother. So *Cohanim* must always have had a Jewish father and mother. Not all those who call themselves Cohen can by this time be considered true descendants of the biblical priesthood. Some have adopted the name or been given it by ignorant immigration officials unable to spell difficult Yiddish names. Since this lineage has always been considered a privilege among the Jewish people, it is an identification not readily lost or acquired in a close community.

The origins of the caste are described in the latter part of the book of Exodus. During the wanderings in the Sinai and after the incident of the Golden Calf, Moses raised the sons of Levi to be responsible for ministrations to the worship of God. Among the Levites, Aaron was installed as High Priest *(Hacohen Hagadol),* and his descendants remained priests in perpetuity. The third book of the Bible known as Leviticus, describes in minute detail the rituals and responsibilities of the *Cohanim*, even down to the design of the robes they were to wear in the Temple and how they were to be donned.

Certain of the injunctions on the Priests are still followed by Orthodox Jews today, including the proscriptions against a Cohen touching a corpse and marrying a divorced woman. Thus, the lineage has passed down 4000 years to the present. The remains of the huge arch over which the Priests entered the Temple compound from the City of Jerusalem in biblical times can still be seen. It is known as Wilson's arch after the British archaeologist who rediscovered it in 1867 and is adjacent to the remainder of the outer retaining wall of the Temple compound. This is the Wailing Wall, or more correctly the Western Wall, that became a holy site to Jews as the last visible vestige of the Great Temple in Jerusalem after its total destruction by the Romans.

A few Cohens have achieved prominence in modern times although perhaps not as great as the place their ancestors occupied in Jewish lore. Lord Cohen of Birkenhead was raised to the peerage for his work in authoring the first comprehensive National Insurance System in the United Kingdom. Sheldon Cohen was Commissioner of the IRS under President Lyndon Johnson. Leonard Cohen is a well-known Canadian lyricist and poet. Morris Abraham Cohen, known as "Two-Gun" Cohen, rose from obscurity in the East End of London to become a General in the Chinese Army!

Dad’s family had come from Zhitomir in the Ukraine. I knew little of the story of their exodus. It was not something he liked to talk about. The family had set out as refugees after the pogrom in Kishinev in 1905. My paternal grandfather had been a vintner with an ice cellar full of spirits. He had sold everything and it had been enough to bribe some peasants to take them across the frozen no-man's land of swamp and forest between Poland and Russia. They were at the mercy of the peasants, many of whom were known to delight in leading Jews to the police after relieving them of their funds. But these peasants hid them, and even carried the small children on their shoulders during the long, hard crossing. Not all were pogromists. Once safely across the border, they made their way to Danzig and caught a boat as far away as they could afford. They arrived in London in 1906 when my father was two-years-old.

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"You boys, what do you think you're doing. Stop that noise, line up, stand to attention!" yelled the deputy headmaster.

We had entered the school about 10 minutes late which was not unusual considering the length of time it took from Woburn House where we went for Kosher meals. To get to Euston, we had to change buses at the Angel, Islington, and often the buses were delayed. In truth, we rarely rushed ourselves. It was fun to be out of school during the day, even if only for a short while. Now, though, we had been caught not only late but laughing. It was a serious matter. Mr. Hollings, the Deputy Headmaster was not in the habit of taking such things lightly.

He postured before us, wearing his customary brown tweed jacket, the pipe sticking out of the top pocket. He swept his hand over his bald head in dramatic gesture. We stood in fearful expectation.

"What am I to do with you?" he repeated rhetorically.

The old founders gazed down upon us in mute condemnation.,

"You Jewish boys are more trouble than you're worth,”. he pontificated. “You will be suspended from traveling to your kosher meals for two weeks. Now go to your classes, quickly and quietly."

When Dad heard the news he practically exploded. It was not that we were religious, not that we kept all the dietary laws, but that this teacher had no right to decide that we could not eat meals according to our religion. The punishment was not appropriate to the crime. Dad saw him as a tin-pot dictator. In vain did I argue that Mr. Hollings was not an anti-Semite merely an insensitive Christian. He had usually been so fair in the past.

First thing the next day I took a poll among those who had been in the group with me. Of the nine who had been caught by Hollings, only one other boy had been told to protest the verdict. According to my father's instructions, I went to the Headmaster's office, the ante-room of the holy-of holies. I approached the desk and stood there until the secretary noticed me.

"Yes, what do you want?" she asked.

"My father would like to have an appointment with the Headmaster,” I said.

"What about may I ask?" she asked.

"Uh, the matter is private,” I responded hesitatingly.

"Well, when does he wish to see the Headmaster?" she queried.

"Tomorrow morning,” I demurred.

"My dear boy, that's impossible,” she said, eyeing me closely.

"My father said to tell the Headmaster that he will be here after Assembly tomorrow and he expects to be seen," I stammered.

"Oh, he does, does he?" she questioned.

"Yes,” I said, “because it’s urgent."

"Why is it so urgent?" she asked.

"Well,” I began tentatively, “it’s because...I didn't eat any lunch today, because of Mr. Hollings, and...I won't be able to until the Headmaster sees my father."

The next morning Dad took off work and went with me to school a little later than usual, after Assembly. As it turned out, he was the only parent to actively oppose Hollings' dictum. Muttering imprecations to himself, "'Oo does 'e fink 'e is, bloody little 'itler," he followed me into the office. The secretary was expecting him,

"Oh, yes," she said archly, "the Headmaster will see you now," and she ushered him into the study.

I sat on the hard bench by the door.

I could hear their voices murmuring through the thick door. Hollings, his gown billowing, blustered in and swept past me, tapped on the door, and opened it.

"Yes, do join us," came the headmaster’s mellifluous tones, as Hollings entered the room and closed the door behind him.

The noise level of the conversation rose. Apart from the secretary busying herself, all was quiet. I thought I could hear shouts but I may have imagined it. I thought of Dad, dressed in his usual workmen's clothes, and the Head, so polished and suave, and Hollings, the epitome of polite arrogance, and I wished the earth would open and swallow me.

Break came and the door to the hallway was opened and closed as people came and went. During break, boys stood outside the door waiting for an opportunity to peer in and see the condemned. Break finished and still the murmuring inside went on. The clock on the wall audibly ticked the minutes away. Suddenly the door to the study opened and Dad and Mr. Hollings appeared. They were chatting quite amiably. They stood in the well of the office.

"Being a woodworker must be such satisfying work,"

Dad was unable to understand, or perhaps to accept, the subtle messages conveyed by that condescending remark. Then incredibly, Mr. Hollings took my father's hand and shook it. In a moment we were outside in the hallway.

Break over, all was quiet while classes were in session.

"What happened?" I demanded insistently.

"You can come 'ome for lunch each day,” Dad replied.

"Oh,” I puzzled. “You mean I can't go to Woburn House, but I don't have to eat the food here."

"Yes, it’s a compromise," he explained. "You, and the other boys can go 'ome, as long as you can get back within the 'our. You can tell 'em that. And 'e apologized for 'is 'asty decision.”

"Mr. Hollings apologized to you?" I asked incredulously.

"Yeah, 'e was wrong an 'e admitted it," Dad stated.

"But he wouldn't reverse himself," I pondered.

"I didn't ask 'im too,” Dad admitted. “I knew 'e couldn't."

"So," I responded happily, "I can come home for lunch today."

His hand alighted gently on my shoulder. "Yeah, now go to your classes, spiv."

Embarrassment mixed with admiration. How did he do it?

"Thanks, Dad," I said as I ran towards my next class.

A rare moment of intimacy passed between us. I looked back and saw Dad’s back disappear down the gloomy corridor.

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“” "Stupid message. Why should I waste my time with their idiotic trivia?”

With a sense of frustration, I practically threw myself down the stairs. I enjoyed doing that. It was a sensation like flying. Then it happened. My heart skipped a beat and began to pound very rapidly. In mid-flight I grabbed hold of the railing and arrested my descent. My heart felt as if it would explode, a terrifying sensation. My consciousness flickered like a fluorescent light when you enter a dark room and turn the switch. Everything is perfectly clear for an instant and then they flicker off, and for a moment nothing exists except your awareness of being. Specks of light flashed across my vision as I stared down into the dark stairwell. I held tightly onto the bars with both hands while my heart continued pounding alarmingly. It was racing like a locomotive at full throttle....

“Oh... mum… why me... now... falling… down... darkness… no… hold on... heart... so fast... what is it... call help... no-one... Julian... what will they do if... I... too… cold...”

A cold sensation struck me, and I suddenly realized that my forehead had leaned against the bars. I was thinking a bit more coherently now. Whatever was happening to me physically, and it was terrifying, I was still there. Adrenaline screamed through my brain as I desperately tried to maintain hold on reality. I gripped the railings with all my strength so that my knuckles were white. The pressure and the cold against my forehead gave me a sensation of stability in the unreal and harrowing experience. Inchoate thoughts of death and revelation swept my mind. Why was it happening, I continued to ask, while my heart changed my perception of time and existence? Then just as suddenly as it had started, it stopped.

My heart skipped again and resumed its normal rate. I straightened my furrowed head from the bars and looked around self-consciously. No one was looking. No one was there. No one had seen. How long had it lasted? I realized that I was still gripping the railings and feeling foolish, quickly let go. My face felt hot and I was gasping as if I had just run a long race. Apart from that, I felt all right. Then, as I began to slowly descend the stairs, I realized how exhausted I was. It was an experiment in re-living.

As I neared the bottom of the stairs, the bell rang for class-change and the corridor erupted into activity. Teachers began entering and leaving the teacher's common room. Mr. Hollings swept out in his usual determined manner. Something clicked in my memory. Yes, I had a message for Mr. Hollings. I called out, "Mr. Hollings, Mr. Hollings," and trailed after him along the corridor in the wake of his pipe smoke.

"Yes, what is it boy!" to ask.

"I have a message for you from Mr. Griffin," I said.

"Well, where is it?” he asked. “Cohen isn't it. Look lively."

I felt around in my pocket, remembering an ancient event, and fished out the missive.

"Here it is, Sir."

Hollings grabbed it in a sweeping gesture and strode off without hesitation.

“He’s a different species," I thought dispiritedly. "How could I tell him about that!"

"Palpitations," the doctor declared authoritatively. “They'll go away as you get older."

Once named, the experience was reduced to acceptability. With official permission I now shunned gym, sport or any vigorous exercise. Any sudden movement could trigger the palpitations. They were caused by an arrhythmia between the auricles and ventricles, the doctor informed me at my next quarterly check-up at the London Hospital. I was hooked into strange, huge machines and was given foul-tasting substances to drink while the doctors viewed my living heart in an incandescent glow. They taught me how to stop the palpitations once they had started. The most effective method was to press my thumb into the pulsating jugular vein in my neck. It was frightening to half-strangle myself. I became more introspective and withdrawn. While other boys played games, I pondered the meaning of life and death. I was sure my father was disappointed in me. He had expected to have a son who would like sports. Perhaps he would have preferred Julian.

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### Nightmares

*...I jumped slowly down onto the floor. He heard me and turned very, very slowly. As I sprang up, although slightly unbalanced, my training enabled me to punch him hard on the side of his head. His peaked cap flew off. We fell together, and as we did I smashed my fist twice into his rib-cage. He was taken completely by surprise. The sound of our fall was muffled by the straw on the floor of the barn. It was a barn. Raising my head I listened intently. Everything was quiet except for the distant sound of men's voices. He lay still. Guttural shouts. Quickly now, I risked a glance through a slat. They were milling about by the farmhouse in their long gray coats. They would miss him soon. I looked at him lying there. I had a few minutes. It seemed to take an eternity as I undressed him and put on the hated uniform. It fitted quite well; we were both of medium build. I pulled the body into the hay. I had watched as they had arrived and as he had strode alone towards the barn, towards my hiding place. Now with my heart pounding I pulled the barn door open and strode firmly towards his car. The black uniform and the peaked cap with its death head emblem made me seem much taller.*

*As he saw me coming, the Sergeant shouted orders and the men began to climb back into the trucks. Although I could speak German fluently, I had to avoid speaking directly to the Sergeant. I opened the door and slipped into my staff car next to the driver. I averted my head, but he hardly glanced at me. The Sergeant came towards me. I merely waved my hand forward and the driver gunned the engine. The Sergeant raced to climb back into his seat in the cab of the first truck. The driver was too busy to notice me. He had driven for so many officers. The car pulled back onto the road. With the soldiers loudly singing patriotic songs behind us, we continued our journey.*

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About this time, as a teenager, I became obsessed with the Holocaust. I read anything that I could get my hands on about it. I needed to know all the details, what would it have actually been like to be there, to be part of it. Raul Hilberg’s *The Destruction of the European Jews* became my bible. I read it secretly as if I was part of a conspiracy and no-one else should know about my involvement in it. How could one communicate the seriousness, even the sanctity, of this subject to mere school friends, and certainly not to parents? At first I dreamt of escape, of cheating the German Nazi system, but gradually I came to accept the fate of the victim.

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*...I jumped down onto the floor. I caught his head with my knee. After we hit the floor he lay still. It was lucky for me because I had no training in close combat. How could I have, there was no time. The soldiers were searching the apartments. They would soon miss their officer. I ran to the stairs. They were on the landing, coming up. I ran back into the room and took his gun. He began to stir, his eyes opened, and we stared at each other. I could have shot him, but it would have drawn their attention. I ran to the window, but there was no escape. Behind me the officer shouted for help and dived for the door. Once again, I did not shoot.*

*Soldiers rushed in. I dropped the gun to the floor. The officer returned. Only he knew that I could have killed him. The soldiers surrounded me with guns leveled. The officer stared at me for an instant, then gave the order. I was led away. My heart was pounding. Finally, they had caught me.*

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“Oh, Henry," the high-pitched wail sailed across the classroom.

"Yes, Minnie," came the Goonish reply.

Mr. Rabinowitz swung sharply around, causing his skull-cap to slide across his bald, shiny head. In characteristic gesture, he grabbed at it with his left hand while pointing the chalk in his right hand at the class full of Jewish boys. The sound had interrupted his familiar initial ritual after entering the room, ostensibly to educate his charges in the finer points of their religious heritage. Namely, he had been writing upon the blackboard a list of those expected to misbehave. It was by now considered a matter of honor to be included in this elite list, and so as the name of each miscreant was added a faint cheer was heard, "Lazarus (cheer), Bronson (cheer), Cohen (cheer)..."

Something in the tone of the sound, a certain contempt for things respectable and wholesome, had set off a nerve in him. On the verge of hysteria, a result of all his previous sufferings at our hands, he stepped off the platform and moved towards the row of desks, the chalk pointed before him as if it would help him divine the culprit.

"Who made that noise," he demanded. "The boy must own up or we cannot continue."

No response apart from some nervous tittering. He seemed to control his impulse and turned, as if to return to the blackboard.

"God," came the wailing reply, just as he swung back in time to see the lips of the guilty one still in motion.

With unusual ferocity he pounced and pulled me to my feet by my ear.

"So," he shouted, "a blasphemer too!"

In his fury he pulled me to the front of the class. "I'm going to give you a note that you will take immediately to the headmaster."

I stood there, *shtum*.

Outside, the corridor had an other-wordly feeling with the hum of learning seeping from under closed doors. Slowly I descended the dark, resounding staircase. I faltered outside the Head's office but then entered. The secretary busied herself on the far side of the large, sunlit room. I stood before the wide, wooden counter until she deigned to notice me.

"Yes, what do you want?" she asked.

"I have a note to give to the Headmaster from Mr. Rabinowitz."

"Give it to me and wait," she said.

She took the note but continued to busy herself.

"Gray haired hag," I thought.

Eventually she knocked on the inner door to the Head's study, and entered as the muffled response came.

"You may go in now," she announced.

I shuffled into the inner sanctum. It smelt of fresh tobacco and the carpet was plush beneath my feet. The Headmaster gazed at me in infinite majesty.

"Cohen, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yes, sir,” I demurred.

“I have this urgent missive from Mr. Rabinowitz,” he said. “He says that you have been continually disruptive, and that today you made disturbing noises and were blasphemous. What have you to say for yourself?"

I stared earnestly at the magisterial face noting the deep, ingrained lines, the white smooth hair, the bright blue eyes, but remained non-committal.

"Why do you boys misbehave with Mr. Rabinowitz more than with any other teacher?” he asked. “Aren't you interested in your own religion?"

It was too hard to explain. Thoughts jumbled in my head: "he's one of us, he can't control us, we don't fear him." But I mumbled, "I don't know, sir."

"Well you understand that I have to make an example of you. Stand there.” the Head explained, pointing to a spot on the carpet. "Turn towards the fireplace and place your hands upon the table. Now bend over."

I found myself examining the intricate oriental pattern in the carpet in minute detail. I heard the measured ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece before me. Behind me I heard the Headmaster moving around, then the faint swish as he practiced his swing.

"I can assure you that this will hurt, Cohen,” he said. “I trust it will be good for you in the long run. Normally I would give five whacks for this offense, but since you did not try to justify yourself, I will only dispense three. Now pull up your jacket, boy and stretch your pants tight, that's right. Now, are you ready?"

Thwack, it came down into me.

Thwack, again it reverberated,

Thwack.!

"Alright Cohen, stand up now.” he said. “You may recover in the anteroom and then rejoin your class. Don't let me see you here again or next time it will be five whacks. Dismissed."

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The pains in my side gradually worsened until I was doubled up and feverish. Appendicitis! An ambulance rushed me to hospital. Nightmare visions invaded my groping consciousness. Across from me, our beds perpendicular, an old Chinese man lay moaning, arms flailing. Nurses surrounded his bed with screens. I watched fascinated by the magnified patterns of sinuous shadows cast by the bed light. In the dark ward, the arm-butterflies fluttered their last summer. I watched as the old man died alone in a strange land. I slipped deeper into nothingness.

.*..I was thrown down onto the floor of the van. There were several other people lying there. The tumbrel. Orders were shouted: “Speaking or moving suddenly will result in immediate execution.” The soldiers stood around the van, guns ready, sitting against the wooden surround. We were driven with shrieking sirens through the town to The Fortress. As we came to a jolting stop, the gates were already closing behind us. The soldiers jumped down. The sirens stopped. The engine was cut. There was an eerie silence.*

*In the cell, two guards stripped and beat me. Then they dragged me down to a white-tiled, brightly lit cellar, and strapped me to a table. They asked me questions I could not understand. They tortured me. The pain was excruciating. I passed out. They revived me. Every part of me hurt with a strange dull tearing. I lay in a mixture of blood, saliva and excrement. Time was eternal. My reality became one palpitating scream*....

My side was hurting. They had operated on me without my knowing. Two nurses came and awoke me and washed me in bed. They talked softly to each other as they matter-of-factly turned me and stroked my smooth skin.

"Where am I?" I asked, fearing the answer.

"This is St. Elizabeth's Hospital on Bow Road," one of the nurses answered.

I suppressed the question forming in my mind, “who am I?” but said instead, "Oh, never heard of it."

"Well, it's not really much of a hospital," she smiled. “Your mother will be here soon. She was here yesterday, but you were still delirious. How are you feeling now?"

"My side hurts,” I answered.

"They took out your appendix."

Once again, the thought crossed my mind. *Why me? Why did I survive? Is Julian in me, or am I in him?*

Mum was relieved to see me sitting up in bed. She told me that I had blood poisoning and it would take some time for me to recover. I would have to eat carefully and rest.

In my weakened state I suffered a recurrence of bad nosebleeds. One day my nose bled so profusely that a doctor had to be called. He stuffed gauze up my nostrils distending them. But the blood continued to flow down my throat and I began to gag. He removed the gauze, and behind it came a huge, long, slithery, red snake. Parasite. The snake-clot plopped into the white bowl and swam around in the red pool.

The next day I was examined by an ENT doctor who recommended that they cauterize the capillaries. I received an injection to deaden the pain. Then the doctor took the gun-like instrument and inserted it into my nostril. The doctor burnt off the offending tissue. I felt nothing. I could see the whiff of smoke rising from inside myself and I could smell the sweet stench of burning flesh. It stayed with me for days. I lay immobile, unable to eat.

"'Ow are yer, spiv?" Dad asked using his favorite greeting.

We chatted about this and that. He brought my books and latest schoolwork. It was a pleasure that we did not argue. Since the food was atrocious, my family usually brought me supplements like Mum’s chicken. Usually I hated it but now it was like nectar. I became used to the routine in the hospital.

There were three nurses I liked. Stubby Gwen Jones from Merthyr Tyddfyll, buxom Barbara Hughes, and beautiful Nurse London. Gwen was married but flirted with everyone. Barbara was blond and single and all the older men chased her. Nurse London was young and virtuous and a few of the younger patients talked with her with feverish eyes aglow. The men in the ward took a fatherly attitude towards me since I was the youngest. They gave me their opinions about life and sex. I was their sounding board and a Jewish man named Jeff, who walked with a stick, taught me to play poker.

As I recovered, I began to feel part of the life of the place. As Nurse Barbara was leaning across my bed one day, I kissed her lightly on the cheek. She looked at me in surprise, and I blushed deeply as she said, "cheeky devil," then laughed her fetching laugh. One afternoon the fooling around erupted as a group of men chased Barbara and cornered her. She giggled a lot while they all had a "nice feel up."

"She was asking for it," was the consensus.

My interest aroused, I would sneak out to the nurse's station in the night to spy on them. One evening, Gwen took me into the laundry room and in the dark we fell into the laundry basket. We laughed and fooled around but I was not sure what was expected of me. As I became more adventurous, Gwen recovered her composure and reminded me that after all she was a married woman.

The other ward on the floor was a geriatric ward full of senile old men waiting to die. Other nurses worked there but often I would push the medicine cart through both wards. As we passed by, the old men would moan and groan incomprehensibly. Sometimes a nurse or a volunteer would give one a drink from a special cup with a spout. The nurses talked rudely to the old men, most of whom could not understand or answer back.

Nurse London remained aloof from the general light-hearted fooling around that went on in the ward. When she, a new nurse, was put on night duty, one young man named Hank, announced to the ward that she was his and everyone else better lay off. Hank had straight blond hair that fell across his forehead that he was continually pushing away in an effeminate gesture. Each night he went to the nurse's station to chat up Nurse London. I spied on them as the representative of the ward and had to report back any progress. Most of the time they were talking, so the men nodded wisely, "playing hard to get."

Finally, Nurse London succumbed. I could not find them. I searched the whole area—the laundry room, the medicine closet. Then with trepidation I slowly eased open the door to the geriatric ward and entered. The odor of decay hit me. The intermittent groans of the old men were mingled with another sound, a rhythmic, jouncing, springing sound. In the pale moonlight slanted across the darkened ward I could just make out their figures on a bed. They were “doing it!” I slipped out as quietly as I could to tell the men the good news. Somehow I was dejected. It was not me and never would be me with Nurse London. As I walked along the short, dark corridor, the elevator door slid open spilling light and the matron stepped out.

"What are you doing wandering around at this time of night, young man?" she asked sharply.

"Oh, I was ...going for a walk," I said.

"Well, get to bed immediately, and don't let me catch you out here again,” she exclaimed.

"Yes, Ma'am."

As I quickened my steps towards the ward, I saw the matron turn into the empty nurse's station. She too would search for Nurse London. When I returned, I told the men my story and they too seemed overcome with an air of sadness. Mostly older men, they had followed vicariously, as had I, the campaign for Nurse London. Sometime later Hank returned furtively to his bed. Nurse London was never seen again.

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...the doors were slammed shut and we were sealed in. The nightmare journey began. Hundreds of people were pressed so tightly together that it was almost impossible to move. Some collapsed but could not fall down. Women panicked hysterically, children screamed, and men cried out. As the train rumbled through the verdant German countryside, in the black, fetid interior of each cattle-car, people died....

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I was sent to convalesce at the Jewish Convalescence Home at Walton-on-Naze. It was a big mansion that stood on the edge of a high cliff. There were many old people there who sat around in deck chairs all day, "taking the breezes." I went for long, lonely hikes along the cliff-top overlooking the dark green sea. For some distance there was grass and bushes but that soon gave way to sparse shrubs and I approached the very edge of the cliff and looked down at the waves striking the beach far below. The further I walked along the Naze headland, the more desolate it became. I watched the big liners on the horizon plying between Harwich and the Hook-of-Holland. I had never experienced such solitude. I stood alone on the cliff-top with the briny wind tugging at my thin clothing.

I feared the sea. Every summer my family had vacationed at Margate. The swimming pool there was a huge open semi-circular barrier that trapped some of the sea. When I was very young, I had waded in the paddling pool there. In the main pool, on the tamed sea, rode great black and orange rubber dinghies, reminders of the War. They dotted the smooth, glistening surface. I begged Dad for a ride in one of them. I wanted to be like the older boys who waved nonchalantly to their families from the remote dinghies. Finally, against Mum’s protests, Dad took me on his back and swam with me to an orange dinghy in the middle of the pool. Close up it rode higher in the water than I had expected. I could not manage to climb onto it so my father lifted me and threw me over the side into the unseen circular enclosure.

Down, down I went. I struggled and twisted, but my screams for help brought only stinging response. Upwards, towards the light, the air. But, thrashing unavailingly I fell back into the deep, salty embrace. Water filling my throat, darkness, fear.

Dad, swimming away, turned, expecting to see my smiling face, was puzzled.

"'Ere mister, that dinghy ain't got no bottom," someone yelled.

Dad swam back and dived desperately beneath the orange circle. He found me struggling weakly in the water and sped with me to the surface. He lifted my head out of the water but I only gurgled. So he threw me face downwards onto the side of the dinghy and, jumping up beside me, began slapping my back. I threw up water, spewing and gasping. Gradually my breathing eased and my white color began to change to a bright red. Eventually Dad swam with me back to the safety of the shore.

Some of the older men at the Jewish convalescence home took charge of me. They regaled me with stories of their sexual exploits. The Home was divided into two wings, one for men and the other for women. But the men there were not interested in the women patients, they were after the young *shikse* nurses. Benny, a particularly dissolute young man, regularly went on drunken sprees in Walton, breaking the curfew. In quick succession he “laid” two of the younger nurses. One night, an older nurse delivered him back to the ward in a completely drunken stupor. She said she had come across him wandering around in town unable to take care of himself. Later he told us that she had taken him home and seduced him before bringing him back. Benny had an irresistible attraction for the opposite sex but he was far from handsome. With a cigarette always poised between his fingers, the smoke coiling into his eyes and causing a perpetual dark squint, Benny exhaled a vulnerable, desperate air.

One evening it turned out that Benny had made a date with both of his young nurses at the same time. So he took me along. The four of us sat on the edge of the cliff as the sun went down. Benny made his choice, put his arm around one of the girls, said "so long," and walked off.

“Remember, faint heart never won fair lady,”. he told me.

Left alone with me, the other girl began to cry. It was, after all, ridiculous, she was probably 18 and I was 14. I put my arm around her for consolation and we walked for a while along the cliff. I knew that nothing was going to happen and so after a reasonable time we parted. When I returned to the ward the men wanted to know what had happened but I refused to answer.

Several days later, a young girl did arrive at the Home and the old ladies who doted on me immediately brought us together. Her name was Hazel and she was plump, white-skinned and withdrawn. Diffidently we shared hospital stories. Feeling that the time had come, and not having any particular fear of Hazel, I invited her for a walk along the cliff. I decided to show her my hiding place. I had found a small, rusty gate within the bushes along the cliff-edge. Behind it a short serpentine path descended directly to the cliff top. Below was a sheer drop and to the south, the town of Walton was immaculately laid out. In front was the sea and behind the thick bushes we could hide from the view of passing strollers. It was an ideal location. We lay together in the grass. Playfully I stroked her. Suddenly she grabbed me. She was stronger and more passionate than I had imagined. She allowed me to feel her small, white breasts but that was all. Nevertheless, I felt a surge of adrenaline and I was quite fascinated by this glimpse of the strange objects.

Soon I would be leaving. The next Sunday, my parents came up for the last time. A special coach brought them from the station. A whole group arrived in a festive atmosphere. Among them was the family of one of the old ladies who liked me and was always giving me my favorite chocolate. She called me over and introduced me to her granddaughter, Sonia. I was struck dumb. The vision I saw before me was a beautiful, well-developed young girl, wearing a woolly, tightly clinging yellow sweater. It emphasized the shape of her curvaceous body. She shook my hand and when she did her own hand and arm were quite limp. She said "hullo" to me in a playful throaty voice. The effect on me was electric; I was totally smitten. All the family and my parents stood around smiling knowingly, and I hated them all. I turned from her and escaped but could not help glancing back to see her again. Later, when the families were having tea in the lounge, I managed to sit near Sonia. We chatted about school; she came from Golders Green, and I mentioned that I had family living there. Time was running shor, and I desperately wanted to see her again. But how to manage it?

Everyone was saying their goodbyes. I decided on the spur of the moment to ride down to the station in the coach and return by bus. The coach was full and I contrived to stand next to Sonia. Oh, my senses were so acute but my mouth was so dumb. In a fit of embarrassment, I asked her to go out with me. I was due to leave the Home next weekend, I told her, and I could meet her the weekend after that, if she wanted to. She casually agreed. My heart leaped. I arranged to meet her at Golders Green Station that next Saturday at 7:00 p.m. With an aching emptiness inside, I said goodbye to her.

When I returned to the Home, Hazel was waiting for me. She was furious that I had flirted with that outrageous girl and had ignored her all day. She said she would never speak to me again. Events were happening too fast.

I had assumed that my date with Sonia, my first date, was a secret, but soon after I arrived home it transpired that my parents knew about it. Apparently, Sonia had told her parents who had passed the word along. I was embarrassed but was insistent that I would go. On the appointed day I rode the familiar journey to Golders Green with my savings clasped firmly in my pocket. I arrived early and waited for a long time but she didn't show up. After an hour and a half, I returned home, depressed at the result of my first foray into a strange new world.

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*...After so many days that we lost count. After three days without water, the train came to a halt again. People cried out for water. This time the doors suddenly slid open to reveal a blinding bright light. There were shouts of* Juden raus*, and* schnell, schnell! *At last, the journey was over. On aching limbs those of us still alive moved our weary bodies to the door. The blazing lights were totally blinding. We jumped down and scrambled up the slope. Anxiously I kept close to Dad in the crowd and took his hand. Guards with guns and dogs stood silhouetted above us. Prisoners in tattered, striped uniforms with clubs went among the people forcing them to move, taking away their parcels and cases by force, and beating them. Now that my eyes were becoming accustomed to the lights I looked ahead and behind me, and saw that we were part of a multitude, straggling towards some unknown destination...*

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### Brothers in Adversity

The four of us sat at desks by the window in the corner of the classroom. George Georgeopoulos pulled out his album. The rest of the boys were outside in the schoolyard. It was forbidden to stay inside during break but we ignored such proscriptions. In the yard boys could be seen examining albums, exchanging and selling stamps. But George's album contained a different commodity. He was showing pornographic pictures of young girls.

George was a Greek-Cypriot who lived in the heavily Greek area of Islington. The two others were Barry Brisser and James d'Arcy. Like me, Barry was a Jewish boy from the East End. James came from an upper-crust family that traced its descent back to the Huguenots who had settled in southern England in the 1700s to escape religious persecution at the hands of the French. While our backgrounds and environments seemed as different as could possibly be, nevertheless a strange bond had developed between us which even we did not fully understand. We were not really friends but brothers in adversity.

Barry was a big, bumbling boy with bright ginger curly hair. His father had died two years before from kidney failure. It had been a great shock for Barry because his father had been a rough and tumble man, a cab driver who went through life without a seeming care in the world. He would always dash into the fray if any rough-stuff broke out and he always drank too heavily. During World War II, as a combat soldier, he had volunteered for the most dangerous missions, feeling a personal vocation to kill as many Germans as possible. Woe betide anyone who made an anti-Semitic remark in his presence. He was not one of the polite, educated Jews who can always rationalize an insult. When he was lying on the stretcher waiting to be wheeled in for the operation to remove one of his kidneys, a patient who was leaving the ward had walked by, suitcase in hand, and seeing him lying there waiting for surgery had announced to the world, "kosher kidney for dinner tonight!" Barry's father, half-dazed from the injection, had clambered off the stretcher and changed the smirk on the man's face into a startled grimace. The fight was brief;, the man ended back in the hospital with a broken jaw. Barry's father was charged with assault and his operation had to be postponed, which worsened his condition.

James was always impeccably dressed and affected the air of confidant superiority which distinguishes the British upper class from lesser orders of men. He had a light complexion with pale translucent skin and staring blue eyes which gave him a gaunt, intense appearance. There was something quite odd about his cold detachment. Some might have put it down to snobbery but in reality it derived from misanthropy; simply put, James hated his fellow man. He had come by this peculiar outlook as a result of his father's second marriage. His father was a successful surgeon with a practice in the exclusive Park Lane area of London who felt that he had married beneath himself. He treated James' mother with contempt, and at the earliest opportunity he jettisoned her for a more suitable spouse. His father had sued and obtained custody of James. Unfortunately, James hated his stepmother.

His stepmother always gave preference to her own younger daughter over James. There was constant warfare between them which James's father was impotent to change. James blamed his father and his stepmother for depriving him of his mother's love. His father had ensured that his mother would not be around to negatively influence the proper upbringing of his son by paying her fare to Australia. His stepmother was a very religious woman and prayed daily for the love that Jesus might bring into the steely heart of her errant stepson. James dismissed this as hypocritical cant. Was she not the one who had driven love from him? Of course, he never discussed his feelings with anyone openly; it was not proper to do so, and it would have been an admission of weakness.

James' school career had been a disaster. Although precocious in his knowledge of many subjects as a result of many lonely hours spent in his father's library, especially biology and medicine, James had been expelled from two private schools. His attitude towards teachers was one of disdainful contempt. If one of them made a mistake, James would publicly embarrass him. James was obnoxious and ignored attempts to discipline him. He preferred to be isolated from a hateful world. Thus it was that he had ended up in my school, on the edge of the City of London, mixing with Jews and Greeks.

George's family had emigrated from Cyprus to Britain to escape the violence that pervaded their island home. Five years earlier, George had witnessed the gunning down of his older brother, Stavros, as he was driving into their village outside Larnaca. Whether it had been the Turks or the British had never been cleared up. His parents had heeded the message and to save their second son they had moved far away from war and violence. A seed of savagery had been implanted in George's heart. Where was vengeance to be had, where could surcease be found that could bring him relief from the image, ever fresh in his memory of his brother's bleeding body lying there on the dusty ground. One way that George found relief was in his ferocious sexual appetite, or as he explained, “banging British birds.” He was handsome in a dark, swarthy way. He treated women with contempt and the more he did so, the more they flocked to him, their lithe little bodies and flowing blond hair offered up on the alter of his hatred.

In the course of time he had amassed quite an album of poses, some of which, tattered and worn, were covered in brown layers of dried semen. Generally, it would cost five shillings to look at George's album, but for his few friends it was free. We were the only ones he trusted, the only ones whom he judged as serious in our resistance to authority.

A few weeks later an event affected my coterie of friends. During break one day Barry Brisser was at bat playing cricket. A group of boys gathered round and started to heckle him. When he missed a ball, the leader of this group, a particularly loud-mouthed braggart, shouted for all to hear, "Brisser the pisser missed again."

Barry came towards the boy ith a look in his eyes which should have stopped the kid right there.

"Jews can never hit straight," the boy shouted, goaded on by cries of, "Ginger, you're barmy."

Barry came toward him, swung the cricket back behind him and brought it smashing down into the side of his head. The boy went down like a ten-pin, the side of his head white where skin had been stripped off. The crowd of boys fell silent and backed away from the two of them. The teacher on duty came running to see what had happened and administered first aid to the fallen boy while he sent someone to call an ambulance. Barry just stood there nonchalantly, the bat resting carelessly on his shoulder.

Fortunately, the boy suffered only a minor concussion, and after a few weeks recovered his speech and vision almost completely. After holding an inquiry, the Headmaster decided that in the best interests of the school, he would suspend both of them for three months.

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*After what seemed an eternity we came towards a raised wooden platform. On this, and in front of it stood several SS Officers. I could identify them by their black uniforms and I could even see the skull emblem on their peaked caps. They loitered and chatted. Before the platform a group of SS Guards were selecting some people out of the line and sending them to the other side of the platform.*

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After much nagging from my mother I went to Brady Boys' Club. I felt like an outsider, but I joined an art class, played table tennis, and became involved in discussions. The worst part was walking home through the depths of the East End in the dark. It was eerie. The lights reflected off the wet roads like elongated brilliant feathers. There were two ways to cross the railway lines which went into Liverpool Street station, either through the underpass on Brick Lane just near the old Shoreditch underground station or on the overpass off Cheshire Street. Both were particularly ill-lit, dingy places. I would usually run across the narrow wooden overpass, although sometimes I would chance the underpass. It was longer and darker and usually there were drunks lurking in the shadows. But I walked past them trying to pretend they did not exist. I began to go to the dances held each Saturday night at the Club, or at the nearby Brady Girl's club.

I would often arrange to meet some of the boys from school there. I discovered the joy of dressing up for these occasions and I spent hours engrossed in my appearance. I looked at myself in the mirror from all angles, thinking, "I'm so ugly, how could any girl want to dance with me. My nose is too long, my lips are too thick, my skin is greasy. But, my hair isn't too bad, and my eyes are deep, black eyes." I spent hours combing my abundant, dark curly hair into a fashionable "bit" projecting from my forehead, although I would have strongly denied any such pretense. While deeply self-conscious about my appearance, after much heart-searching I decided that I would not allow this to rule my life.

At one particular dance, I was chagrined to find myself alone, that is alone in a crowd. I wandered around trying to look as if I were going somewhere. I noticed a beautiful girl. I had seen her before, and someone had remarked that she was “easy.” She was very popular. No doubt she noticed me wandering around her, trying to pluck up courage to ask her to dance. Like most of the others she would probably say, "no." They usually smiled and said it dismissively as if they were too busy with some more important event. I approached her obliquely and managed to time it just right, getting there just as the music started, but before anyone else. To my great surprise she said, "Yes." We danced and exchanged the usual trivia. Her name was Janice, and she was pleasant, and smiled as we chatted and whirled. The next number was a fast one and before she left I asked her to jive with me. This was my specialty, the rhythm and lack of formal steps made it easier. I had had a few dancing lessons from my aunt and uncle in Manor House but the only time I ever practiced, because the whole thing seemed slightly ridiculous, was when I was in the elevator going up to their apartment.

She really was very good-looking, much more than any girl I had ever been that close too. It affected me but I found it easier to interact with her than I had expected. Another boy was hanging around and asked her to dance but she refused and stood next to me. We continued talking and dancing. Pretty soon, I decided I must take the plunge. It was so trite, but that was the way the game was played,

"Can I take you home after the dance?" I asked tentatively.

"OK, I'll have to tell my friend, but, yes I'd like that," she answered.

I was over-joyed! Wait till the others heard about this. I glowed in eager anticipation. The other boy kept hanging around and again asked her to dance but she refused and had some words with him.

"Why don't you leave me alone!" she pleaded.

I tried to ignore it although the boy, a nasty-looking guy wearing a fashionable narrow tie, glared angrily at me. Then as the evening was coming to a close, I went to the toilet and arranged to meet her in the hallway.

The boy who had been bothering Janice came over to me in the toilet.

"You better leave 'er alone, whatsyername, she's my girl," he said.

"I'm taking her home," I said innocently.

"Oh, you are are yer,” he threatened. “Naw look 'ere. She's been goin out wiv me an I ain't lettin no-one else take 'er 'ome."

He stood in front of me as I turned around and zipped my fly. I managed to dart out behind him and rushed through the crowd to retrieve my coat. Janice was standing waiting for me in the hallway. I grabbed her arm and rushed her out while telling her about the encounter. When we got outside narrow tie was waiting there with some of his friends.

As I came down the steps, they surrounded me. Narrow tie confronted me.

"I told you ter leave 'er alone," he said.

"Look, I'm just taking her home." I demurred.

"Me an me mates, don't want yer to," he said.

I wished that I had some mates to help me out of this predicament.

Suddenly Janice, who had been momentarily forgotten, pushed her way into the circle of miscreants and grabbed my arm.

"You mind your own business," she said to them, trying to drag me out of the group.

Narrow Tie grabbed my lapels in imitation of a gangster and shoved his fist in my face. He wore a large showy ring.

"See this, if you takes 'er 'ome you'll feel it," he menaced.

A crowd was gathering outside, blocking the way down the steps. One of the chaperones pushed his way through.

"What's going on here," he shouted.

"Nuffin, mate, nuffin," the yobos, responded. Narrow Tie released his grip, and under Janice's power I was dragged away.

We walked briskly down the street and up to Whitechapel High Street, with the gang following behind shouting and jeering. I thought feverishly but came up with no plan. At this point I couldn't abandon her, so I began to accept the fact that I would have to fight and presumably be beaten up.

When we arrived at the main road, I suggested we go to Johnny Isaac's fish and chip shop across the road, staying with the crowd. The garish neon lights suffused the gray dull paving stones with brittle reflections. Inside we bought fish and chips and mingled, with the gang taking up a corner nearby. Then I had an idea. Janice went home by bus in the direction on the opposite side of the road. What if we waited for a bus to come by on this side of the road? Did Janice think she could run for it when it stopped at the nearby lights?

"Sure," she grinned. She liked the idea.

We made our way towards the exit, looking out for a bus on this side of the road, while the group of boys watched and shouted remarks.

A bus came by as the lights turned red.

"Not yet," I said, as calculating the time it would take us to reach the bus and the delay in the lights changing.

Suddenly it seemed to be right to me.

"Now, but slowly," I said.

We walked out of the door and I glanced behind to see that the boys were beginning to follow us again.

"OK, run," I shouted at Janice.

I ran as fast as I could. It wasn't far and I was soon jumping onto the platform and grabbing the pole. Behind me I saw Janice going slowly and the boys beginning to break from the shop behind her. Janice stopped, pulled off her high-heeled shoes and sprinted to the bus. I felt it lurch.

"Come on, come on!" I shouted.

She made it just as the bus began to pull away. I pulled her behind me and stood ready to repel any of the others if they were quick enough. The bus pulled away fas, and they peeled off, shaking their fists.

"You wait, we'll get yer,” they shouted.

Fortunately, the next stop was well down the road. We rode as far as Aldgate and went into a coffee bar to have an espresso. Luckily, I had a few shillings on me though it barely sufficed.

Then we went into the underground at Aldgate East and took one of the last trains to Mile End. From there we found a bus which took us part of the way, and then walked through the back streets to her house. It was already very late.

I longed to be able to touch this beautiful young woman beside me but all I was allowed to do was put my arm around her back or her shoulder. When we arrived at her house, it was completely dark. I drew her to me and we kissed. My whole body responded.

"Thank you for being so brave and saving me," she said.

"Oh, you’re welcome,” I said. Was she poking fun at me? “Can I see you next week."

"I'm not sure," she responded.

"Can I call you during the week," I asked, trying to find a way past this stab of rejection.

"No, it’s better if you don't"

"I'll meet you at the dance then," I stated.

"Yeah," she answered hesitantly.

"I enjoyed meeting you," I said self-destructively.

"Goodnight."

Walking back alone in the dark I cursed my fate. I had saved a beautiful maiden but all I had to show for it was a goodnight kiss. Was I not good-looking enough, not aggressive enough? She had really chosen a nice patsy. A muggings, who would risk himself to save her. And what for? The unkept promise of herself. Would she be there next week? Would I see her again? I doubted it.

I realized that it was well past my own time to be home. My father had decreed that I must be in by 11:30 p.m., which meant midnight at the outside. I had no watch, but I knew it must be later than that already. I walked back to the main road. It was almost deserted. The last trains had gone, and few buses were still running. I started walking in the direction of home. I knew the way approximately, but I decided to stick with the main roads for safety, even though it might take longer.

After some time, when no bus had come, I decided to cut through to Cambridge Heath Road, because I thought an all-night bus ran along there. The side streets criss-crossed each other in random meaningless patterns. I found the main road and consulted the chart on the bus-stop. There was an all-night bus but I decided it was pointless waiting there for it so I continued walking. It was very late now and I was getting frantic and sweaty. I had plenty of time to think over the events of the evening. I did not regret what had happened. It would make a good story for the boys. I had not really been brave. In fact I had been shit-scared. But it had worked out looking as if I had been brave. What I hated was making myself vulnerable. Giving her the option of accepting or rejecting me based on this one night’s events. Yet I was always among the first to push myself into circumstances like these, in spite of myself.

A bus came slowly along, a brightly lit beacon. There was no bus-stop nearby, so I waved it down and luckily the driver stopped. It made me feel better, even though I had walked most of the way already. The conductor told me it was 1:45 a.m., and after taking my fare went back to his conversation with an old beery drunk.

Finally, I reached home and prepared myself for the inevitable argument. I opened the door as quietly as possible, then took off my shoes and crept up the stairs on tiptoe. The stairs made incredibly loud creaking sounds. The light on the landing went on,

"Where 'ave you been?" Dad demanded.

"I took a girl 'ome, and I missed the last bus,” I explained.

“Whaddya mean, missed the last bus,” he glared. , “It’s two bloody am."

"We've been so worried about you," Mum said, appearing behind my father in a white nightgown. In the sudden harsh light her face was red, she had been crying.

"I couldn't help it," I responded, "I didn't know how late it was, but I was alright."

As I spoke I ascended the stairs towards my bedroom, while Dad descended towards me.

"I'm sorry you were worried, but I had quite a good time,” I continued warily.

"I'll bet you did," Dad growled back, working himself up, "but, yer didn't fink of yer muvver worrying abaht yer, did yer?"

We were quite close together now. I could feel the field of his power radiating off his squat body.

"Please in future tell us if you're going to be coming in so late,” Mum said quietly. “I can't stand waiting up for you."

"OK, Mum, but you don't have to wait up for me, honestly you don't."

I slipped by Dad. "Goodnight," I yelled, as I closed the door to my room.

"Goodnight," Dad grudgingly responded.

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*As we shuffled forward, we saw many strange things. An SS Officer picked a little girl dressed in a sweet frou-frou out of the line and lifted her into his arms. He spoke to her reassuringly, but she began to cry for her mother. The SS Officer tired of the game, and carelessly threw the child into the mud. We moved forward in the garish light, the way lit by flickering bonfires receding into the darkness.*

*We passed a corridor of railway ties. On one of them a young man had been crucified. He was still alive, and his lips were still moving. As we stumbled by I tried to look into his face, to let him know that I shared his anguish, but of course I had no way of knowing how he felt. I stared at him and I thought I recognized him, but I was confused. Was it my cousin from Holland...or was it Julian? I looked back to see him hanging there above the poor Jews...*

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One day at school George was caught red-handed with his well-thumbed album and was also brought on the carpet before the Headmaster. In his case, a simple caning was decreed since the Head felt that he had suspended enough boys lately. He only guessed at the root causes of the problems of the boys who had been the objects of his displeasure. He did not recognize any commonality between them.

When Barry returned to school after having a great time roaming the streets, I told him the latest rumor about James. It seemed he had stolen his stepmother's jewelry, withdrawn all his money from the bank and skipped the country. Barry thought it was a pity they had not been able to go together. Although Barry claimed to love his mother, they both knew that she no longer exercised control over him.

The boys in school treated Barry with a certain amount of trepidation. I was the only studious and reasonably well-balanced one in our little group; I gained in notoriety by being identified with Barry, George and James. In retrospect, the complex origins of my own problem seemed minor by comparison. That year I was caned three times and there were many arguments at home. Of course, my parents were unhappy with the group of friends I had fallen in with. But they had only a hazy idea of what was actually going on at school.

Barry and I decided to get even with the Headmaster, and George was eager to help us. At the next annual graduation and prize-giving ceremony we planned to go out with a bang. George procured all the equipment needed, I helped with the technical aspects, but Barry exhibited a mechanical ability and imagination that he disdained to use in the classroom. After several practice sessions at home things were ready for the big event.

On the appointed evening, the boys gathered in their classrooms while their parents filled the auditorium. At the scheduled time, each class was marched in sequence into the gallery where we sat and alternately stood, supposedly quietly, for the remainder of the evening. The prize winners were seated on the side downstairs awaiting their call to glory. During the long, boring speeches, one of the teachers noticed a wire stretched across the auditorium from one side of the balcony to the other. At one end of it was a box covered with a cloth. He had no idea what it was, not having noticed it there before. He leaned over and asked a colleague who glanced up and shrugged. So he pushed it to the back of his mind intending to look into it later. Alas, it would be too late.

As the evening reached its climax, as the Headmaster was about to end his speech before distributing the prizes, as the parents were poised to clap, I slipped my hand into my pocket and pressed a switch. I was sweating and prayed that it would work. The box suspended by wheels from the wire slid out from under the cloth. It ran down the wire until it reached the center of the auditorium, where it was stopped by a small metal contact. A fine wire stretched back from the conveyance. When it stopped, a circuit was completed which actuated a resistor inside the container. While this was happening, people noticed the strange object suspended above their heads. They began to look up and stand in anticipation of something happening. There was a gradual silence. Only the Headmaster's voice was still heard. Suddenly the small container perched above the audience burst into life. Fireworks and crackers went off with a bang. The Headmaster stopped in mid-sentence mouth gaping, dumbfounded. Parents scattered for their lives as the sparks flew, sending chairs in all directions. At first, the boys in the balcony were struck dumb too, then they broke out in waves of laughter and cheering at the audacity of it.

When the fireworks had stopped and the parents had been somewhat calmed, and the cheering gradually died down, the Headmaster remained standing before them, still sputtering. His assistant, Mr. Hollings, stepped forward, and shouted above the din.

"In view of the disgraceful incident we have just witnessed, this ceremony is concluded,” he stated angrily. “The prizes will be distributed individually. We apologize for the inconvenience."

Finally, the Headmaster managed to pull himself together and speak coherently. Red-faced and shaking with anger he waved his clenched fists impotently towards the balcony.

"I'll find the culprits,” he shouted. “I'll find them, and when I do I'll destroy them."

As the boys and parents filed from the Hall, his dire threats could not prevent peals of laughter that still rang out for all to hear.

During the investigation, Barry was a prime suspect. His record was well known, and although no clear proof was forthcoming, he was blamed for the incident. Eventually he owned up, but never told on George or me. I spent several sleepless nights, but in the end, I let him take all the blame. I have never reconciled myself to this decision, but at the time I reasoned why two should be punished in place of one. Barry was expelled before the whole school. But, as he left, after being publicly lectured on his disgraceful conduct, a strange thing happened. A great cheer went up. Barry left there forever, with the cheers of the boys he despised ringing in his ears.

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*...Over the entrance was the slogan "Suffering Ennobles." I tugged at my father's hand and asked him what it meant. He was too tired or distracted to answer. We continued shuffling along in the column of people. It was dark now, between the beacons of light, we might have been on a late stroll. The earth began to slope downward into the entrance of a building whose vague shape loomed before us. My father suddenly bent down to me and pointed with his hand into the sky. I looked up at the piercing stars, so far away, so lifeless. He said something to me, something about death, that we were going to join Julian, my brother, that I should not be scared, that death is part of life...*

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The library was stifling on hot summer afternoons. Most of us could not study at home because there simply was not enough room. The local public library provided an alternative, but in summer it was impossible to concentrate. Boys would wander back and forth exchanging solutions to problems or the latest gossip. There was the usual shushing from the librarian; we usually responded with an even louder shush of own to intimidate them. If a pretty girl walked in, all hell would break loose. On a hot afternoon all sorts of things could happen. That was how the idea for the caper was generated in someone's fervid brain. In a short time it became more of acollective idea and it occupied the attentions of the group more effectively than studying ever could.

Once the basic idea was formulated, each of us was assigned a specific task. It worked out almost naturally, like a military operation without a general**.** For a while, the library was silent in a hush of intense activity. It took three days to get everything together: the photographs of building sites, some clippings from the newspaper, copies of old Russian science exams. The most difficult thing was the paper headed “TOP SECRET.” That problem was soon solved when Al remembered that he knew someone who worked at a printing shop during the summer vacation. Since Phil was the best physicist, he had to type a few stiff problems out on the “TOP SECRET” paper with plenty of equations. Leonard, who was Polishand knew Russian, was chosen to scribble some words on various sheets in Cyrillic. Of course, we all were sworn to secrecy. We tried to avoid touching anything except by the edges. It had to be authentic.

When everyone had their part completed, a meeting was held in the toilets. With alookout posted we discussed the plan of operation. It was deceptively simple.

The following evening during the 5:00 p.m., rush hour, we were discreetly spread around the hallway of the Manor House Underground station. Just after 5:00 p.m., Stan came up the escalator in the midst of the crowd. He hung back until someone was caught without a ticket and was paying the ticket collector. When this happened, the crowd was inevitably held up, but the collector continued to collect tickets with one hand while dealing with the miscreant with the other. This was the most favorable time to slip by without having paid, but morespecifically in this case, it was the best time to unload the goods. He dropped the old, brown briefcase in the middle of the crowd just at the exit. He scurried away. No one seemed to notice. We held our breath, amazed as people just stepped over it.

When the crowd had thinned, we waited impatiently for the ticket collector to investigate, but she hadn't even noticed the briefcase lying there. Was it going to fail? Had all the work and careful planning been in vain? The next trainload of people arrived. One of the first to reach the exit, a middle-aged woman, hesitated, then picked up the nondescript briefcase and handed it to the ticket collector. We had been worried that whoever picked it up might try make off with it. Then we would have had to step in and retrieve it.

We waited with bated breath to see what the ticket collector would do with the prize, but for a long time she just ignored it. It lay in her box while she collected tickets. Then, in a lull between trains, she picked it up and glanced into it. Her expression changed. She looked up and looked around. There wasn't anybody nearby to identify it with. She hurried off to the station-master's office, just as we had expected her to do. That was the signal for us to make ourselves scarce. We left the phone booths and wall-maps that we had been staring at so intently and exited by different routes. We gathered across the road from the main entrance and waited to see what would happen. There were bets on how long it would take for the police to get there. We were all amazed when they were there within a few minutes. Nobody had guessed that they would respond that quickly.

As the first police car came careening up, we dispersed, wandering discreetly to monitor events. After about another five minutes, all hell broke loose. About ten police cars arrived in quick succession. The noise and flashing lights were terrific. Some big brass was escorted down the stairs. Then, to our amazement, they cordoned off the station. It was unheard of to close a station during the rush hour. Apparently, they were carrying out a thorough search. Then the press arrived and more police cars and several plainclothes policemen or agents. The place was absolutely swarming with people and a big crowd developed to see what was going on. It was quite a circus.

Someone reported back that it had been announced on the 6 o'clock news that a package of important documents had been discovered in Manor House Station but it was not known who they belonged to. Would the owner contact the police, the reporter asked! By the late editions of the *Evening Standard,* there was already an item on the front page reporting the finding of a briefcase containing secret documents and the closing of Manor House Station. It was also reported that scientists from the Government research labs at Aldermaston had been called in by the Metropolitan Police to study the documents. Of course, it would not take them long to see that the physics was hardly top secret, and their Russian experts would spot the simple scientific Russian in a flash. As we suspected, the word had got out before they could cover it up. It was a smashing success.

The next morning, the newspapers reported the finding, including particularly the Russian aspect. But the authorities were already questioning the significance of the material. In one or two papers, the reporters speculated that another atom spy had narrowly missed capture and wondered if there was not enough evidence to lead to the culprit. Either that or a Russian courier had got away. However, by noon the BBC no longer mentioned it in their news broadcasts; by the afternoon, papers reported that the authorities were convinced it was a hoax.

One of the more conservative dailies questioned that conclusion and attacked the Government for its lax security and accused them of a cover-up. By the next day, it was definitely labeled a hoax by most of the papers and it was stated that the police were following up leads to capture the perpetrators.

My friends and I had created a three-day wonder. What a diversion. We returned to the hot, stifling library and pored as usual over arcane subjects. Whenever our eyes met, they did so with a glow of triumph.

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I finally plucked up enough courage, and swearing George to utmost secrecy, asked him to set me up with one of his girlies. I paid George the money and we made the arrangements. If my parents had ever found out I would have died. Very carefully I arranged my alibi. That night I would be going out with a group of boys to see a movie. Without a telephone it was easy to fool my parents. I made sure that Mum didn’t know the mothers of any of the boys I said I was going with. I also picked a movie that my parents would not see that was showing at a cinema far enough away so that it would cover the time I hoped to be out.

On the appointed night, I took a bus to The Angel, Islington. Following George's directions, I found the alley. It was drizzling and dark with only an occasional lamp post. The cobblestones were slippery. Paving stones sloped towards the center of the narrow passageway. At the end, the alley was closed off to traffic by a pair of bollards which were old cannons fixed vertically with a cannon ball stuck into their sealed muzzles. It felt cold and slimy to my touch. I passed between these sentinels into the dark abyss that I imagined awaited me beyond. Finding the number, I mounted the steps, and was just about to knock on the door when I remembered that this was a rooming house. I glanced around. No one I knew would be found in this God-forsaken place.

A panic gripped me, but I controlled it. I remembered the fantasies I had carefully nurtured over this oft-imagined event. It was too late to turn back now. I pushed the door open and entered the hallway. It was a dark corridor with a light at the end by the stairs. There was a strong smell of cabbage that I associated with poor Christian houses. Walking carefully to avoid the prams and bicycles I made my way to the stairs, listening carefully to the distant noises of radios and sudden outbursts of shouting. I ascended the squeaking stairs to the first floor landing and found room 203 on a ceramic ellipse affixed to the door. My hand shook. My whole body shook as I gently tapped my knuckles on the door. There was still time to turn back. Why not even now turn and run? No one would know except George, and the girl who was supposedly inside the room. Suppose she wasn't even there. Then I could get my money back and George would have to apologize. I heard no sound in response to my knock. Emboldened, I knocked slightly louder. Aain there was no noise to indicate that anyone was inside the room. Gingerly I grasped the doorknob, slowly turned it and opened the door.

The room was small and quite bare. There was a small light with a thick shade next to an old bed to the left. I entered the room with the conviction, perhaps the hope, that no one was there. That no girl was waiting for me.

"Shut the door then,” she said quietly. The smile that had begun to cross my face froze.

"Oh, yes, hullo," I responded weakly.

There was no turning back now. I carefully pushed the door closed behind me. I could not take my eyes off her now. How had I not seem her immediately? Had I been blinded? She was half-sitting on the side of the bed away from me. She was fully dressed. I had expected her to be nude or posed in a provocative way. It was cold in the room and she had her coat on. She was young and blond.

I was rooted to the spot. My fear had until now banished my earlier sexual feelings about this situation but now I felt the stirrings within me. For several minutes I stood there and watched her as I felt my erection growing. The fear that I had had of not being able to have an erection had been forgotten.

"You gonna stand there all night then?" she asked.

"Naw," I said.

I walked to the bed, not sure what was expected of me. George had said the girl would bring a contraceptive which saved me the worry of how I would acquire one. But I could not bring myself to ask for any other advice from George.

"This your first time then?" she aksed.

"Naw, well yeah, it is,” I embarrassedly answered. “Did George tell you?"

"Nah, I can see for meself,” she said. “Why don't yer take yer coat off then?"

"You too. It's kind of cold in here."

"Yeah there's never any heating in these places," she stated.

I stood across the bed from her. I was quaking inside. I studied her now that I was closer. She had coarse pimpled features with a smudge of make-up that made her look older than her teenage years. Her dark blonde hair hung in straight skeins. She stood up and removed her coat. Then she came around the bed and watched me remove my coat. She embraced me and we fell together onto the soft folds of my longings**.**

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*We entered a large wooden building. Inside were signs "to the showers." Prisoners shouted that we should undress and leave our clothes on the hooks. We were going to be showered and disinfected. They said to remember your number to retrieve your clothes later. It was very cold. People covered themselves with their arms, as we shuffled towards the other end of the large unevenly lit room. Some shouted, others muttered,*

*"Why do they treat us like this, like animals."*

*"Jews, prepare to die with dignity."*

*"No-one comes back for their clothes, those bastards!"*

*I was embarrassed. I had never seen naked women before. I tried to look away, but it was too late for such petty concerns. At the exit guards with rifles and bayonets pushed the people forward.*

*"Keep moving." I lost sight of my father. I pushed to get ahead but I could not reach him. We were herded down a slope, downwards into the dark earth. I thought that I could occasionally glimpse him trudging before me, but I could not reach him. I began to panic. I was pushed along by the crush of the people.*

*The passageway narrowed until it was possible to touch both sides. It smelt horribly down there. People panicked in the narrow defile, but there was no way to go except forward. The dank tunnel took a sudden turn, and went downwards more sharply, like a chute. Fear welled up in me. I tried to hold onto the walls, but they were slick, and the bottom of the chute was slick with the blood and excrement of previous victims. People fell or were pushed into the chute. I put my arms around my head and slid down. The walls tore at my elbows and my legs. Sharply I hit a wall, and then saw below me a red circle. The circle gradually became bigger, and I realized that I was falling into it. I pushed my arms and legs against the sides of the chute, but to no avail. I crashed down onto the concrete floor. My arms protected my head, but my body was numb. Slowly I turned my head and saw a man silhouetted against a blinding light.*

*He is leaning on a long pole. Beyond me another man is carrying something, a body. He lifts it with both hands and impales it on a hook. The hook is moving, it is part of a conveyor belt. In the few instants after hitting the floor I have perceived these things. And I notice that both men are wearing open shirts and braces. It is very hot, I realize, near the fire. I lie there helpless and see the man lift the mallet. I scream. When I recover consciousness I feel terrible pain enveloping me. I see that I am suspended on a hook, moving inexorably towards the searing flames....*

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### France, 1958

We left Paris via the Porte d'Italie, hitch-hiking south. I had a rucksack on my back and Barry carried a hold-all. We felt slightly ridiculous when, for the first time, we stuck our thumbs tentatively into the air. To our surprise, we were quickly given a lift, then another, and found ourselves dropped at a circle on the main route south from Versailles.

After several fruitless hours it began to rain heavily. We stood disconsolately under the trees until we were so soaked it didn't matter anymore. La Belle France. An army car with two American soldiers in it pulled up just beyond us, and one of the soldiers got out and beckoned to us. We began to run towards the car, but as we did so he hopped back in and the car pulled a bit further away from us. The soldier got back out and beckoned again. We relieved our frustration in abuse.

Several hours later, with no sign of a lift and the rain easing off, we decided to walk. We slogged on for about ten miles in the sweltering afternoon. At the first opportunity, we took a side road a mile or so into a nearby village. Everything was closed. We knocked at the door of a restaurant and managed to indicate that we were famished. We received a sandwich containing a runny, gross smelling cheese, which we dubbed 'old sock,' and terrible strong coffee in a bowl. Having no other choice, we returned to the highroad. Miraculously at dusk, a small van stopped. The driver asked us where we were from, and upon hearing England, he became friendly. He opened the back doors and ushered us in. It was some kind of ambulance, perhaps of a veterinarian.

He dropped us off in the middle of the night in a small town. It was now freezing cold. We wandered around for a while but could find no place to stay, so we continued trying to get a lift. After a while we gave that up and found some park benches and tried to sleep, but it proved impossible. To keep warm, we decided to walk and crossed a bridge over a rushing river that took us back to the main route again. Once more we tried our chances with the few cars speeding south at that time of night and once again luck was with us. A smart couple in a sleek, black Citroen stopped and we were on our way again. The young woman asked us questions about our backgrounds but when our French proved to be unequal to an extended conversation, she lost interest and went to sleep. As dawn was breaking the driver pulled over to the roadside and told us to get out. We had no idea where we were. We stood for several hours in the broiling sun while hundreds of cars flashed by.

We decided to do something we had been warned against: we began waving money at the trucks that sped past. After some time, one braked and eased to a stop some yards up the road. We ran towards it. A big, burly driver, with massive forearms climbed down from the rig. He stated his terms and we negotiated with him in a mixture of schoolboy French and sign language. There was not much communication, except that we agreed to pay 1,500 Francs, 500 down and the rest when we arrived in Marseilles. The driver wanted to put our bags in the back of the huge truck, but we demurred. We decided it would be safer to keep them with us. We climbed into the cab, which had only one passenger seat. We took turns sitting on the engine cowling. Through the night we rode in the cramped, mobile hell.

We were dozing fitfully somewhere south of Lyon when the driver turned off onto a secondary road and eventually pulled into a gas station. When the roar of the engine was stilled, it was a great relief. We were too tired to climb down and just rested there with the window open, high above the entrance to the office at the back of the station. Inside, the driver was smoking a cigarette and chatting with a man who was wearing a suit and who we took to be the manager. An attendant was meanwhile filling the truck and its spare gas cans. The entrance to the office was covered with a screen of hanging bead strings in the local style. We relaxed and listened to the sound of the crickets and the murmur of voices rising and falling.

Suddenly, Barry leaned across to me and whispered, “Did you hear what they were saying?"

I hadn’t been listening, but now I strained my ears and a few words came through the tired filter of my brain.

"...cinq kilometres... valises... seulement deux..." It made no sense to me.

"I think they're planning to rob us!" Barry whispered insistently.

That made me jolt up. The two men seemed to be having a quiet argument which was going back and forth. It appeared that the manager was trying to persuade the driver of something.

Maybe they were discussing the latest cricket scores but a pattern did seem to emerge from the snatches of conversation that drifted up to us. We could clearly see the two men, the driver leaning against the counter smoking thoughtfully. Could it be true? They were planning to drive five kilometers up the road, take our bags and money and leave us. The discussion seemed to center on what they would do if we resisted, with the manager repeating, "...ils sont seulement deux..."

Barry and I stared at each other in fear. My instinct was to jump down and make a run for it but Barry cautioned that we might be safer up there in the cab. We forced ourselves to calmly and quietly consider the alternatives. Even if we were wrong, it made no sense to trust going with him further. Could we get to a phone? None was visible, and who to call? If we stayed in the gas station, we might be robbed then and there. The best course seemed to make a dash for it to the road and try to wave down a passing car. But we watched and very few cars went by. We could wait no longer, and as casually as possible we climbed down, as if to stretch our legs. Barry passed down the bags, and quickly we began to walk towards the road. We agreed that if necessary, we would each run for it in opposite directions. Only now did the tanker that was pulled across our path loom as a major obstacle.

The two men came running from the office, the driver shouting.

"Nous somme fatigue... hotel... " I tried to explain.

The driver was having none of it. He grabbed my arm, and the attendant came running over, too. The driver demanded his money. I decided we had no choice but to pay, and while they were preoccupied counting it, I shouted to Barry, "lets go!" and we broke for the road. We stumbled along at a trot back in the direction we had come, thinking we had passed through a town just down the road. Barry was angry that I had paid up the full amount, and we were just starting to argue when Barry pointed back towards the gas station. A black Citroen, which had been parked there, turned out of the station in our direction. It moved very slowly towards us with its headlights full on.

The road dipped to the left under a railway bridge. Barry and I turned from the road and ran quickly through the stubble and up the embankment. We dropped into the underbrush as the car went by and passed slowly under the bridge. Deciding not to risk returning to the road, we stepped over the flimsy fence and began to cross the railroad lines. There were many sets of track and we realized that it must be the main line south from Lyon. We reached the other side and saw across from us the lights of a large factory. As we approached, we heard the loud pulsating roar of huge machines. It was a cement works. Although there were lights on, there was no sign of life. We began to circle the building. There was no entrance and the place was deserted. On the right was a line of old houses.

Suddenly a dog began to bark at us and an old crone appeared behind a fence. She eyed us distrustfully.

"Ou est un hotel?" wbut she showed no sign of comprehension.

As we were standing there, a car came towards us from the direction of the town with its headlights full on. We turned and ran full pelt down the lane between the row of houses and the cement works. As we ran into the darkness, the road petered out at the edge of a field. The car turned into the lane behind us. In panic we raced into the field, stumbling and falling with our bags. We pressed ourselves into the earth as the car came to a halt at the edge of the field, its headlights blazing towards us. Barry whispered, "Bury your money, don't let the bastards get it!" The car doors slammed and we saw people get out. We kept dead still where we were. I listened to the strange sounds of the night, the crickets, the distant pulsation of the cement works, a loud rushing sound, and I even thought I heard wafts of music, but perhaps I imagined that. Mingling with the other sounds, the murmur of voices came closer. I frantically scratched a hole in the bare earth, and hurriedly buried my wallet and passport. Looking up I saw magnified silhouettes approaching. I jumped up, turned and ran as fast as I could down the slope.

I tried to move laterally, but found that was impossible, there were bushes and wire fences. I tried to tear my way through them but could not. It was like barbed wire. The rushing sound of water became louder as I ran helter-skelter down the slope. Before me loomed pitch blackness of an intensity I had never experienced. I turned and saw them coming after me. I could hear their labored breathing.

My rucksack was still over my right shoulder, I twisted it off, and as the first man came at me, I threw it with all my might at his head. As the man ducked, I lunged at him and kicked out wildly. My foot caught the man low, and he doubled with a groan. Instinctively I brought my knee up and it hit the man on the side of the head. As it did, we fell onto the ground.

"You fucking bastards, you lousy fascists!" I screamed as I struggled to get up.

The second man came up and threw himself at me. Then I was down, and they were upon me. Nothing mattered now. I punched and tore at them in slow motion. My arms operated independently of my mind. My face dissolved in wetness, I drifted in a cascade of light and pain.

Cold. It was so cold within me, lying on the earth. I moved, but pains shot through me. It was totally dark, I looked up to regain my sense of direction. The stars still shone brightly in the vault of the heavens. I shivered and called Barry's name. There was no response. Gradually, I sat up and finally lurched to my feet. My hands ached as I moved them over my face. My nose had been bleeding and it felt as if it was broken. I moved slowly up the row between the fences. Suddenly I realized that we were in a vineyard. I called again and from the distance came an answering shout.

I found Barry seated on the ground digging.

"You OK?" I asked.

"Yeah, you?" he said.

"I hurt,” I managed, flexing my hands. I noticed Barry was digging. “Whaddya doing?"

"Looking for my money," he answered.

"Oh, yeah, I forgot about that,” I responded. “Did they get it?"

"I doubt it, fucking bastards," Barry moaned.

"I forget where I put mine," I answered, realizing I might have a problem.

"You'll have to search like I did,” he said.

"Mine was a bit further down on the other side of the row,” I said, standing on my toes to get a better look.

"Did they beat you up?" he asked.

"Yeah, sure did, damn them to hell,” I answered. “You too?"

"Yeah, but I gave them a go for it, I stomped one of them," he said.

"Did you break any bones?"

"Mine or theirs?” he joked. “I ache like hell all over. You?"

"My left side hurts badly,” I answered. “I think they broke a rib or something. Are you sure they've gone?"

"Yeah, before I started digging, I checked up there,” he said. “No sign of life. I searched for you and called but you must have been out cold. I thought they might have taken you, or..."

"OK, I guess we're lucky to be here." I lifted my head. "I swear that I can hear music. Am I imagining it?"

"You know it’s strange, but I've been hearing it too,” he said. “Hey, I've found my wallet. It’s all here."

"I better look for mine,” I said. “Then let's get the hell out of here. Oh God, I hurt. I hope they haven't done me any permanent injury."

"They probably improved your looks,” Barry joked.

"Fuck you,” I laughed as I moved away to dig.

I went scrabbling in the earth for a while until I,too found my wallet and passport.

"Let’s go," Barry said, "but, easy now, in case they come back looking for the money."

"Did you find your bag?” I asked. “I didn't see my rucksack."

"They probably took it," he suggested.

As we moved quietly to the edge of the field, we stumbled over some things on the ground. Bending over to examine them in the dark we realized that it was our clothes.

"They must have pulled everything out looking for the money," I said.

"Yeah, they must have brought the bags up here where they could see in the light of the headlights,” he reasoned. "I would have loved to see the look on their faces when they couldn't find any. It’s lucky for us they didn't come back and kill us."

"They probably didn't think we were worth it,” I answered. “Anyway, they gave us a pretty good going over."

We scrabbled around, picking up pieces of clothing in the dark. We found my rucksack and Barry's hold-all lying empty a few yards apart. Barry realized his watch had been taken off his wrist. I had no watch but couldn't find my alarm clock or flashlight. We found our sleeping bags and our camping gear.

"Boy, we're lucky,” I stammered. “They were certainly picky."

"What would they want with camping gear anyway,” Barry mused. “They only wanted valuable stuff that can't be traced. It makes sense."

"OK, let’s get out of here,” I declared.

We walked parallel to the margin of the field in the direction where we supposed was a town. We both hurt and ached and hobbled a bit but it was exhilarating to be alive. We moved up towards the row of houses continuing perpendicular to the way we had come down the lane, away from the cement works. As we walked, the distance between the houses narrowed and the sound of music became louder. Soon there were houses on both sides of the lane, and as we passed through a narrow opening, we entered a brightly lit village square.

It was like a dream. People were dancing to the music and drinking glasses of wine at long tables spread out around the square. A band was playing on a stand. We had walked into a fete. Everything was decorated. We tried to ask someone what was going on but the group of people who gathered around to stare at the ragged, bloodied tourists laughed at us in mutual incomprehension and offered us some wine. Gratefully, we gulped it down. It was madness. It was an illusion. The world had suddenly changed. We drank more wine and laughed at each other; it seemed uproariously funny.

After some time, we asked for a hotel and a boy was sent to guide us. As we followed him through a maze of dark, narrow alleys, we became suspicious of a trick. At each parked car we paused to wonder. Then we laughed at the absurdity of it all. At last we arrived at a hotel. The clerk looked at us strangely and asked for our passports. We started to get into an argument over whether or not to report what had happened to us to the police. I wanted to but Barry pointed out that we had not even remembered to get the license number of the truck. What idiots we were!

Alternately frightened and relieved, slightly drunk and exhausted, we carefully locking our door and gratefully collapsed onto the bed. We fell asleep instantly, lulled by the sound of rushing water. When I awoke refreshed the next morning and opened the shutters, I was greeted by a magnificent vista of the River Rhone.

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After a wonderful tour of the Riviera, we arrived back in Paris in a deux-chevaux driven by a young American who had given us a lift all the way. We had driven through the night and the drive had been uneventful apart from the road-block. All cars had been diverted onto a side road where the French police, armed with machine guns, conducted a detailed search. Apparently, Algerian terrorists had blown up an oil depot in the vicinity. When the police saw we were all foreign, and Barry, who had been asleep on the back seat, had my passport in his hold-all in the trunk, they were quite nasty. They made us all get out and hold our hands up while they searched for the passport. After asking a few questions they let us go. Fortunately, Barry was too tired to unleash himself upon them.

The American guy was funny. When he stopped to ask directions he always added "c'est loin?" in a strange Kentucky drawl. "La Gare du Nord, c'est loin?" He dropped us in the early hours of the morning. We realized that we were a day early to catch the boat-train home, for which we already had tickets. It was just as well we had decided to buy them in advance for now, at the end of our xx week trip, we had hardly any money left. After a croissant, we returned to the Boulevard St. Michel, where we had found a cheap hotel on the way out and found an even cheaper one this time. It was a real doss-house called the Hotel Pascal on the Rue Pascal near the Sorbonne. There was no running water and open toilets on the landings. Still, it was a place to sleep the night.

We had barely enough money for a meal and wandered around aimlessly for a while. Barry had an idea. We bought a can of Epsom Salts, which, when taken with water, made us feel full from the gas and reduced the acidity. We shared our last meal, a Spanish omelet, in a cafe near the Luxembourg gardens. With our last few sous, I wanted to go to the Louvre, while Barry wanted to save it for breakfast. Since it was my money, I insisted, and we walked to the Louvre. How could one visit Paris and not see the Mona Lisa? We had just enough money for the entrance fees.

The next morning, we were at the station early, having fortified ourselves with Epsom salts. We crossed the channel and reached the English side without eating anything. In the train waiting to leave Dover, we shared a compartment with an old, gray-haired English lady. The conductor came around announcing, "Tea is served, tea is served." The old lady ordered a full English tea, and as the train left Dover she slowly and delicately consumed each delicious morsel. Barry and I exchanged glances. It was excruciating. We were famished and began to salivate. It would not do to steal a piece of cake off the plate of a proper English lady.

When I arrived home, I was starving, not having eaten for more than a day; I had exactly one penny in my pocket. I was tanned. The darkness of my skin and my beard hid the scars which I had acquired on my trip. I omitted that incident in telling of my exploits. Mum was so excited to see me but she hated my beard. She began to cry and I had to promise to shave it off. I swore I would re-grow one as soon as I was independent.

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At the end of the Fourth Form, the Headmaster had invited my parents in and told them, candidly, that if my conduct and work did not improve rapidly in the coming year I would not make it through the Fifth Form to take the "O" level exams. The Head thought I had the ability but I had fallen in with some unsavory characters, two of whom, fortunately, were no longer with the school. I was called into the august presence and in front of my parents was required to promise that my behavior and studies would improve.

Although I bridled at this unwarranted interference, nevertheless it came at a fortunate time for me. Of my previous gang, Barry was doing odd jobs until he could become a cabbie, and I saw little of him. James had disappeared from view and ever since that sordid encounter with the prostitute, I avoided George. Besides, the experiences in France the past summer had wrought subtle changes in my personality.

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### The Reality of Experience

By force of circumstances, I became friendly with another group of boys. Every day I walked to Cowper Street from my home in Brick Lane past the hospital and my old primary school on Virginia Road. Beyond Shoreditch Church, I cut through Rivington Street, a narrow, dirty, mercantile street, which brought me out on Great Eastern Street, right by the school. Two other boys in my year, who lived in Hackney and came by bus to Shoreditch, also walked through Rivington Street as a short cut. I gradually joined up with them.

They were nicknamed Satsun and Fatnat. Satsun was tall and good-looking, with blond curly hair. He was half-Jewish and could not decide whether he was Jewish or Christian, whether to celebrate Saturday or Sunday, hence the nickname. Nat was large and rotund, euphemistically called “portly,” but he could not escape the appellation fat. They were both 'A' stream students, while I was determinedly ‘B.’ I rationalized this by quoting the Buddhist epigram, which I had come across on day at the library, "moderation in all things." I realized that I was as bright as they were. I had begun to enjoy science, especially chemistry and biology. Between us we had some scintillating conversations while traversing Rivington Street.

From Nat I learned the differences between Marxism, socialism and communism, which until then had confused me. History was more than a subject for Nat, it was a hobby. He collected medals, maps of famous battles, knew dates by heart, and canvassed for the Labor Party. Satsun, meanwhile, under the tutelage of his English master at school, had begun to read T.S. Eliot. Rivington Street echoed to "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." They stimulated me in a way no teacher could.

The three of us were in turn part of a larger group of Jewish boys in our year at school that met each Saturday night at Gardiner's Corner near Aldgate. There we would hold a conclave and decide where to go, either a movie or a dance at one of the local clubs. As we became older, we graduated to dances in the West End, and then we would meet at Imhof's on Tottenham Court Road, where we could listen to records in a booth while waiting. We frequented such lugubrious spots as "The Tropicana," "The Marquee," and "The Empire Rooms."

Although these dances were banal, we continued to go, because that was where the Jewish girls were. As often as not, the group would spend its time discussing some important philosophical or political question. At worst it was a security blanket to retire to when the girl in choice turned us down. Other times we would go to the jazz cellars and jive all night to Trad with Acker Bilk or Monty Sunshine playing clarinet, or at Johnny Dankworth’s. Then we would repair to a coffee bar—“Heaven and Hell"—was a favorite. Eventually we walked all the way home to the East End without a care in the world.

Once I saw Janice on the arm of an older man smartly dressed in a navy blazer. She was as beautiful as ever. We smiled at each other and chatted. She said she was "in the movies now." I saw her name and photo on a movie marquee for one of those slapstick English comedies. She played her part as my lost, beautiful starlet, and then was heard from no more. I did manage to pry some young ladies away from their chaperone-friends, but generally when I took them home, and if one invited me in, I got along better with their mothers. But, then I was asking them to give up less.

I needed cash. Helping my father at jobs on the weekend earned me an allowance but it was a pitiful amount. I had to hold cupboard doors while my father hung them or paint a fitted wall cabinet. Invaluable training and experience my father assured me, but it was cold comfort to a poor materialist. I did manage to find a job down the Dalston Lane market selling groceries. I had to carry great bundles of evil-smelling fish or cans of soups up from the cellar. The part I hated most was standing out in the bitter cold shouting the merits of a special offer, usually some old dented cans of fruit. For the princely sum of 10 shillings from 8:00 a.m., to 7:00 p.m., it was real exploitation. I asked to leave early once to meet a date. The owner refused and I told him where to shove his lousy job.

I found a more permanent Saturday job through the intercession of a cousin who had a friend who owned a men's store down the Roman Road market. There were only the two of us, Lou the owner, and me. We immediately took a liking to each other. I arrived first and opened the store at around 9:00 a.m., then Lou arrived about 9.30 a.m.. He always brought some sweetmeat for me. Every Saturday I looked forward to a walnut whirl filled with luscious coffee cream. Lou was a completely new type of person to me. He was an easy-going, happy-go-lucky kind of guy. His most incredible feature, which was always in evidence because he loved to croon, was his voice, which sounded exactly like Bing Crosby's. It was like having Bing right there in that small store in Roman Road. Lou knew all about Bing, the Rhythm Boys, the phrasing of all the classics. He had them down pat. It wasn’t put on. Lou naturally sounded like that. Unfortunately, Lou was about 30 years too late.

Lou loved to reminisce about his times on the stage when he had toured the Continent singing in all the swank casinos. There was no future in being a Bing sound-alike so he had set up a comedy routine with a young Jewish girl he had met. She turned out to be a stage-struck nymphomaniac, and they soon parted. Since then, she had worked her way up to the top and now appeared on television, while he remained in obscurity.

I had been known to sing. My friends and I would gather at Manny's house every few months to listen to their great record collection. Manny's parents would go out and leave us to ourselves. It was wonderful, especially if you had a girlfriend. We played Frank Sinatra until I knew practically every word by heart; Benny Goodman was also a favorite. "Sing, Sing, Sing," was played so often it was almost worn out. Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, Mel Torme. Unfortunately, my voice bore a slight resemblance to that of Mel Torme who was known as the "velvet fog." I was dubbed the "velvet fog-horn." Every Saturday, some surprised customers to the store on Roman Road were treated to a weird duet.

Lou had an eye for the girls and would demonstrate his technique for my instruction, as he liked to put it. He always had some on-going flirtation and would leave the store to wander down the lane. He usually came back with a broken mechanical toy that a stall-owner had given him for a song. Lou, who had also studied engineering, and I spent hours repairing these toys and usually gave them to charity. A customer would enter the store and would be surprised to see the two salesmen on the floor anxiously watching a quacking duck waddling around or a mechanical car that was supposed to reverse. I would measure the prospective customer while Lou would charm him into buying something.

"Hullo squire, nice day," he’d say very casually. Then he’d start out singing. "Red sails in the sunset..."

"You know your voice sounds just like Bing Crosby's," the customer would say.

"As the deep purple haze…" Lou would croon.

And they would buy something whether they wanted to or not.

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### Germany, 1959

That last summer of school, four of us, Satsun, Fatnat, Barry and I, decided to hitchhike through Germany. The other two were not keen on having Barry along but I insisted since I had gone with Barry to France the year before. We agreed it would be easier to hike in pairs and, to make it fair, we would toss-up and alternate. We took the boat train to Paris and from there the overnight express to Basle. We had booked sleepers but with our usual luck the numbers we had on our tickets didn't correspond to any on the train. By the time we discovered this, all the seats were taken. We walked the length of the train and found the only space was immediately behind the engine. We took turns stretching out in our sleeping bags. It bucked and roared and rattled and blew soot particles in our eyes. With the orange glow of the engine's fire upon us we raced towards Germany.

It was a bad start, and things soon became worse. Barry could not get along with the others. He and I argued the whole time—over the route, whether sleep was a conditioned reflex or not, whether we should go to nightclubs or museums. To save money, one of us would rent a room and the others would sneak in later and sleep on the floor. In Munich, we had a very narrow room, not big enough for four. Barry claimed the bed and an argument ensued. Tempers flared and it became a shoving match. As he and I grappled with each other, we rolled off the bed onto the floor. The sheet became entangled between us and it ripped. It then became an argument over who was responsible. The manager came and pounded at the door and shouted to us in German and English. He was going to throw us out of his hotel for creating a disturbance. We quickly hid the sheet under the blankets and sheepishly left the hotel.

Outside, Barry refused to go with us. "I know you don't want me with you,” he sputtered. “It’s been obvious from the start."

"You mean you've been deliberately provocative since the beginning, picking arguments over everything?" I asked incredulously. "If that's the way you feel you can go to hell."

The three of us climbed aboard a tram that went into the town center where we hoped to find a warm place to stay the night. As the tram clanged away, we left him there, a forlorn figure diminishing into the distance.

The only place we could find to keep warm was the waiting room at the Hauptbahnhof. Old men coughed and it was stuffy and impossible to sleep. After a while we decided to walk. We left our things at the left-luggage and took a midnight tour of the city cursing "Barry the bastard." As it became light, we noticed something unusual. Everywhere we went there were nuns. It was strange. There were hundreds of them; it was vaguely disquieting. Where were they all from? There must have been a nun's convention. A whole gang of them with rolled-up umbrellas were waiting for a tram at the terminal. I looked up and noticed the street-name. It was "Dachauerstrasse."

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The Frankfurt Cross is a major intersection of the Autobahn. The three of us were dropped there by a US serviceman, who had given us a lift. This turned out to be a very inconvenient spot to be hitchhiking for a number of reasons. It was a long way outside the city; we were not sure which part of the complex intersection we were on, so we had no idea in which direction the cars were going; and it was forbidden by law to hitchhike on the Autobahn. We stood there with our thumbs in the air trying to get a lift into the next town. Hour after hour the cars just sped by.

At the point where we stood, two pair of Autobahnen ran parallel, making in all eight lanes of traffic. Behind us was a small side road down which the American had driven. It seemed to go nowhere. Across the Autobahnen from us was the top of a peculiarly shaped building which we soon realized was an airport control tower. Apart from planes, where there is an airport there must also be a restaurant. We were hungry, not having eaten since early in the morning. We decided to make our way there if we did not get a lift within an hour.

The police car caught us unexpectedly. There was complete absence of verbal communication but complete comprehension. We were lucky not to be arrested, the short, fat policeman was saying as he ushered us down the side road. We walked for a very short distance, in the opposite direction to the airport-restaurant, until we saw that the police car had gone. Very little traffic came down this side-road. We decided to take a chance and returned to the autobahn. Soon we decided the risk of arrest for hitchhiking was too great,; we would cross the autobahn to find a meal. There across the autobahn, like a mirage awaiting us, food beckoned.

Crossing was no easy matter since we were heavily laden with bags and rucksacks. Cars were flashing by at breakneck speed. At mid-afternoon, our stomachs took over; I darted across the first lane to begin the perilous crossing. Between the lanes were narrow grass verges with low barriers, but between the autobahnen was a double metal barrier which was at crotch height. With my rucksack on my back, I managed to get one leg over but the bottom of my rucksack somehow caught on the barrier. With traffic going in opposite directions on either side of me, I was afraid of falling into the path of the onrushing cars. It was impossible to maneuver, so I yelled above the roar of the traffic for help. Satsun had just reached the first verge when the police reappeared. The little fat cop came walking along the side of the autobahn as the police car drove up the side road. They had set a trap and had caught us red-hiking.

The little fat cop stood on the side of the autobahn beckoning to me. Couldn't he see that I was stuck, even if he couldn't hear or even understand my shouted imprecations? Fearing the consequences of a misunderstanding, I pointed in the direction of my rear to indicate that I was stuck. The policeman became very agitated. Suddenly he stepped into the path of the oncoming traffic and held up his hand. It seemed that the cars could not possibly stop before hitting him. I covered my eyes but there was no sound of rending metal, only the screech of tires. The second policeman now came forth and held up the other lane of traffic. The lines of cars grew rapidly. The fat cop came mincing over to me. It was really too bad I could not speak German. I searched my distracted brain for a few words of explanation. How could I explain that we were poor students looking for a meal? Then it came to me.

I said pleadingly, looking him straight in the eyes. I thought I had asked where the menu was, hoping it would convey my meaning

The policeman's face became suddenly purplish with rage. He began to shout at me in a most unprofessional way. He even stamped his feet in frustration. God, these German cops were dumb, couldn't he see that I was stuck. I shouted back at him "you too!" I was not going to be intimidated by a German policeman. Why did I take such risks?

Realizing the predicament, Satsun dashed across the road and released my strap buckle from between the barriers. He was just in time because the cop was almost hysterical now. He began pulling his gun-belt towards the front and fiddling with the holster cover. Somehow this action provoked me, and I began swearing loudly at the cop. After all, he was no great specimen of the master race. In retrospect, it seemed rather funny: The fat German cop having apoplexy and going for his gun in the middle of the autobahn while a bearded Jew straddled the barrier and demanded to see the menu.

The cop escorted me to the roadside but I shrugged off his grip. The others issued soothing sounds and with the help of a phrase book the right words were found, including "speishaus," restaurant. The police made it clear that if we did not do as we were told, we would spend two weeks in jail. The three of us once again walked down the side road, followed closely by the police car. We noticed that the road began to turn, gradually at first and then more sharply, and lo and behold, it reversed direction and ran *under* the autobahnen towards the airport. The police car picked up speed and passed us. As it raced away the German policemen waved.

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In Bonn, we found an all-night cafe and ordered long sausages. Two men came and sat next to us on the oval, vinyl bench. An attempt at conversation was made. The older man of the two, who was partially drunk, became quite animated when he learned we were from England. Nursing his beer, he went into a long explanation we could not follow. He became quite excited and grabbed a paper napkin. He had a ruddy, lined complexion and short cropped hair. I wondered what he had done during the war. He drew a triangle on the napkin, and showed it to us and indicated, "England." He wrote the distance from the edge of the triangle to the center in kilometers. Then he drew an airplane and wrote down a time in minutes

"England ist eine kleine land,” he laughed loudly.

I grabbed another napkin, drew a large square on it and said equally loudly, "Germany is bigger than England, but we won the war!"

The old German was perplexed until his younger companion explained the response. Then he became enraged. He smashed his fist down on the napkin and shouted volubly. The proprietor came from behind the counter and argued with him, while his companion tried to restrain him. The three of us continued to eat our sausages anxiously awaiting the outcome. The proprietor ordered the man to leave, and with the help of the younger man, who appeared apologetic, they levered him out.

After they had gone the proprietor came back and apologized to us.

"I sorry for crazy man say," he said.

When we went to pay, he refused to accept our money. We all shook hands solemnly.

After some difficulties, we found a tram to the camping site just outside town. It was late by the time we had registered, found a suitable site, and put up our tent. Finally, we crawled in not even bothering to undress.

From my dream-state I was jerked awake by a loud blood-curdling scream. It was a woman's scream. It sent shivers through my body. I sat up and put my head outside the tent-flap but it was too dark to see anything.

"Did anyone hear that?" I turned back and whispered.

"Yeah," came back a dazed reply.

"What should we do?" I asked.

"Dunno, see if you can see anything."

"It’s pitch black outside,” I explained. I crawled out and staggered around in the cold for a minute, but nothing stirred.

I crawled back in. "I can't see anything,” I said shivering. “Should we report it? It sounded like a woman being murdered."

"What you gonna do, look up the word for 'scream' in your dictionary?” Satsun asked. “Forget it and go back to sleep, I'm exhausted."

I finally fell into a fitful sleep.

Next morning, the scene that surrounded us was positively bucolic. The sun shone, the river sparkled, our fellow-campers shouted good-naturedly, healthy frauleins cavorted energetically. The scream that had shattered the German night remained an elusive mystery.

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### Naomi

I met Naomi at a place called "The Bar of Music" in the West End. She was dark and attractive, but above all vivacious and lively. We danced well together; I felt at ease with her. Her parents had been pioneer settlers in Israel in 1949, although they had returned to England for health reasons only a year later. When I met them, I enjoyed tales of their experiences in Israel.

My family moved away from the East End when my father was given a permanent job with Aaron's Veneers. We moved to Harrow, which was a long way from the city and the West End. My father now worked out in Rickmansworth. The old factory in Marlow that I remembered from earlier days had been sold. Now they had the latest equipment. Machines as big as houses cut thin sections off huge tree trunks. I enjoyed the visit and the countryside.

I invited Naomi to go with me for a picnic one Sunday. It was the first time I had thought to do such a thing. We set out early, riding the train out to Amersham. This was *terra incognita*, the abode of all those unsmiling men in pin-stripe and bowlers who rode through Harrow on their way to the City every morning and returned to their castles each evening, to places with strange-sounding names like Stoke-Mandeville, Crouch End, Chesham Bois, Chalfont St. Giles.

Naomi and I began to walk uphill and, leaving the road, wandered along leafy paths in the warm sunlight holding hands. Occasionally, we asked the way. We scrambled over steep overgrown inclines until we reached the top of the hill and saw a sweeping view of the English countryside.

A brisk wind blew. We could see for miles over hundreds of minute checkered farms stretching to the horizon. In the distance towards Oxford, changing and reforming, we could see a dark squall line moving towards us. At the apex of the hill was a tall column, a monument to those who had died in World War I. We started down the other side. We were completely alone, invigorated by the fresh air, untroubled, hearing only the rushing wind as we ran breathlessly downwards. We stopped to eat our picnic. The warm, drowsy afternoon gave way to thunder. Storm clouds gathered overhead. It began to rain. We didn't really care. We walked on in the rain, getting soaked and lost. I didn't mind, although normally I would have been annoyed. Now we laughed at our predicament.

Gradually the sky cleared and the sun came out again. We asked the way and found a pub where we had rough cider. A little further on, we stopped to admire a house. It was white- washed with pointed windows and had a beautiful display of roses growing around a trellis-gate. I took a photograph of Naomi standing in the center of the bower. I looked through the viewfinder and saw that the sun was behind her. She was silhouetted with the roses as a halo. It moved me. Was it a sign?

I clicked the camera but made no particular fuss about it. At that moment I had decided I would marry her. I did not know if I loved her, but what was love anyway? What did it all mean? I knew instinctively that she would be a tender mother and a good wife. In retrospect, it is strange how an unremarkable incident, a particular combination of light, rain and wind can alter one's life irrevocably.

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### Milly and Hilly

After I met Naomi and we were going out for a while, it was time to meet her parents. Naomi’s mother, Milly Silverstein, was a unique person. She was short and energetic with a very white complexion and a controlling personality. It would not be exaggerating to say that for some time during our relationship, I hated her.

From the start it was clear that Naomi’s mother was in charge. Her dad, Hillel, a large affable man known by his knickname, Hilly, took a back seat. Milly ordered him around and he seemed to accept it. They were known as Milly and Hilly, and she always came first. She would say “Hilly, do the dishes,” or “Hilly, make tea,” and he would sheepishly do it.

They met under unusual circumstances. She was at a milk bar, with a glass of milk, and a fellow came in and sat next to her and knocked over her milk. She shouted at him “You oaf, are you blind!” to which he replied “Yes, I’m blind!” She was very apologetic. He explained that he had been stationed out on an observation platform in the North Sea during WWII and had gone temporarily blind due to poor diet and had a vitamin deficiency. He was now on a diet of herring and milk. She helped him home and they became a couple.

When I met her, Naomi was working as a secretary in a local accounting office. She would give her salary to her mother each week and her mother would give her spending money. In effect she was controlled by her mother. I soon put a stop to that. I said, you tell your mother that it’s your earnings and you’ll keep it and give her money for bed and board. Her mother reluctantly accepted this.

This is not to say that everything was unpleasant, I enjoyed their love of music, they played records all the time, and I learnt a lot from them. In my house we had no gramophone and no music. They played opera, Paul Robeson, Mendelsohn, Beethoven and so on. Also, I greatly enjoyed listening to stories of their experiences of the time they made Aliyah and lived in Israel from 1949, soon after the State was founded, until 1951, when they returned to England because Hilly fell ill.

From the start relations between Milly and me became strained. She was a very tactless person, saying what she thought without consideration for other people’s feelings. She used to order Naomi, and her younger sister Barbara, about and I resented that. She was very superstitious and partially religious. She pretended to be religious, but she went shopping on shabbat, but she hid he bag under her coat so her ultra-orthodox employers who lived around the corner wouldn’t see her. And she watched television on Shabbat and played records and turned lights on and off, which no truly religious Jewish person would do. Yet, she was always criticizing me because I was not religious enough.

Things came to a head one Sat night when I went to pick Naomi up to go out. Naomi was wearing black slacks, and her mother said to her,

“You can’t go out wearing that!” (religious women are not supposed to wear men’s clothing)

I asked, “Why not?” and she replied, “I won’t allow it.”

It was clear she was trying to control Naomi, and through her me.

Naomi was prepared to go and change, but I said “No! if you change, I won’t take you out and we’re through.” I put her in a very difficult position, she had to choose between me and her mother.

Naomi said, “I’m going out wearing these slacks, it’s perfectly alright.”

At this point Milly became so angry, that she picked up one of Naomi’s high heel shoes and threw it at her. If it had hit her in the eye it would have been terrible. I shouted at her and then I said to Naomi “Let’s go!” whereupon Milly shouted, “if you go out of that door don’t ever bother to come back,” and as we left she let out a loud scream.

Of course, we didn’t know what to do, it ruined our evening. So I called one of my favorite aunts and uncles, Phyllis and Alf, who lived nearby at Manor House, and they said come over and we went there and told them the whole story and they were very solicitous and said Naomi could stay with them overnight. We had a good evening and then I left her there.

The next day Milly called my mother assuming she was with us, and when she wasn’t, she pleaded to know where Naomi was, and my mother told her. Then she called Naomi and asked her to come home, all is forgiven. In this we saw the hand of her father, Hilly, who was always the peacemaker, trying to make up for Milly’s excesses.

Milly didn’t want Naomi to marry me and told her I was a nobody with no prospects (I was a student at that time), but luckily for me Naomi stood firm. We got engaged and then married in 1961. Then we moved to Cambridge and Milly called several times a day. I told Naomi that I didn’t mind if she called when I wasn’t there, but not when I was. Relations between me and Milly were strained, that was until Barbara met and married Malcolm. He was worse than me, he would hang up on her if she called, so unexpectedly I became the favorite son-in-law.

Here are some examples of Milly’s behavior:

* Naomi was an excellent pupil at school, and by the age of 15 she spoke fluent German, perhaps because her grandparents spoke mainly Yiddish and she was close to them (they lived in her grandparent’s house for years). A Professor from Birmingham University came to the school looking for possible recruits. She interviewed many girls and chose only two, including Naomi, both in linguistics. She wrote to Naomi telling her that she would like her to think of going to Birmingham to study German. Under her mother’s influence, Naomi replied saying that she thought she was too highly strung emotionally to be a good student. Basically, her mother did not want her to go to University, but to get married, buy a house and have children. The Professor wrote back and told her not to worry about this, and later that year sent her a formal letter offering her a place in the German Department to do a degree. Milly received the letter first and *hid it* from Naomi, so she never knew she had been offered a place at University, and instead went to secretarial school. He mother only revealed this terrible act 20 years later. Naomi had always felt inferior since she had never been to University and studied. Her mother’s excuse was that she didn’t want her to meet non-Jewish boys and if she had gone there, she would never have met me.
* Milly and Hilly came to visit us in the States, and Naomi arranged a party for her with her friends. When one of them came in she said loudly, in front of all the others, “Judi, what have you done to your hair, you look terrible!”
* On another occasion when they arrived at our house, they came into the kitchen first through the side door. Naomi happened to be taking a can of food out of a cupboard opposite and it was a low deep cupboard. Milly said, “that’s not convenient,” and she looked around and saw out broom cupboard behind her. So she said “Hilly I want you to make some shelves in there.” I left in disgust, and by the time I got back Hilly had found some plywood, cut out some shelves and Milly had transferred all the cans into the broom cupboard. I don’t remember where the brooms went. Their suitcases were still standing in the kitchen. When they left, I removed the shelves and put the brooms back.
* Miriam, our daughter, was spending a year in Israel living on a kibbutz. She went to visit her grandparents Milly and Hilly who were then living in Netanya. As she was leaving Milly said, “I want to give you some money, but I don’t have any now.” Miriam said, “I don’t need any money,” but Milly insisted that she go with her to the bank. While they were waiting on-line, a man pushed in front of them and the clerk served him, so Milly got into an argument with them, and then she called the manager and the manager came and a large argument ensued. Miriam quietly left.
* My sister and her husband were visiting Netanya and said they wanted to buy some T-shirts for their kids. Milly said, “I know the best place to buy T-shirts,” and took them down to the main street. They looked around and found what they wanted and asked the price. At this point Milly interrupted, she knew the proprietor and she argued about the price. My sister thought the price was OK, so she paid, and they left the store while Milly was still there arguing about the price.
* Once Milly was walking in Netanya and a thief tried to steal her handbag. She had a parasol and she beat him with it, and he ran away.
* In Netanya, every Saturday evening they had an Israeli dance program (called *rekordim* from the Hebrew to dance). Milly always danced at these evenings and always sought the limelight. Hilly used to sit on the side playing a small drum (*tof*). Milly was widely known as the dancing grandmother, and there was even a newspaper article about her. One evening at home in the States, we got a call from someone who lived nearby who had filmed her on a visit to Netanya and she had given them our phone number and we went around and saw her performing.

I could go on, but you get the point. I had a doctor friend in Netanya who knew Milly and Hilly and he described their relationship as “pathological.” After Hilly died, we tried to persuade her to move into a home, but she refused. But a year later she came around and agreed. I helped to sell her apartment and put some of the money towards a very nice room in a Retirement Home in Netanya. Naomi visited her almost every day and helped her, until she was unable to.

Milly needed a full-time carer, so I arranged for an Indian girl who slept in the same room with her and looked after her. Milly would have been very upset if she had known that I would end up looking after her and her finances. Fortunately, as she aged, she mellowed. She died in 2016 at the age of 101. Although we had our bad times, I must admit that she was a unique and strong personality, and I had great respect for Hilly for putting up with her for all those years.

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### The Accident

In 1958, at the age of xx, I was accepted to study chemistry at Queen Mary College in London. I studied hard. It did not come easy to me. I met other students from a wide range of backgrounds, but living at home and studying left me little time to cultivate friends.

During my summer vacations, I needed to earn money. The year I worked as a house painter, the boss took me to a house and told me to get up a high ladder and paint the eaves of the house. I was surprised they had given me such a dangerous job to start with. If I had fallen, I could have been killed. I did the job and did not complain.

A few days later, I was taken to the parking lot behind their store and told to help unload a truckload of bricks. I stood there unprepared for the heavy, sharp bricks that I had to catch as they were being thrown at me. Once I caught them, I had to turn and throw them to the next person who then threw them to someone else until they were in position to be stacked. The boss sent me home to get gloves as they didn’t supply them. The gloves lasted all of about 30 mins. The edges of the bricks cut them to pieces. I complained in the office that I had signed up to work as a painter. The manager was very nasty.

“If you can’t handle that we’ll give you an easy job,” the manager said.

The next day, I was sent to a lot that was overgrown with grass and weeds four feet high and told to clear it up. It was a swamp filled with mosquitos and flies. At that point I realized that they were deliberately giving me dangerous and dirty jobs to do. I don’t know if they were motivated by anti-Semitism, but I quit!

The next summer, Dad got me a job helping at the veneer factory. There were many Pakistanis there now and my father was foreman of a mixed group. Often there was friction. My father loved to regale people with stories of his interactions with these men. Once, when one of them, Ahmed, was sitting alone with his head in his hands, Dad told his favorite joke.

"This bloke Ahmed wasn’t feeling well. ‘You sick,’ asked the foreman? Ahmed replied, ‘No, I Muslim.’ Sikh, get it, Sikh," Dad would emphasize.

This particular Pakistani was a good worker and on Dad’s recommendation he was promoted to foreman. This entitled him to eat in the Staff Cafeteria, as opposed to the worker's buffet. Dad usually ate in the latter, but occasionally he used the cafeteria. He took Ahmed Waktil with him once and later received a visit from Works Manager Arthur Sneed.

"'Ere Mick, sorry to 'ave to do this, but some of the boys asked me to ask you not to bring Ahmed into the café,” Sned said.

"Why not?” Dad asked. “’E's entitled. Wots a marrer, 'is skin too black for 'em?"

"I don't know what it is Mick,” Sneed replied, “but I think they think that once one 'o them gets in 'e'll bring in the others."

Dad was outraged. How could this be allowed in a Jewish firm? It was not the senior management who objected, the Works Manager, who himself was not Jewish, insisted, but the other middle-level staff. Each day Dad took Ahmed with him to eat in the cafeteria, and as I was able to observe, the banter gradually became innocuous. A small victory.

As we were standing in the yard one day, the managing director of the company, Alex Aarons, walked over to us. Since his father had known Dad when they were both poor workers in the East End, he had a familiarity with the sons that few others dared.

Alex questioned me about my studies then he posed a question. “Suppose you had a choice,” he said, “suppose you could be my son or your father's son, which would you choose?"

I was taken aback. It was such a crude question to put to the son of a poor man in the presence of his father. I eyed the cocky, well-dressed, millionaire.

“You insensitive son-of-a-bitch," I mutter just out of his hearing, answering loudly, "my father, of course."

"Why? If you were my son, you could afford to have everything you wanted," Alex continued.

"My father would never ask such a question, even if he happened to be rich,” I retorted.

Afterwards Dad asked me why I was rude to Alex. “You know 'e's been very good to us."

"Yes," I replied, "but mainly because of old man Aarons. He knows he can trust you. Alex is a condescending prick. He likes to flash his wealth around, it’s all he's got."

Dad smiled, but we both wondered.

“Who's that?" I asked as I picked up the phone.

"This is Alex Aarons," Alex said. I wondered why he was calling on a Saturday morning. "I'm afraid your Dad's had an… accident."

"Oh God, is he OK?" I blurted.

"He's OK, but he's cut his hand rather badly,” Alex responded.

"Where is he?" I asked, panicking.

"I'm calling from the Stoke-Mandeville Hospital,” he said. “We brought him here in my car. They're operating on him now."

"Shall I tell my Mum? Should we come?" My knees were quaking.

"Tell your mother that he'll be OK,” Alex said. “This is the best hospital for plastic surgery, and we'll pay any costs, so don't worry about that.” He paused. “I don't think she should come because they said the operation could take several hours, but I'll send the car for you, if you'd like to be here."

"Yes, of course I would," I said quickly.

"OK, the car will be there soon, and look, you can be sure we'll do everything possible for your old man."

The chauffeured Rolls Royce came to pick me up and took me to the famous hospital. A small group waited there—Arthur Sneed, Ahmed Waktil and Alex Aarons, an unusual group. The story was that one of the workers had been cutting some wood on a circular saw. He was unfamiliar with the machine so Dad, who was just about to leave, said he would show him, and impetuously had taken the piece of wood from him. There was a knot in the wood and it had twisted and pulled his hand onto the saw. His thumb and at least two other fingers had been cut, practically severed. The saw had had no safety guard.

After some time, the others left, and I continued the lonely vigil, occasionally calling my distraught mother. Eventually the surgeon came to see me.

"I'm sorry, but we had to amputate one finger, the index finger on the left hand,” he said. “I presume your father is right-handed."

"Yes," I answered, thinking of the horrible mutilation.

"Well, then, it won't be as bad, I mean his rehabilitation,” the doctor continued. “We were able to rejoin all the main blood vessels and nerves in his thumb and other finger, and he should eventually recover most use and feeling, but it will take a long time, longer than most people realize. You will have to help him."

"Can I see him?" I asked.

"You'll be able to see him soon,” he said, heading back towards the surgery.

"Thank you ever so much, Doctor,” I envisaged the scene: The crowded workshop, the young man fiddling around unaccustomed to the dangerous saw, Dad saying, "'ere let me 'ave that, you doan know what you're doin'." Then the terrible moment as the saw grabbed his hand, the realization, the blood. After 30 years it had finally happened, as Mum had feared all those years.

When I went in to see him, Dad was just coming around.

"Hullo Dad, how do you feel?" I asked tentatively.

"I'm OK, 'ow are you, Spiv?" he answered.

"Mum's coming over later on,” I said.

"Tell 'er not to worry, she always said it would 'appen one day, and I managed to 'old it off for quite a time,” he said clearly.

"Dad," I asked, wanting to reach out and clasp the hand and make it whole, "is it painful?"

"Whaddya fink?” he joshed. “Naw not really, it’s all numb still. They told me abaht the finger. Well, that's that."

"Well, it shouldn't stop you going back to work,” I said.

"Yeah, well I 'ope so,” he responded. “S'pose it could 'ave been worse."

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### An Anti-Semitic Incident

"I'm going to miss the bus." The thought hardened into conviction as the tube train trundled slowly along the Piccadilly Line into King's Cross where I would have to transfer to another line. It was 1961, and I was on my way to Cambridge, to embark upon my new life as a graduate student. I was resplendent in my new lamb’s wool coat. It was hot and sweaty wearing it, but I could not bring myself to take it off. As I reached the top of the escalator, my heart sank. Before me stood the backs of the rush hour crowd in a solid phalanx. It would take 15 minutes at least just to reach the platform, and I had only 45 minutes to get to the bus station.

I glanced up the stairs at the sky as I shuffled below and caught sight of the red top of a bus. Yes, I remembered there was a bus that went all the way to my destination, the bus station itself. It might go slower, but overall, it might be quicker. I raced up the stairs, luggage in hand, and saw a number 6 bus standing right there by the bus stop. I ran to the end of the queue. Too late. The bus began to move. It slowed next to me in the traffic, the conductor appeared on the platform, and yelled that he had room for one more passenger. Instinctively, I launched myself forward and landed on the platform as the bus jerked forward. The conductor told me to put my case under the stairs and sold me a ticket. I moved inside the bus congratulating myself on my good luck.

As I stood in the crowded bus clutching a support, I became aware of a woman's loud voice behind me.

"There was women and children waiting in that queue for hours.,” the woman complained.

,” another woman's voice answered her. “

They're all the same, bloody Jews."

I turned to see two women, apparently mother and daughter, who were sitting on the bench seat by the entrance. They were purposely speaking loudly so all could hear. The derogatory remarks continued.

Finally, I could stand it no more. "Are you talking about me?" I asked.

"Oh, 'ark at 'im, " the mother laughed, mocking. "’Are you talking about me?’"

"The conductor let me on because there was one space left, and he sold me a ticket," I explained for the benefit of the silent audience.

"Always got an answer, ain't they,” she answered.

"Call Bert dahn, 'e'll take care of the Jew-boy,” the daughter added.

The bus continued on its way, the people inside staring out of the windows at the drab streets, aloof under the veneer of their civility. The person sitting next to me got up and left. I sat down in his place.

"'ere see that, 'e got on last but 'e sits dahn first,” the mother complained again. "'Itler should 'ave taken care of the 'ole bloody lot of 'em."

I turned round in my seat, and waved my ticket at them. "This ticket gives me the right to sit where I like, so why don't you mind your own business you stupid, bloody cows."

"ey, Bert get dahn 'ere, there's a Jew-boy insulting us," the mother continued. “Why don't you go back to your own country?" phrases that I remembered from my childhood.

"This is my country, as much as yours,” I replied, remembering that phrase from my childhood. “Call yourself British? Why don't you go back to Germany where you belong?"

Meanwhile, Bert came downstairs, and with the women pointing me out, he pushed his way down to where I was seated. I sized him up. He was shorter than I had expected, but stocky, and well dressed.

"What's goin on 'ere,” Bert asked. “You insultin’ me missus?”

I stood up, a head taller. "They started insulting me first, as everyone on the bus heard."

Cries of denial came from the women.

"You better apologize, you bearded git, or I'll beat the livin' daylights out of yer!" he menaced.

I was sweating and shaking, but I steeled myself. "You lay one finger on me and I'll 'ave you in court," I shouted. "Conductor, stop the bus and get a policeman, this man threatened me."

The conductor could no longer ignore the situation. "Gents, gents, take it easy, we don't want no trouble,” he pleaded. “If yer wants to fight why don't yer get off the bus?"

"Call the police!" I insisted.

"Come on son, if I calls a copper, we'll all get 'eld up," he said. He leaned over to me. “Ttake it easy mate,” he whispered, “they'll be getting off in a minute."

I was in a dilemma.

“A copper won't save you, you fucking Jew bastard,” Bert said.

We stood facing each other, arms raised. "You lay one finger on me and I'll see you and your women in jail, so help me,"I said, aiming for bravado.

"'E ain't worf it Bert, 'e's not worf the bovver," Bert’s wife said dismissively.

The conductor returned to his platform, rang the bell and yelled out the next stop. It was a stand-off. We both stood poised ready to strike or ward off the first blow.

"You wanna watch it Jew-boy," Bert said.

"Why, what are you gonna do about it,” I answered.

The bus slowed and people began pushing by to get off.

"Come on Bert, we're getting off 'ere,” his wife said.

Bert withdrew. As he left he shouted his parting shot, "If I ever see you around 'ere again Jew-boy, I'll kill yer, you fucking Jew-bastard!"

After the bus started, I sat down exhausted. The conductor came over to me and said quietly, "Don't let 'em get yer down son, they ain't worf it."

I was still shaking from the crude verbal assault when I boarded the coach to Cambridge. I sat comfortably in my seat and thought over the incident. It did no good to think of clever replies now. As we passed through the fens I thought that here would have been an ideal place for the camps that Mosley and his Blackshirts would have set up to concentrate and murder the Jews if they had taken power. And I had just met a willing British concentration camp guard, a potential killer. Did it never cease?

This experience with an anti-Semite re-kindled in me thoughts that I had suppressed while going about the task of growing up and trying to make something of myself. For years I had not thought about Julian, my older brother, who had never really existed. Why was I the only one of my year and of my friends going to Cambridge? I knew that it was not because I was better or cleverer than they were, but because I had a destiny to fulfil. I had to live for two: I was my dead brother’s keeper.

I awoke with a start, and saw that we were already passing through Trumpington, the village before Cambridge. The experience with the anti-Semite in London had left me feeling empty but as we entered Cambridge I gazed around with renewed interest and anticipation.

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### Cambridge, 1961

Swish!

The curtains below part

on yet another day of glorious existence.

From below arose the shrill sound of the whistling aria from Mefistofele, initiated daily by the alarm clock turning on the record player. Across the landing swelled the Rhine Maidens which drowned out the Beatles belting forth from the adjoining room. At an intermediate point in the disturbance created in the cold, damp Cambridge air, something stirred. Slowly life manifested itself in what appeared to be a mere fold of the bedclothes in the darkened room. The object developed a hirsute, almost hominoid, appearance.

How extraordinary are interpretations of the unconscious meanderings that occupy the mind in its impressionable waking state. In fact, a thought did evolve in that superb complex of cells and molecules straining towards consciousness… “Ssssssssssssssssshhhhhhhhhhiiiiit...”

Awakening to the undeniable reality of another bright mid-morning, I dragged myself from bed. Stripe-pajamaed hypnophile! Staggering under the mutually malevolent musical crossfire, with hands to ears and pressing needs, I crossed the landing and entered the blue bathroom. Although the combination of stimuli was hardly conducive to the far-ranging clarity of thought which usually accompanied my sojourn upon the turquoise toilet, nonetheless I abandoned myself to discursive reflection. Adding my own lavatorial part, I meditated upon the nature of the strange quartet, and upon the events that had brought us together.

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In the beginning, alone...I walked the endless corridors. Finding the laboratory, I entered, with trepidation. Serried ranks of bottle-bedecked benches. The light shattered by the glistering glass. Reflection, aesthetic of science. A group occupied the foreground with their noise. A loud, friendly voice intoned a greeting.

The laboratory covered an entire wing of the Chemistry block. To the right the Victorian girth of Cambridge, which even in the bright sunshine affected a gray, somber air. To the left, directly below, stood the Scott Institute, dedicated to that chap who did the right British thing. Lensfield Road ran beyond it and at the corner with the High Road was the large Catholic Church. Mercifully, this was almost obscured, except for the spire, by a huge tree. It reminded me of the view from my bedroom window in Bethnal Green. I neither knew, nor cared, what was the species of the tree. Behind the houses across Lensfield Road a glimpse of Downing College was visible.

It was several years since I had come to Cambridge to take the scholarship examinations at Downing. The first bright hope of an earnest new Headmaster, I had been sent to impale myself upon the sharp spires. It had been an irreversible experience. I had become friendly with two other hopefuls, one from Blackburn, the other from Llandindrod Wells. We were all over-awed, but acted cocky. I had stayed in the room of a scholar who had left books of poetry scattered around. What was a “metaphysical poet,” I wondered. The other two had been in the rooms across the landing. We each had such different accents it was almost impossible to carry on a mutually comprehensible conversation. They had taken me to a pub. It was the first time I had ordered and tried to drink a pint of bitter. When I told them, they couldn't believe it and laughed heartily. I couldn't tell them that where I came from only 'shicker goyim' drank in pubs. The smell of stale beer and piss, the kids hanging around outside, waiting for a snifter of shandy.

During one of my lonely walks I had passed by a high fence enclosing a major construction site. I had found an opening and had looked up wonderingly at the skeletal building, from whence I now gazed dreamily across the ancient rooftops of Cambridge. It had been a long and difficult journey. "Would Julian have been proud of me?" I thought.

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Out of the Chemistry block, through the Cambridge streets in the gathering dusk, two figures—one leading, the other lagging—by devious circumvention of Mill and Backs, cycled. We arrived and entered a dimly lit, high-ceilinged room. Soon the percolator gurgled, the gas-fire sang. Books were displayed, facetious chat indulged.

"Unlike you I have no principles, that's my first principle."

"I've taken an interest in Buddhism, you know, moderation in all things."

"You mean to say," with mock incredulity, "you actually want to be mediocre. Soon you'll be telling me you're an existentialist, or worse still, you'll confess to being infected by the sin of humanism."

"Not much likelihood of that," taken aback.

"What are you interested in beside chemistry?"

"I play the French horn, and I'm an expert in comparative mesolithic leucohippotomy."

"Come again, leucowhat?"

"Leucohippotomy, white horses, the study thereof, you know the white horses dug on the south-downs by ancient Britons."

"You're an expert in mesolithic white horses."

"Well, that would be difficult, since none of them date as far back as the mesolithic."

"Caught me again."

"Don't know what you mean." Mark Reader, didact! A thin, angular, pimply-faced youth, by nature withdrawn, yet avuncular and amazingly bright and well read. It was impossible for me to judge what was true and what he said for effect. But, then after all, what is truth.

"How about a bit of Beeters? I think you'll like 127, it’s the most popular of the late quartets, although not the most profound."

"I've never heard this piece before."

"Ah, how wonderful it must be to have an unspoilt ear."

At concert volume the unknown sounds, ethereal and impassioned, filled the room. The reverberations induced sympathetic resonance within me. Thought was lost in a sea of transforming counterpoint. Omniscient blind insight. Once more I felt his ineffable presence, Julian, my brother. I heard my mother's screams as she struggled against implacable fate in the abortive struggle to wrench her child into the world. "They used forceps, they squashed his head with forceps!" Then all was calm, the ensuing silence unreal, hollow. “Why now,” I thought, “why now do you choose to return to haunt me?”

Mark, unknowing, breached the mood. "Did you enjoy that, yes, it is rather catchy. Now for some leitmotif relief, you do like Wagner?" Mark busied himself with the contraption, a device that transformed the turntable into a primitive tape-recorder.

Later in the midst of the dark, cold night we rode back to the lab together with measured phrases thrown across the oscillating gulf between us. I heard, "...if I have any religion... the late quartets."

Mark refused to listen to music except at concert volume. He also had the habit of playing his French horn whenever the mood caught him, which often was at night. He would perch upon his mantelpiece and give vent to his carefully controlled feelings. His landlord objected to these nocturnal serenades. Soon Mark was looking for new digs where his passion for music would be tolerated.

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From my lavatorial vigil I heard Mark turn off the damned Wagner, leave the adjacent bedroom, and having already washed and dressed, descend to take breakfast. Soon the sound of the pop-playing radio died. and I envisaged the daily breakfast scene below.

Tall and dignified Paul Pollock, B.A., Esq., stood naked by the table unselfconsciously rinsing his testicles in brine. In the healing glow of the cold October sun, he massaged away the dreaded fungus that afflicted him.

“Why did I ever cross the Channel and venture into foreign parts?" he declared in his rich northern accent.

"Ah, the scrotum-tightening saline solution," Mark mocked, while performing surgery on his roll and continuing to read my newspaper.

Having had his carefully nurtured development examined by numerous doctors and nurses, without noticeable result, Paul had taken to home therapy. After carefully drying the glowing objects he tenderly applied calamine lotion, making the red one white. On finishing the daily ritual, while waiting for his bacon to fry, he pranced upstairs. A hyperborean fertility God, walking the Cambridge streets, unknown, unsung.

Paul had rented a room on the second floor of a row house from a withered old widow. She liked to look after her gentlemen and each day made them rice pudding, or occasionally, one of Paul's favorites, baked bean pie. She was very strict about certain things. She liked her gentlemen to be in on time, and, of course, no women were allowed in the rooms. It was against the University regulations.

One night Paul missed supper. It was normally called dinner, but he was northern and devotedly lower class. It was a pity he was not there since the landlady had made an especially large dish of baked bean pie. Knowing Paul's predilection for this delicacy, she shuffled upstairs with a hunk for him and hearing no response to her knock, unlocked the door and walked in. Paul was lying on the bed having his affliction tended to by a kind nurse, partially dressed in her uniform, naturally. Baked beans were suddenly spread over the floor. Paul was immediately looking for a more conducive environment in which to continue his treatments.

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The living room door suddenly flew open. Enter dramatically left, a Frenchman carrying high a vacuum flask.

"Good morning my little friends, eating as usual." He beamed hugely at his joke, the daily repetition of this greeting.

An ancient aria from the Huguenots faintly clung to him in admixture with the cheap tobacco he smoked in hand-rolled cigarettes. Francois Smith's rules of life, monkish in spirit if not object, forbade him the pleasure of company except on trips to the kitchen. Following the tradition of his British antecedents, he had come to Cambridge to finish his education. He prepared his coffee and returned to his room, still grinning.

Francois' lodgings had appeared to have all the necessary perquisites for which he assiduously searched; comfort, a small kitchen, large windows, and a deaf landlady. The latter was necessary so that she would not be disturbed by his operas, which he played incessantly, and would not be offended when he swore at her (in French of course) while smiling broadly. Since he was a self-confessed graphologist, he contrived to have her write something. When he had checked her character in her writing, he pronounced himself satisfied.

However, unanticipated factors proved his undoing. The door to his room had a frosted pane of glass in it. He was aware of the image of his landlady flitting back and forth but whenever he tried to catch her, she was nowhere to be seen. It was maddening. Also, the toilet was across the corridor. He valued his privacy so highly that he locked his door during the day; his landlady had agreed not to enter in his absence. However, when he went to the toilet and returned to his room, he had the strange impression that she had been there. What was it, he wondered? Then he noticed that the cup from which he had just been drinking had been washed and neatly upended on the draining board. That was the end of his sense of privacy, and the renewal of his search for the ideal lodgings, and that’s how he came to be sharing with us.

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One day at the railroad station I happened to see an attractive young foreign lady dragging a large suitcase. She was obviously in need of assistance so naturally I offered to help her. My offer was gratefully accepted whereupon I found myself lugging her heavy suitcase into a taxi, for which I paid. My bicycle remained at the station until I could retrieve it later.

Guidita, for that was her name, was Italian, and was lovely. She was blond, her hair cut short, and strikingly dressed all in black with dark penciled eyes and incredibly whitened skin. I concluded she must have put flour on her cheeks to heighten the effect. She needed a room, and knowing my own landlady had a spare one, naturally I took her there first. After we had unloaded her things and dismissed the cab, my landlady was adamant. She would have no foreign young lady in her rooms. We left Guidita’s suitcase in my room while we searched for a room elsewhere.

We took the bus and walked a lot during the fruitless search. Guidita was very choosy. During the tour, I was beginning to have second thoughts. Was it worth my while to traipse around Cambridge? Guidita confided to me that she did have a friend in Cambridge, that is a former friend. Since we could not find her a suitable place to stay, I suggested that we return to my room, and then we could call her friend and see if he had some ideas. We returned tired to my room and Guidita used the telephone in the hall.

As we were sitting down to a nice cup of tea, and I was wondering if I could persuade her to stay the night without my landlady finding out, her friend arrived. He turned out to be a belligerent Danish law student. With evident proprietary rights, he immediately began to re-establish custody. A long intense discussion now developed between the two ex-lovers, to which I was a somewhat embarrassed audience of one. Being a novice in such situations I tried to be helpful while at the same time hinting at my own claims (it was after all a heavy suitcase). Matters, as they will, became somewhat heated. At the stage when the Dane was having a tug-of-war with Guidita over her suitcase at the open door of my room. The Dane was shouting in Danish, Guidita was screaming in Italian, and I was swearing in Anglo-Saxon. When my landlady re-appeared, I lost both potential lover and actual room.

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Thus it was, that early one fine autumnal Saturday, I found myself seated on the back of Mark's MGB precariously balancing a huge cardboard box containing all my possessions. We were driving to the house the four of us had rented together in the village of Chesterton, just across the Cam from Cambridge. I found it exhilarating as we drove through the center of town, past the open facade of my College, St. Catharine's, then down King's Parade beneath the magnificent Gothic edifice of the Chapel. We turned right through Market Square. Perhaps among the crowd of curious onlookers some wondered at that dark smiling young man dressed in a lamb’s wool coat, uncertainly clasping a box as big as himself, seated as if in triumphal procession, and waving regally at the passing cavalcade.

We proceeded through the narrow streets, turning left onto Sidney Street, the high stone walls of the college cutting out the light and giving the appearance of a fortress. The road widened at the old Round Church. Behind it a large sign proclaimed incongruously, “PRSZYBORWSKI” and in smaller letters below, “haircuts.” We continued over Magdalene Bridge and turned right onto Chesterton Road. This took us past Milton Road and directly into Chesterton.

In our shared living room endless discussions ensued, profound and silly, personal and political, literary and scientific. Paul told Cambridge stories about climbing into College after curfew.

“There was the story” Paul explained, “it’s true mind you, of the chap who had to climb into Christ's very late one nightand I don't suppose you know this, but an easy way, 'specially if you're a bit smashed, is up a tree through the window of the Master's Study, across it, and out the window the other side into the quad. Well, this chap found the window unlocked so he climbed in, and as he was crossing the room he heard someone at the door, so he dived behind a sofa. The light went on and he heard someone moving around, sit down and light a pipe and turn some pages and write a bit. The chap was going bonkers behind the sofa trying not to make a sound. Then the person, presumably it was the Master, got up and walked over to the door. As he went out he said, 'I don't know about you but I think it’s about time to turn in.' Ten he switched the light off and went out."

Francois was also a raconteur. He told this story about his time doing national service in the French Army. He was stationed at a large army training base in the south which consisted of a large building with two wings and the entrance at the center. They had a fire drill and afterwards, the commanding officer mounted a platform and addressed the 1,000 or so troops and then asked if there were any questions. Francois put up his hand and asked the General why it was that for so many soldiers there was only one exit for all of them in case of fire. The General thanked him for his question and then he was demoted.

His demotion consisted of not being allowed to participate in the regular training. He was relegated to secretarial duties in the office. He spent most of his time typing orders for the officers. While doing this, he thought of the idea of typing orders for himself. Since he was an opera lover, he scanned the papers and typed himself a release over the weekend to visit a city where an opera was being performed, stamped it with the official stamp and then bought a ticket for the performance. Travelling by train was free for servicemen.

One day on his way by train to Lyon to attend a performance of his favorite opera, the rarely performed ‘Mefistofele’ by Enrico Boito, he was stopped by the military police. They looked at his papers and were suspicious, so they hauled him onto the local military police base. He was held in a cell, and then marched into the office of the commanding officer. He stood at attention while the officer examined his papers.

“We have been investigating your activities and we have found that you have been travelling all over France on the weekends, we think you are a spy!” the officer declared.

Francois was shocked. He felt the only way to safe himself was to come clean.

“Sir, I am not a spy,” he said. “I have a perfectly innocent explanation why I have been crisscrossing France. You see I am an opera lover, and I have been going to see operas. You can easily check this.”

“Where were you going today?” the officer asked.

“Sir, I was going to Lyon to see a performance of Boito’s Mefistofele,” Paul said.

“Boito’s Mefistofele! I have never seen that opera,” the Officer shouted excitedly. “*Alors*. Let’s go! We just have time to get there before the performance starts.”

My contribution was to tell my favorite joke. It was some years after the Russian revolution, the nights were bitterly cold in Moscow and there was no food. One day, notices appeared that bread would be distributed at a certain square at a specific time. Long before the allotted time, crowds began to gather, the people waited patiently as it grew dark and it began to snow. Finally, a black limousine drew up and a commissar in a black leather coat got out and stood on the running board. He addressed the crowd: “Comrades, there will be bread, but there will be no bread for the Jews, all the Jews can leave.” Whereupon the Jews present turned and trudged away in the snow. Then he continued, “Comrades, there will be bread, but not today, bread will be distributed tomorrow, come back then.” And he got back into his car and drove away. The crowd dispersed.

The following day, the crowd reassembled and stood in the cold and the dark until the black limousine reappeared. The Commissar got out and addressed the crowd: “Comrades, all those who joined the Party after 1920 can leave, there will be no bread for those opportunists.” As some of the crowd left, he continued, “For the Party faithful, there will be bread, but come back tomorrow.” And he drove away.

The following day the pattern repeated, but this time he said, “Comrades, to you, the Party faithful I can reveal that there will be no bread.” And he got back into his limo and drove off. As they were trudging from the square one Party faithful turned to another and said “Comrade, why do the Jews always get preferential treatment?”

Mark told stories about his former roommate who had been a devout Christian, a member of the Cambridge Intercollegiate Christian Union (CICCU), who refused to speak to him except for the purpose of converting him to the one true belief. Mark had set up a continuous circular tape on which he had recorded, "God does not exist," which he played incessantly. But, God did not strike him down. Over a period of time Mark wore the poor fellow down until he had a crisis of doubt, and converted to atheism. Once he had seen the error of his former views, he and Mark devised ways to subtly disrupt CICCU prayer meetings, particularly referring to imaginary sexual acts at great length. It was all good clean fun.

At parties, Mark and I would put on a show and people would sit and listen to our arcane disputations for hours. We would discourse sardonically on any subject but we had certain favorites to which the conversation could be steered like "culture is reality transformed into symbolism," or "the fear of the realization of one's fantasies is greater than the need to act them out," or "there are two worlds, actual and perceived." Debate in not less than 5,000 words! We adopted the practice of referring to these topics by number, "Ah yes, conversation number 6." It was the old numbered joke taken to its intellectual extreme. Mark called me "casuistical Cohen," or the "Semitic sophist." Although I tried hard, I could never match Mark's mental and verbal gymnastics. Paul was too phlegmatic to become involved in these competitive exercises and Francois was too cynical to want to.

Where others felt religion and politics should be avoided, Mark and I pounced on controversial subjects. Of course, God came in for a beating. We were quite a combination on religion, Christian and Jewish atheists that we were, and we would round on anyone who had the temerity to hint at a belief in God in our presence. I would quote the Gilgamesh epics, and the ubiquitous creation and flood myths in the Middle East. Then Mark would warm to his favorite theme: "I can just imagine him, the old blind bastard, as he lewdly fingered the clay, sticking a piece on here and there. Oh yes, he must have thought, I will make these little things ugly. And he succeeded, didn't he. And above all he gave us consciousness, to see our own vanity and delusions. He must have thought to himself, now we'll have some fun, and if he exists, he's been roaring with laughter ever since."

Of course, agnostics were also anathema, living as they were as if there was no God, but covering their behinds. The two of us even devised a proof against God's existence; since there is no absolute unit of length (all units being relative), therefore there is no absolute zero of space; since Einstein has shown that the four dimensions, three spatial, one temporal, form a space-time continuum, therefore equally there can be no absolute zero of time; consequently creation could not have taken place, hence ... I trotted this proof out when required. Ultimately it became too pat. When I had heard Mark's bon-mots for the third time it became too predictable, even boring.

During one of these party discussions, my mind wandered, and I experienced the recurrent memory of Julian. I wondered how exactly it had happened, the birth-death of my older brother. Neither of my parents had ever spoken of it. It was strange that we never discussed it, but I realized that it was too painful for us. I could never bring myself to raise the subject. We each carried this wound inside us, our own personal Holocaust. Some things are best left unsaid.

"...don't you agree?"

Then I would realize someone was speaking to me, and I was expected to give a witty reply, and I would leave my reverie and once again become caught up in the general merriment.



I arranged for my parents to visit Cambridge. They came up on a Sunday when the labs were usually empty. That way there was less likelihood of them embarrassing me. As I took them around the Chemistry Department, showing them the labs and the equipment, they were suitably impressed. I introduced them to fellow students who were working that day, but I hoped they would not engage in long conversations, "Hullo," "Pleased to meet you," "Goodbye," that was enough. I didn't want Mum gushing about her clever son, or Dad showing his lack of education and his cockney accent. Did they realize my apprehension? Was I being openly rude to them? I wanted them to be proud and to enjoy the visit, for they had certainly contributed enormously to the fact that I was there.

Yet I was ambivalent. They clearly had no concept of what it was that I actually did, even when I tried hard to explain things.

"Now tell me, does this have anything to do with curing cancer?" Mum asked for the umpteenth time.

How could they understand? I could not communicate with them anymore, if I had ever really done so. I now inhabited another world, one from which they were excluded. I steered them around the tourist route, through the historic buildings, the ancient quads, pointing out where Newton had lived, where Blake had trod. I noticed how I now towered over them. I was nearly a head taller than Dad. I imagined how ridiculous we must look together, the tall, bearded, gesticulating student and the short plump mother and father, dressed in their Sunday best.

*Mrs. Cohen is wearing a beige, draped, light summer coat, over a large floral print dress, made by herself for the occasion,* I announced in my head.*Mr. Cohen is wearing his only, ill-fitting, charcoal-gray suit, black shoes and brown trilby hat, which he carries in his left hand. Mrs. Cohen leans on his right arm, and he carries a large white handkerchief in his right hand with which he occasionally wipes the perspiration from his brow.*

*Master Cohen,* I continued in my private self-examination, *is wearing fashionable light khaki trousers, a yellow short-sleeved shirt, a tan sleeveless pullover, and open sandals.*

In my self-conscious embarrassment I had forgotten that Dad’s short stature and bowed legs resulted partly from early deprivation, and my own height, and mere presence there, resulted entirely from their careful nurturing.

When we reached the Backs behind St. John's, looking across towards the soaring King's Chapel, Dad surveyed the scene, the elegant greensward, the immaculate gardens, the turreted buildings, the tessellated pavements. “They could build plenty of worker's flats 'ere,” he said.

I was preparing to explode when I noticed the gleam in my father's eyes, and we all burst out laughing.



Mark and I were seated in striped deck chairs on the paved patio before the French doors, reading.

"Why are you so sensitive about being Jewish?” Mark turned to me and asked deliberately. “I know you don't believe in Judaism, or in God for that matter."

"That's true, but it’s more a matter of culture.” I replied, choosing my words carefully. “I was raised in a different environment from yours. Call it ethnic if you like."

"But, I was raised in a different environment to yours, and I'm not self-conscious about it,” he responded.

"It might be difficult for you to understand, but my grandfather and father fought against tremendous odds to retain their religion and their culture, even their lives,” I continued. “I simply can't let it go that easily."

"My grandfather also suffered,” Mark said, “he was a crofter in the Lake District. We also had a different sub-culture, but I don't feel a need to perpetuate it."

"Your family’s culture was a part of the overall culture," I tried to explain.

"So is yours,” he stated. “My goodness, you're as British as I am."

"I can see this is another argument I am going to lose," I joked.

"I wasn't aware that we were having an argument,” he retorted.

*Damn you,* I thought, *is there no firm ground?* There was no way for me to intimate the undercurrents of suffering.

Under Mark's influence I became immersed in James Joyce’s *Ulysses,* and then Fydor Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov.*  For the first time in my life I really listened to music. One day, I was excited by a strange sound, full of thrusting dissonance, that I heard on the radio, which Mark identified as Igor Stravinsky's violin concerto.

I remember the first concert I attended. We entered the Senate House quietly. The wooden floors creaked. The student audience was still gossiping about the recent rag day activities when the engineers had transported a car, piece by piece, up to the roof of the Senate House and had there reassembled it. The police and army had taken several days to reverse the process. The audience sat politely as the musicians entered. After only a few moments tuning, they began to play Beethoven’s Opus 135. There was something ridiculous in the sublime. The music flowed in resounding harmony. Suddenly, the place, the composer, the players, and the listener became a coherent whole.

In the lab, I learnt how to do research. It was a mysterious art serving new Gods. Synthesizing substances that had never before existed. I raised up a flask and shouted, "with this I could conquer the world!" But, in retrospect I was glad that I had chosen to work with molecules rather than men; molecules were more predictable.

On weekends, I went to the Arts Cinema, usually in a group. The audience always entered into the show, shouting during the news, booing the Queen, and heckling during bad films. I saw some great movies there, classics such as *Les Enfants du Paradis. The world of Apu,* moved me to tears. Oh, vicarious life, during which I studied, read, listened and watched.

The competition for women in Cambridge was depressing. Periodically I went down to London and retained a strong relationship with Naomi. I had not proposed yet, but it was understood between us. Meanwhile I hung around the International Center on King's Parade, where many foreign students congregated. The French and Italians kissed each other every time they met; how strange and superficial that seemed to me. I did manage to strike up a conversation with a buxom, blond German girl. Ellen took great pains to explain to me that her antecedents were Danish and that she had lived in France for many years. She apparently had a thing about small, dark men that fortunately complemented my fascination with large, blond women. We became friendly, and although she rejected my cumbersome advances with accustomed ease, over time we developed a friendship. Without other options, I became her advisor, once more emasculated by intellect.

One thing about Ellen that surprised me was her strong anti-German penchant. She made cutting remarks about Teutonic orderliness as if she were playing to my gallery. I soon appreciated that they were deeply felt views, not indulged for my benefit. Naturally, she knew I was Jewish, and she was anxious to talk about it. Gradually her story came out. It seemed that her father had been an officer on the Eastern Front during the War. He had always been nice to her, sending her cards whenever he could. He managed to get a furlough to be home for her thirteenth birthday. Without going into details, she confided that her father had tried to rape her. She had screamed and cried and told her mother. There had been a tremendous family argument, and her father had left without saying a word to her. He had returned to the front, never to be seen or heard from again.

So that was why she turned away all advances. I reminded her of the terrible conditions on the eastern front. Intense cold, insufficient food, no quarter given, massacres, death. One German Officer had constantly dreamed a twisted fantasy of sex with his young daughter. It had been, ironically, his hold on reality. I also reminded her that as far as is known no officer who had requested transfer from involvement in the massacres of Jews, which she feared her father had participated in, had ever been shot.

One evening when we were supposed to be going to a movie, Ellen stood me up. The next night I cycled round to her digs, prepared to forgive. There was no answer to my knocking but I thought I saw a light in the upstairs window so I threw a few pebbles. In a minute she put her head out, apologized, and said she would be down. She spoke to me through the crack of the open door. She explained that she was now living with someone and that she was very sorry but she could not see me again. I discovered that her lover was a Maltese lecturer of comparative romance philology. Apparently, he was smaller, darker, brighter, and older than I; he had the winning combination. One day in the early spring I saw her punting her lover on the Backs. I stood on Clare Bridge and watched my fantasies disappear towards Grantchester.

At a party in town, in desperation and emboldened by beer, I made a pass at a suitably buxom young woman. She had come with a young man whose hands and body shook occasionally. I remarked that he must have had too much to drink, but she cut me down when she told me that the poor fellow had Parkinson's disease.

"Oh, my God, I'm terribly sorry," I said.

"That's alright, it’s degenerative you know,” she answered. “It’s really sad, he has a brilliant mind."

I watched as he went into uncontrollable vibrations.

"Let's go outside and get some air, she suggested when his fit had ended. “I'd like to buy some cigarettes”

In one of the ancient dark alleyways of Cambridge we grabbed for each other. There was a lot of fumbling. We found a secluded doorway. I searched for solace in her unbelievably large, soft breasts. At first she seemed intent on abandoning herself, emitting short, sharp moans. Then suddenly, just before climax, she became business-like. I felt like a cripple in her hands. I trembled uncontrollably and came ecstatically.

Afterwards I attempted to clear up the mess. I was very apologetic, but she seemed used to such situations. We returned breathlessly to the party, she to minister to her cripple, to whom, she informed me, she intended to devote herself until his forthcoming sad demise. Ah, the ultimate female self-sacrifice. I never learnt her name nor saw her again.



I met Harold Albright at a meeting where Rolf Hochhuth, a German author and playwright, best known for his 1963 drama *The Deputy,* which insinuates Pope Pius XII's indifference to Hitler's extermination of the Jews, spoke. In the informal question and answer period afterward, the two of us had the most to say, and we were soon engaged in an intense discussion. Hal was wearing a silk purple shirt and a thin black tie. He was tall and well-built but had a slight thickening about the waist which was emphasized by his tight-fitting black trousers. His thinning hair was combed forward Caesar-style, to cover his balding spot. He invited me to his room for coffee.

Hal was ostensibly studying economics but spent most of his time playing the roué. He collected second-hand books which were stacked in piles and strewn around, unread, in the incredibly dilapidated, untidy, musty basement room he rented. His favorite subjects were witchcraft, werewolves and premature burial. He was delighted to explain that there had been more premature burials than most people cared to know and he drew out old tomes to support his contention. His mania for books on arcane subjects was satisfied by the fact that he worked part-time in Heffers bookstore from which, he boasted, he stole them. Since no one else would ever buy them, they might as well be available for his personal. Also, Heffers was a capitalist exploiter, overcharging poor students for a basic commodity, so actually he felt that he was doing his duty. Hal was a Russophile and a member of the Communist Party. On his wall hung a poster of Lenin exhorting incomprehensibly; and over his bed was the portrait of death from Ingmar Bergman’s *The Seventh Seal.* His favorite work of art, which he showed me with grand emphasis, was *Heaven and Hell,* by Hieronymus Bosch.

Hal explained that he had become disillusioned with the Party when he had been stranded in Red Square in Moscow after the leader of their organized group had absconded with their funds. After all, if you can't trust a comrade, who can you trust? He had managed to survive by selling thing such as his plastic rain mac which brought incredible profits on the black market. It tickled him that in England he was a communist but in Russia he had been a capitalist. In any case, he confided, he veered towards Trotskyism. We both agreed that in the unlikely event that the revolution would ever come in England, Hal would be one of its first victims.

The two of us, although very different in views and appearances, became friends. Occasionally we would meet at one pub or another or have dinner at one of the many Indian restaurants or at the King Street Corner House where the artsy crowd hung out. Hal would talk quite openly about his latest lover. He was obsessed with sex and spent most of his time chasing women, rarely leaving time for study. He never cleaned his room and rarely changed his clothes or sheets unless it was necessary to attempt a new seduction. He had become friends with an artist and through him he had met several models. They were amenable to an impulsive screw after posing and a few beers.

Unfortunately, Hal lacked discipline and ran after whatever attracted him currently.

"I'm in love,” he stated one day.

"With Joan, you told me,” I answered.

"No,” he explained, “with Ann."

"What?” I asked, “you met Joan only last week."

"Well, I can't help it,” he said, “but this is for real."

"Why don't you stick to economics for a change,” I suggested. "You told me that the College was going to throw you out."

“Did I tell you I've discovered a new economic law?” he countered. “It will be known as Albright's Law. Masturbation is the perfect economic relationship because supply always equals demand."

"That's very funny,” I laughed.

"Yeah, I can't study when there are so many arses to be chased,” Hal opined. “Anyway, I've outflanked them, I'm going to switch to English. Look, I have to run now, got a date, the arse-man goeth, see you."

And he was gone.

Hal's switch to English proved a disaster. Hal's College, Peterhouse, had recently appointed a well-known novelist and this had caused a furor since the writer was not considered to have the necessary academic stature. Hal fitted all too well into the profligate group that now gathered around this infamous figure. I decided that Hal was incorrigible and that it was better to keep my distance. Out of curiosity I showed a sample of Hal's handwriting to Francois. It was all angles, points and flourishes.

"Mon dieu, but, this person is mad, quite mad!" Francois exclaimed,



One rainy winter evening after the Christmas Holidays the four tenants gathered in the living room to view slides of last summer's vacations. I showed the highlights of my trip through Europe though it was already fading into memory. Now Mark was showing his slides of Istanbul. Between the good-natured banter I was feeling complacent. This is how it should be, I mused, remarkably civilized, accepted, cozy. Mark flashed on the screen a magnificent view of the minarets seen from across the Golden Horn.

Suddenly there was a furious banging at the front door. Paul, who was closest, threw the living room door open.

"Alright, alright, take it easy, I'm coming,” Paul shouted.

We glanced at each other in expectation. As Paul opened the front door, I was surprised to see Hal. He was drunk and practically fell into our arms. We dragged his bedraggled body inside while he attempted to explain, incoherently, his sudden dramatic appearance. We dumped him unceremoniously on the sofa. His story, as far as we could tell, was that his landlady had thrown him out on the spot when she had caught him in the act with one of his lovers in the downstairs hallway. He had picked up this Italian woman ("Yes," he responded to my interjection, "her name was Guidita. How did you know?"). It seemed that they had both been a bit pissed. After they were caught, Guidita said she had someone to stay with but couldn't bring Hal along. So after pleading unsuccessfully with the old bitchy landlady, Hal had packed up his trunk. He was desperately looking for somewhere to spend the night. He had tried all his friends but they had each given him a drink en route and sent him on his way. He had remembered that I shared this wonderfully large house so he had walked out here in the rain. Plaintively he asked if he could stay the night. I glanced around at the others. They knew Hal only slightly.

"Of course you can stay the night,” I replied.

"Could I stay a week or two?” Hal pleaded. “I promise I'll pay my share."

I told him that we would have to discuss that. Almost instantly Hal fell asleep, snoring prodigiously.

I fetched some blankets and Paul and I pulled off Hal's wet jacket and trousers. Then we sat around and discussed Hal's plight. Mark thought Hal was pathetic. Francois thought he was mad and possibly dangerous. Paul was sympathetic. We had agreed that one of our few rules was that there would be no long-term guests, only four could share the lease. I admitted that Hal was irresponsible but appealed to their common decency and asked them to allow Hal to stay for a maximum of two weeks. Predictably the vote was three to one against.

We left him snoring on the couch. I looked at him compassionately. There was no room for truly crazy eccentrics. As I was about to shut the door I turned the light off and realized that Istanbul still glowed on the screen. I turned off the projector and closed Hal into darkness.



"There's a party tonight at Andy's place," in the lab.

"Where's that?" another voice queried.

"On the corner of High Street in Milton."

Although I had heard the conversation absentmindedly, that night when I found it impossible to work, I remembered the exchange clearly. I really had no idea who Andy was but I assumed that some of the chemists from the lab would be there. I had to get away from the house. The presence of Mark practicing Bartok's "Mikrocosmos" interminably on the old upright piano in the corner of the living room made it intolerable. I found myself leaving and getting on my bicycle. Then I was cycling in the direction of Milton. It wasn't far and it was a nice clear night. I thought, what the hell, I might as well go.

When I arrived in the village, I spotted the place immediately. It was above a shop on the corner. I could see silhouettes of people milling around with glasses in their hands. I walked my bike past the entrance and saw the door was wide open. I had never crashed a party before but it was common in Cambridge and there's always a first time. So I set my bike against the wall and very deliberately entered and climbed the ill-lit stairway. At the top a landing opened on the left into a small flat filled with people, noise, light, and movement. I was swept up into it. I quickly found a table laden with beer and wine and helped myself to a glass of white with a pang that I had not brought any. At the very least I could get drunk. I had never really allowed myself to. I was too circumspect. Now I began to lose my self-consciousness. I wandered through the crowd looking vaguely for a familiar face, but was surprised to see no-one there I recognized.

I sat for a while drinking and taking in the noisy chatter. I noticed a particular girl who seemed to be very lively. There was some music blaring in the middle room which was suitably darkened for dancing. I waited for an opportunity and then asked her to dance. She smiled her assent and we gyrated around for a while, shouting the usual innocuous pleasantries. After some time, we went into the bedroom, where people were sprawled on the bed and the sofa. She said she would like a drink so I maneuvered my way back through the passage, through the throng, and to the table. Finally, I found a bottle, filled two glasses and returned to the bedroom. There I found her lying full-length on the sofa kissing someone.

I backed away into the crowd and found a place to sit. I drank absentmindedly from the two glasses. On my right, a dark-haired girl turned and smiled. I said something to her and we started a conversation which quickly became complex and philosophical. Words rolled off my tongue unhindered by thought. I hoped she did not notice that I was fascinated by her breasts. I felt expansive and wishing to be more comfortable and to put my arm around her, I pushed myself backwards on the bed. There seemed to be a shelf there behind the curtain. My elbow went into the space and something gave way. There was a smashing of glass. My elbow had crashed through a windowpane and the wine in my glass spilled all over me.

The whole room hushed, and everyone looked at me. I was devastated. Partly to cover my embarrassment I stood up and pulled open the curtain, as if to indicate by that action that I was as surprised as anyone to find a window there. As I looked out into the black night, I saw the reflection of all of their eyes focused on my back. For an instant I stood transfixed. I thought I recognized one of the faces, "It’s Julian, watching, appraising." I spun around, but the recognition had gone. I found myself staring into a group of blank expressions. I wanted to shout something at them, but it would have been pointless. They turned away and resumed their idle chat.

There was a noise from below and then a clomping on the stairs.

"What the fuckin 'ell's goin on 'ere. 'oo broke the window? I've called the police,” a gruff old man came up shouting.

"Oh damn, you didn't have to do that, we'll take care of the damage, it was only an accident," said a young man stepping from the crowd.

I pushed my way through to the top of the stairs. "It was my fault," I said. "He's right. It was an accident. My elbow slipped."

The young man looked at me in surprise.

"I'll pay for the damages," I continued, trying hard to keep the slur out of my voice.

We heard the siren of the police car approaching and we went down to meet it, followed by a crowd of curious onlookers. When it arrived a policeman got out.

"What's going on here?" the cop called.

I repeated my story and assured him I would pay for the damage.

"How much would it cost?" the policeman queried the owner.

"'Bout five quid," he answered.

"I could repair it myself for less than a pound," I blurted out.

"OK," the policeman said, "give him two quid and we'll call it quits. It’s not even worth filling out a report."

I fished around in my pockets and gradually counted out the money. I was a few shillings short and the young tenant came forward and made up the amount.

"That was jolly decent of you," he said to me, and after the police car had left, we all trouped back upstairs.

I was now an object of some curiosity. I looked around for the dark-haired girl but she was no-where to be found. People were already leaving as it was getting late. I sat in the living room sipping some wine, not wanting to leave and not knowing the time. I definitely had had too much to drink. I heard a car screech to a halt outside. For a moment I envisaged a police raid, but then some men and women came boisterously up the stairs.

They were older and more sophisticated than the rest of the crowd. They wandered around sizing up the place. One woman was wearing a tight black dress and carrying a small matching bag that she swung on a long gold chain. She came directly towards me. Our eyes met and I stood up and asked her to dance. We went into the darkened room. She put her arms around my neck and pressed her body against me. It felt heavenly, like a dream. Somehow, I managed to converse and discovered that she was a nurse at Addenbrooke's Hospital. Apparently, the nurses and doctors on the night shift often went out for a drink or a party when their shift finished. Now I was really drifting, becoming aroused.

An older man, one of her companions, came in and watched us locked together. He came over and said something cryptic to her. She laughed, then I heard him say more loudly, "This place is dead, let's get out of here." She disentangled herself from me but still holding my arm she looked at her companion and asked, "Can we take him with us?"

The man glanced disdainfully at me. "No, he's not my type."

She released my arm and allowed herself to be lead from the room. As she left, she turned and blew me a kiss. I ran after them and saw them disappear down the stairs shouting familiarly to each other.

I returned to the bedroom and sat on the sofa. On the bed a couple were lying asleep in each other's arms. I found a glass with some wine in i, and indiscriminately finished it off. I watched as the wind coming through the broken window ruffled the curtains. Intermittently I caught sight of my fragmented reflection.

"Expiation," I thought. “Why me? It was before I was even born?"

I found a piece of cloth, a pillowcase or something. I wrapped it around the wineglass and placed it on the floor. Then I stamped on it, and stamped again, and smashed it to smithereens. Without glancing back, I stumbled down the stairs and found my bike. Although I fell off several times, somehow I managed to cycle unsteadily home through the neon-islanded streets.



It was ironic that Mark should be the first to introduce a woman into the house. We had not made a strict rule against it nor envisaged a permanent roommate. The others had their own arrangements. Paul was going steady with a nurse and had decided to get married or, as he described it, "penial servitude for life." Francois knew certain young ladies who would do almost anything while listening to his rare record collection. The more fascinated they were with his analysis of their handwriting the more cooperative they became. Francois rated them according to how long it took to coitus with operatic accompaniment: overture, first act, second act, and so on. As the only one whose home was close enough, I entrained back and forth to London. Often I would spend an evening with Naomi, although I tried to keep this relationship separate from Cambridge.

Mark, who was the most reserved of the four, had seemed almost a woman-hater, a part of his general misanthropy. Yet there she was, a tousle-haired, unkempt undergrad, who espoused all sorts of crazy notions and was apparently prepared to remain in his room. After several days when this had become tiresome, with hairbrushes and powder in the bathroom, and items of feminine underwear draped untidily around the house, the matter was raised and a meeting was held. After much acrimony it was voted by three to one that she must go. Feelings among the most civilized are perhaps the most easily hurt and words are the more calculated to cut.

In silence we ate breakfast. I lazily observed the finely cut lawn through the French windows. Mark, having finished his health-giving Oaties, and having read my paper, finically swept the crumbs from the table, cleared, washed and wiped his things, and, in silence, left. I continued alone to observe the garden through the French windows.



"Well, are you coming then?" Paul was ready to leave, the bacon grease in his pan left congealing as usual on the table. Hounded by Francois' Meyerbeer we cycled slowly towards the river, conversing easily.

"Did I tell you about the schmuck test?" Paul asked.

"No you didn't, tell me about the schmuck test.,” I responded.

"Well, last year I had a Jewish friend here,” Paul explained. “ We always argued about how many Jews there were in Cambridge. We could never agree. So like good little physicists, we decided on a random sampling technique. We invented the schmuck test. The two of us would walk down the street and choose someone at random. Then we would walk in front of him and pretend to get into an argument. One of us would push the other, and he would shout back, very loudly, 'you stupid schmuck.' Then we would quickly look to see if there was some reaction. If he smiled knowingly then we added one more to the list of the chosen, and if he looked puzzled or disinterested, or looked away in disgust, then we put down a negative. It worked like a charm for a while, but then we had to stop because the rumor spread that we were crazy."

We cycled across the slatted bridge, shouting "you stupid schmucks," at the idiots sculling below.

A few weeks later I ran into Hal carrying a pile of books along King's Parade. Hal insisted that I help him take them to his new room in Peterhouse. As we walked, he explained how he had practically threatened suicide to get this precious room in College. When we arrived, he put on a record of a Russian choir singing revolutionary songs. On the walls hung the same striking posters that he had had up in his old dingy basement. Hal offered me some sherry and we sat down across from each other. The sun streamed in through the high windows.

Hal explained to me that he had solved the mystery of who had moved the stone and he was writing a book about it.

“It was Jesus himself!” Hal exclaimed. “It was a case of premature burial, and Jesus had been catatonic.”

As he spoke Hal gingerly scoured his navel through the front of his shirt. His single long manicured nail turned here and there, removing the exquisitely smelling essence. He continued to speak and listen in turn as he spread the secretion on his hand and raised it to his nostrils. I watched captivated while at the same time trying to project my mind forward to continue the dialog.

"You see I realized this when I delved into well-documented cases of premature burial,” he said.

"So that's why you've been collecting all these obscure books,” I reorted. Even then I knew that he would never finish writing his book.

"Now you see, it wasn't only morbid fascination, although that played a role,” he explained. “If it weren't for the munificence of Heffers I might not have stumbled on the truth."

Hal pinched his nostril and inhaled the fragrance like snuff. His eyes gradually closed, and his head lolled backwards in ecstasy. In silence I sat and watched him. The musky redolence drifted across the stuffy room.

As I was leaving, Hal invited me to his 23rd birthday party. The party was held in a private room overlooking Market Square. It was all male. One of the guests was wearing a green velvet jacket and matching paisley cravat. From his blatant and exaggerated gestures, it was clear that he was a homosexual. His name was Oliver and he was Vice-President of the Union Society. The wine flowed freely. Oliver sat at one end of the table and Hal at the other, and they shouted jocular innuendoes back and forth.

"Hal, old boy, why don't we have champagne?” Oliver called.

"Buggers can't be choosers,” Hal responded.

I realized that the party must have cost Hal a small fortune, and knowing his usual state of penury, asked him how he could afford the party. Hal explained that he had stolen the money from his parents. He grinningly stated that he hated them. They were devout Quakers and he hated their hypocrisy. They had stopped his allowance so he figured they owed it to him. They had also stopped payments on his motor scooter so he had taken that too and had hidden it. Since it was unregistered, he could only ride it occasionally. The rest of the money, he openly confessed, came from selling books he had stolen, or rather confiscated, from Heffers. From this money he had also bought himself a present and he stood up on the chair and rolled up his trousers and displayed the calf-length cowboy boots he was wearing, for which he had paid nine guineas. Everyone laughed uproariously.

Eventually, in a drunken haze, we streamed unsteadily—the intoxicated leading the inebriated—across Market Square to Oliver's rooms in St. John's. There, to a background of loud rock, several of the guests relieved themselves out of the Tudor windows into the passing Cam. I decided it was time for me to leave the aristocracy at play.

I could not remember how I had reached home. The following morning, suffering from a terrible hangover, I seemed to remember walking next to a girl. As I caught up with her and glanced sideways at her face, I saw that she was crying. Was it on my behalf? I could not tell. We discussed many matters, deeply personal. As we were about to consummate our relationship, I awoke. As I lay there in a daze I realized that no thoughts of Julian had intruded. I dreamed rarely now, the vivid daydreams of my childhood had faded. I wondered if I suppressed the memory of my dreams because of my fear of their contents.

I deliberately avoided Hal after the party. I read in the local newspaper that Hal had crashed his tutor's car into a level crossing while drunk. A mutual acquaintance told me that Hal had failed his English exams and was going to be sent down. Apparently, he planned to go to Oxford and study publishing.

Then Hal committed suicide. It was a contemptibly messy business. He swerved his scooter under a truck on the A1 Road. Damn self-destructive manic-depressive. Crazy, innocent, exhibitionistic fool. Hal had collected postcards, and had travelers send them from exotic places. A few weeks later I was surprised to receive a card from Afghanistan. It read, "Having a wonderful time, wish you were here. Hal."

I weighed out the fine white powder. Carefully I sprinkled the grains of the precious substance onto the non-absorbent paper. The balance pan oscillated as I released the counterweight. It was well damped and equilibrated quickly. The luminous dial showed the weight to the fourth decimal place ...0.3671 ...0.3673 ...0.3675 ...

"Does the precise value matter? Does it really mean anything," I mused as I watched it slowly alter.

The sun was shining brilliantly through the large window, making the small weighing room very stuffy. I went to the window and stared dreamily across at the great tree waving in the wind and the white clouds skiffing behind it. Needing to feel the cool breeze upon my face I turned the latch and flung the window wide open. I leaned out and luxuriated in the combination of cool wind and warm sun.

Someone entered the weighing room. As the door opened there was a strong draught. The unattended balance clunked and the fine, white powder flew from the pan into the air, an ephemeral sparkling cloud.

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I marched quickly over the damp flagstones, fiddling with the black bundle. Gradually I loosened it and with a flinging movement, in my stride, like a tallit, I draped it over my shoulders. I was glad that it was dusk so that my smile could not be seen. I marched on with a sense of the dramatic and ludicrous mingling within me. This was not the short cape of the undergraduate; this was the ankle length cloak of the postgraduate. It billowed out behind me as I marched purposefully to the monthly College Postgraduate Club dinner.

There was something in my smile of triumph: ttwo generations from a Russian shtetl to this, one generation from the East End to this. I strode confidently into the halls of privilege. There was also something of the scientific skeptic, noting the artificiality of such attire and the shyness that a person unaccustomed to such “dressing up” naturally felt. No doubt my old friends would have had similar mixed feelings. Barry, or Satsun. They would have laughed at me but they would have also felt envy and pride. And then, perhaps, my final sensation as I entered the dark, small Walnut Tree Court, and the low, crooked doorway, was of the young man entering upon his birthright.

I entered and was just in time. This oldest and most beautiful room of the College was lit only by candles. The magnificent table was extended the length of the room and on it twinkled the silver cutlery, the glasses, bottles, and candelabra. Dark beams crossed overhead and the yellow walls threw back an inconstant but warm glow. I took the last glass of sherry from the tray, gulped from it, and stood behind the remaining unoccupied chair, waiting for the prayer to be intoned. On the wall behind the President of the Postgraduate Club, who stood at the head of the table, was a large drawing of the Parthenon. I admired it as the incomprehensible Latin syllables filled the air. Then we sat, fourteen young men, while the servants slid obsequiously into action.

"I hear you've moved into a house with Paul Pollock." The statement was addressed to me from across the table. Some introductions were made.

"Yes, as a matter of fact there are four of us. We were lucky to get the house, it's quite cheap,” I explained.

"Did you have to sign a lease?" he asked.

"Yes, for a year. The old dear who owns it is going to America. She just got her visa through and was eager to be off." "There aren't many people who will lease a house to a bunch of students, sorry, gentlemen. Who are the others? Are they also chemists?"

"Yes,” I said. “Mark Reader and Francois Smith. Do you know them?"

"Well, I know Mark. That's quite a combination; you know that Paul and Mark were the only two to get firsts in chemistry last year."

Feeling a sense of well-being I began to think back over my experiences that past year. I thought that I would like to write. To write about the crazy, absurd life, and the strange people to which chance had subjected me. Vain hopes, literary pretensions. Francois said his novel would start with the word, "*Chryselephantine*..." Mine would be more mundane.

A snatch of conversation from the other end of the table attracted my attention.

"...which would completely destroy a system that it has taken centuries to develop. Can you imagine Eton degenerating into a secondary modern?"

It was not so much the content as the clipped, superior accent in which it was delivered that provoked me. I leaned forward and in a momentary pause said rather loudly, "It’s about time there was a change in that medieval elitist system."

Well, that did it! The argument lasted all evening. From the educational system, it went on to the educational policies of the two parties, the history of the Labor Party, the relative merits of Labor and Conservative Governments, and a comparison with the American system. This was contributed to by an American who, like all the rest, argued for an elitist system. Only I argued for radical change, to something like the American liberal art’s college. It was thirteen to one, and thus I found myself once more the minority, my accustomed role, controversialist. I supported the rights of the uneducated against the plutocrats, while having little in common with either. At the same time I enjoyed my status as a novice member of the meritocracy.

The candlelight flickered through the wineglass as I twirled it in my fingers. The light was smashed into a million slivers of hued rays.

"The multifaceted illusion that is life...” I whispered to myself. Julian existed in my mind like these swirling fragments. I somehow had to wrench that ghost from within myself yet also ensure that Julian had not lived and died in vain.

“More wine, Sir,” a hovering waiter inquired.

The waiter patiently repeated his query. "More wine, Sir?"

My mind raced back instantaneously through time and space. I returned through the maze of my thoughts to the actual moment of present consciousness; through the excitement of the College dinner; my brief friendship with Hal; Ellen and my clumsy attempts at sex; Francois, Paul, and Mark and our life together; back to my lavatorial vigil. That first year in Cambridge had altered me irretrievably. Had I finally come to terms with the imagined memory of my dead brother and the bitterness that had been gnawing within me? Julian had never existed; I was the one who had lived. I had miraculously survived Julian's death. Phoenix!

In the comparative silence that now reigned, I arose from my turquoise throne. Having finished my daily sojourn, I played the final note of the bizarre quartet - I pulled the toilet chain. As the last gurgling sound died away, I bowed low to the imagined applause,

and prepared to face

another day,

another day

of glorious

existence....

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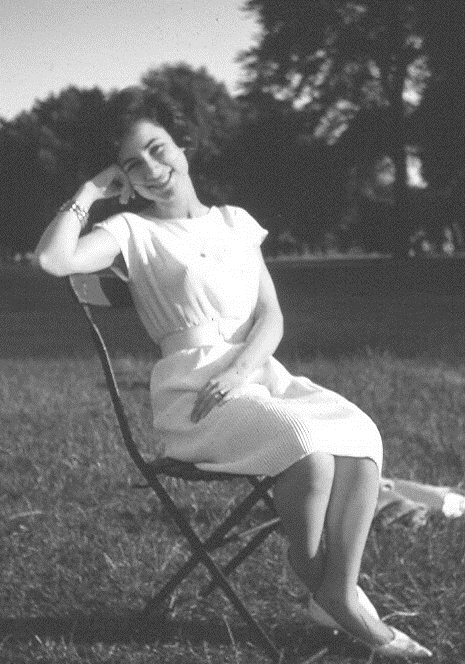
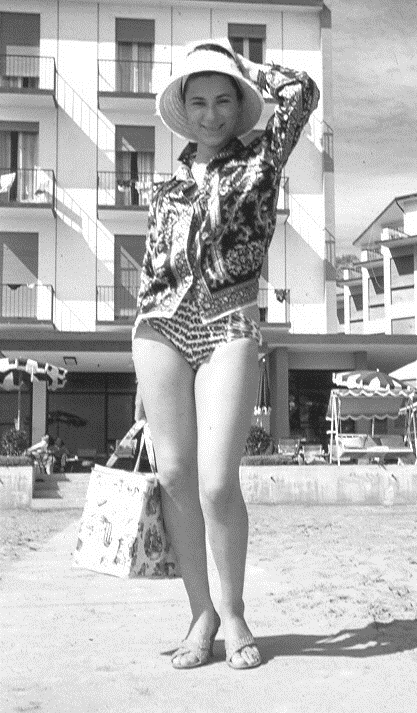
### Marriage

Once I was on my way to getting my PhD in Cambridge, I received permission from Naomi’s parents, Milly (and Hilly) to marry Naomi. It wasn’t that we were madly in love, it was somehow deeper than that. It was as if we were both part of each other. It was inconceivable to either of us that we could be separated, like Siamese twins.

One condition that Milly insisted on was that we had to have an Orthodox Jewish ceremony in their synagogue (*shul*) with all the trimmings. That meant that I had to wear a top hat. I hated it. I never felt so ridiculous in my life. The whole thing passed in a blur, the ceremony in the shul, the Rabbi going on interminably in Yiddish (I couldn’t understand a word), the reception and the dinner. For me it was a means to an end. I do remember that night we stayed at the Cumberland Hotel near Hyde Park. We had a great time opening all the presents and counting the money sitting in the middle of the bed and then throwing it all up in the air.

We honeymooned at the Lido di Jesolo near Venice in Italy. It was the first time flying for both is us, quite an experience. Naomi had a cold and her ears hurt landing. We had a great time, visiting Venice and then Trieste in Yugoslavia. At one point on the beach she buried me up to my neck, and then a group of Italian boys came over and started flirting with her, and she quickly dug me up.

We had embarked on our life together, and we had no idea where it would lead.



**Fig.1** Naomi, Hyde Park, London, 1960, Lido di Jesolo, 1961

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### The Grand Tour, 1963

The red minibus stood on the shoulder of the main highway leading north from Belgrade. The sky was gray and overcast. The clouds just cleared the tall utilitarian apartment blocks standing in long straight rows beyond the highway.

Inside the minibus, a heated argument was in progress between eight people. The topic of the argument, or rather the subject over which the argument had finally been precipitated, was the distribution of bread. That's right. Eight otherwise educated, civilized people were arguing over a few crusts of bread!

We were out of money, that much was clear. So we had been trying to decide on our next move, whether we should plan to stop overnight somewhere in Yugoslavia or drive overnight as far as we could into Austria, in order to conserve funds. As usual there were strong differences of opinion. At some point in the discussion, Naomi asked for her bread ration. We had become so short of money on the return journey that we had to institute rationing. Robert Klein, tall, bearded and generally disinterested in the goings-on in the world around him, was at that point in charge of our resources. Being a mathematician with a tendency to prefer order and abstraction, he refused. He argued that if he gave Naomi her ration then everyone else would want, and then that evening we would want another ration, and so we would be out of bread sooner.

Naturally I took Naomi's side, for although I had tried very hard to avoid showing her any favoritism when I was in charge of the allotments, since she was, after all, my wife, I felt I had to support her. This was not turning out to be much of a honeymoon. We had been married a few months before. Now Naomi said she was hungry. For that matter, we were all hungry, having been living off corn stolen from the fields of the Yugoslav People's Republic, and our reserve iron rations of split-peas and lentils. My main point in support of her was that it was a matter of choice: if she wanted her ration now no-one had the right to deny it to her, whatever other people chose to do. The person in charge of the rations was a distributor not a dictator.

Simultaneously, several of our fellow travelers began to express their views about the matter. Both Martin and Anne supported us, as might be expected since we had been friendly with them for a long time even before we had left Cambridge. Since Naomi and I were the only married couple along on the trip, we had not always agreed with either of them on other matters. However, the opposition from the others became vociferous. Alan and Richard, our two main drivers, who usually disagreed about everything, were strangely united on this issue. Since Alan was a London taxi-driver, whose main interest had been to visit bars whenever he got the chance, and Richard was a student of architecture at Cambridge, whose main preoccupation had been to visit buildings, it was not surprising that they often disagreed. In addition to this, they fought like cats and dogs over who should do the driving and when.

Now they were united, and it was clear to me that it was not so much the merits of the case, whether or not Naomi should be able to have her piece of bread, but a choice opportunity for each of them to get back at me. As the senior person in the group, the organizer and initiator of the tour, I had always been called upon to arbitrate any disagreements. Naturally, I had tried to be fair, but it was inevitable that the others would begin to build up resentment against me. In fact, to avoid this I had from the outset delegated as much responsibility as possible which was why Robert was now in charge of the rations. Their resentments, built up over a period of time, now boiled to the surface.

A shouting match ensued with increasingly bitter recriminations being thrown about over trivial matters which one would have thought had long since been forgotten.

"Animals, you're nothing but a bunch of unfeeling animals,” Naomi shouted, crying from weakness and hunger.

Richard, who was sitting in the driver's seat, broke out openly into a grin. Robert, sitting next to him, who did not like any open display of emotion, began reluctantly to reach for the remainder of the bread and the bread knife, which he had underneath his seat. As he drew the knife to begin slicing a piece off the loaf, Richard suddenly leaned across and grabbed the knife from him.

"No-one is going to get bread unless we all agree,” Richard declared, brandishing the knife while he looked around at our astonished faces in the ensuing silence.

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It had all started so pleasantly. "*The journey of a lifetime. from London**to Jerusalem and back by mini-bus*," read the ads I had placed to find a fewpeople who would be willing to pool resources, buy a mini-bus and spend the long summer vacation driving to Israel and back. The summer of 1963 would be my last long vacation as a student. I had calculated our meager resources and found, as expected, insufficient funds for most usual forms of travel. If a group could buy a mini-bus then re-sell it on returning, that would bring the cost down to our level. Naomi and I had been married a few months before in an incomprehensible Hebrew-Yiddish ceremony in an Orthodox synagogue to satisfy her parents. We thought this trip would certainly make an unusual honeymoon.

I had already found three potential fellow travelers. Martin Lipsett, an economics student who had some cousins in Israel he had never seen; Anne Graham, a Cambridge girl who wanted to see the world, and although not Jewish, seemed to like to be with Jews; and Robert Klein the mathematician. Our big problem was that none of us could drive. I had just failed my test for the second time. So I scanned the replies for drivers.

An advertisement in the Cambridge University student newspaper brought a reply from an architecture student, Richard Potter, who had experience driving heavy trucks during his vacations; an ad in the *Jewish Chronicle* brought a reply from a London Taxi driver, Alan Moss. The eighth member was a medical student, Steven Kantrowitz, a good individual to take along. He could also drive and was an amateur photographer. With these three—Richard, Alan and Steven—we began to make arrangements. It looked like it was going to be great fun. Richard helped select a second-hand mini-bus in good condition, and colored bright red. Steve took care of medical supplies. Alan saw to spare auto parts. I made the financial arrangements and bought the tickets for the Channel crossing. Each traveler paid me an agreed sum for the mini-bus, for tickets and insurance and an estimated amount per day for food. All other expenses were up to the individual. Unfortunately, we only managed to all meet together once before we embarked on our trip.

We were certainly a motley crew. For some of us it was our first and only meeting before the trip. There were six Jews and two non-Jews, Anne and Richard. Two of the Jews ate only kosher food, Naomi and Robert. It was clear that they would have to be flexible but I saw a source of problems there. Also, it was clear that *each* of us had different expectations. Robert only wanted to get to Israel, while Naomi and I wanted also to see Rome and Greece. Anne was interested in sightseeing in general, but Alan wanted to go to night clubs. By contrast, Richard mainly wanted to see specific architectural sights and was consequently elected our cultural guide. In all of these differences were the germs of future conflicts. Our route was to cross the Channel, drive through northern France, Switzerland and over the Gotthard Pass into Italy at Como, down the Eastern coast via Pisa and Rome to Naples then across to the heel at Brindisi. From there a ferry to Patras, then a drive across the Peloponnese to Athens and by drive-on boat from Piraeus to Haifa. A three week adventure. Then, after a three week tour of Israel, we would return to England by boat from Haifa to Izmir, drive to Istanbul, then along the coast to Salonika, north through Yugoslavia, along the Dalmatian coast if time permitted, and then back through Austria and Germany. A total of nine or ten weeks.

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In a mad rush of last-minute arrangements, we set off in high spirits early on the first Sunday in June. We had been able to borrow two old but serviceable tents, enough for three each and the girls would sleep in the mini-bus**.** This was packed to capacity, not only the roof rack, but under the seats and in the aisle. It was not exactly comfortable. Apart from the usual supplies, I had bought some emergency rations, a few large cans of split peas and lentils. The first day was plain sailing across the Channel and across northern France. There Richard insisted we stop to see Le Corbusier's Notre Dame du Haute at Ronchamp, which we would certainly have missed without him. It was magnificent. But Alan was not impressed by this detour to see a church. As our main driver he was responsible to get us where we were going.

We drove on to Rheims and after a quick look around the Cathedral realized it would soon be getting dark. We decided to drive all night to make ground, to get further south to a warmer climate. Richard, our second driver, and Alan shared the driving through the night, and as morning approached we found ourselves in Basle. Problems arose right from the beginning. When we ate in restaurants, who was to decide what was a reasonable cost? Clearly, if some ate expensive meals and others less, the cost per day would not be a fair assessment. I decided to limit each person to a maximum amount. This decision produced quite a bit of grumbling so that to show I was not a dictator I declared that I would share power; each week a different person would be responsible for the kitty and would declare the allowances per meal or per day. This was to prove a mistake since some were very careless while others really were little dictators. Democracy cannot work under those circumstances. It requires the consent of the governed.

We pressed on, through Switzerland and over the St. Gotthard Pass into Italy. We were exhausted and camped on a beautiful site by the lake at Como. We cooked our first full meal and felt very good. Then it began to rain. We retired to our tents and slept soundly.

I woke to a screaming, howling gale. The tent was shaking violently, the ground sheet had separated and water was running under the tent flaps. As I struggled to find a flashlight, the tent began to disintegrate. I grabbed one of the poles and shouted for the others to do the same. The canvas began to rip and the whole thing collapsed around us, a sudden engulfed mass. We struggled into some clothes and taking what we could, headed for a restaurant. It was about 4 a.m., and we sat around for several hours until the fury abated. Both tents had proven inadequate. As we yawningly cleared up and squeezed out the water, other better-equipped campers were rising refreshed and preparing breakfast.

We hung the wet things all over the outside of the bus, and as we headed south the weather became hotter and our spirits improved. Unfortunately, before we reached Como the engine began to give us trouble. It would cough, splutter and then continue. Eventually it stalled. We ended up coasting down into Como. We stopped and asked for a garage. We had to push the bus along the lakeside to the nearest one. The mechanic did a few tests and made a few adjustments. The engine seemed ok so we were off again. Unfortunately, the problem recurred before we reached Milan. We were lucky to make it through the Italian traffic, stalling continuously. Alan had a great time maneuvering and swearing at the Italian drivers. We decided to camp at a site in the suburbs and have the engine really fixed this time.

After checking in to a site we were directed to the central AGIP garage, a huge complex a few miles away. It turned out that the followingday was the Pope's birthday, and the garage would be closed. We were asked to come back the day after. In any case, we would have a chance to see Milan, although we left the bus behind in case of breakdowns. On the appointed day we returned to be told that we could leave the bus and they would try to get to it the following day. We made a fuss, but we had to drive back to the camp, unload all our stuff and return to the garage. No-one there spoke more than pidgin English. By this time our nerves were beginning to wear thin. The following day we called, but all we could understand was that it had not yet been fixed.

It was very hot that day so we decided to go bathe somewhere. We had seen people returning to the camp in swimwear, so we changed into ours, and set off with towels. Outside the entrance, by the road was a sign reading "Bagnare". Well, we reasoned that must mean bathing. So we walked, and walked, and walked, for about 30 minutes down a deserted winding lane until we came to a village, sign-posted "Bagnare", and the nearest thing to a swimming pool was a dirty puddle in the middle of the road. We trudged back, our white, mosquito-blotchy legs followed warily by dark, suspicious eyes.

The next morning a few of us walked several miles to the garage. With dictionary in hand and much shouting we prevailed upon the manager to do our job out of turn. We also paid a little extra. They really took the thing apart. Finally, they showed us the problem, it was the diaphragm in the gas pump that was leaking. It was relatively cheap to replace, so we paid up and with the engine roaring like new we dashed off. We re-loaded and decided then and there to get on our way.

We raced down the Autostrada del Sol into the sunset until there it was again, the engine cutting out. Eventually we had to push the bus onto the shoulder and wait. In the early hours of the morning a police car came along. They radioed for a pick-up, and so we were towed ignominiously into the nearest repair shop on the Autostrada. The owner-mechanic could not speak English, so we had the Police explain the situation and show him the repairs we already had done. We would now have time to watch a beautiful dawn.

We were practically despondent, the repairs and extra restaurant meals were eating into our capital. We had seen more garages than sights. Dissension was rife and arguments flowed back and forth. Several people were for taking off, but I refused to give them their money. We all finally agreed that if it could not be fixed here, we would have to sell the bus for whatever price we could get, divide the money, and go our separate ways.

On and off throughout the day, between other jobs, the mechanic meticulously took apart and tested each component of our engine. Everything worked perfectly he said. Finally in the late afternoon, by a process of elimination, he had the answer, dirt in the fuel line. It was as simple as that, how frustrating! He diverted the gas through a hard plastic tube, and the engine raced beautifully. We insisted on an extensive test drive; the one in Milan had been too short. So, we drove up and down the Autostrada until we realized that our trip had been snatched from the jaws of failure. The mechanic was very nice. He charged us almost nothing; after sharing a bottle of wine with him we raced off towards Rome with a filter carefully fitted in the gas inlet.

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In Rome, Richard was in his glory pointing out the architectural marvels of the Forum, the Coliseum and the Temples. The Pantheon was the most remarkable building, with its roof still intact after over 1800 years. Typically, Robert found it boring. When we came out, Martin went into an adjacent kiosk to buy a newspaper. As he emerged he realized his wallet was missing. The owner expressed total ignorance. As we were about to call the Police, a small boy, about ten years old, suddenly appeared and offered to find the wallet for us - for a fee. Martin said he would pay a fee if the wallet was returned intact. Then the boy led us through some streets to a man, who made the same offer. We threatened to call the Police, whereupon he assured us if we did we would never see the wallet again. So Martin agreed to his price. He went away and returned in a few minutes with the wallet and contents intact. Martin paid him the agreed sum, not bad for a few minutes work!

Since we were several days behind schedule, we had to miss Naples and Pompeii but drove overnight to Brindisi. In the middle of the night those of us in the back were thrown forward as the bus came to a screeching halt. Our awakening was so sudden that it took us a while to understand what had happened. Apparently, Steven was driving, and had somehow not noticed the warning signs for a level crossing. He had passed all the usual striped lines on poles by the side of the road, easily seen in the glow of the headlights, and had only realized what was happening when he had seen the flashing red light of the level crossing bar immediately in his path. He slammed on the brakes and we came to a halt a few feet in front of it just as the train came roaring by. Some of us were slightly bruised, and, of course, Steven was highly apologetic. Right then and there by majority vote we decided Steven should only drive in future in case of emergency. Richard decided to take over. This decision may have been a mistake, although taken for safety reasons, since it made Steven feel like an outsider, and it mayhave helped to give rise to our later problems with him. We arrived safely in Brindisi in the early hours and caught the first ferry across the Aegean to Patras where we spent the rest of the day sleeping in a smallhostel. The next day we looked around and then drove across the Peloponnese Peninsula, stopping at Olympia, which was a bit of a disappointment. That night we intended to camp at a new site shown on our map as a major tourist facility right in the center of the Peloponnese and named after the famous Greek-American conductor Dimitri Mitropoulos.

When we arrived at the area of the site, we scanned the roadside, but saw no campsite. As dusk approached, we reached a village clearly beyond the site. We looked for a hotel but found only a decrepit dosshouse. So, we drove back hoping we had missed it, but to no avail. Finally, we drove into a large field and set up our tents in the dark.

Early that morning I went to relieve myself in the field and I stumbled over a couple locked in an embrace. At first, I was apologetic and wandered off somewhere else. Then I realized in astonishment that I did not know who they were. By the time I returned to my tent both of my two companions were there, but in the dark I may not have noticed if either of them had been absent when I left. However, since they were Robert and Martin, the former religious and the latter very shy, I hardly expected it could be either of them. That left the three occupants of the other tent, Richard, Alan and Steven. I could hardly think of an excuse to visit their tent in the middle of the night to see if one of them was absent, and in any case I was sure that whoever it was, like Anne, would be well tucked in by now.

Then it struck me, how did I know it had been Anne? Suppose it had been Naomi. I dismissed this thought as being absurd. I just could not imagine such a possibility. Of course, from a romantic point of view, this was not much of a honeymoon, although Naomi and I had managed to get together alone occasionally. We had acknowledged, in deference to the others, that a regular married life could not go on in these circumstances. On the other hand, as Naomi pointed out to me, we were legally married and could do as we pleased. I trusted her. It simply made sense that someone would try to pair off with Anne. Whoever it was, they were keeping it pretty much a secret. It was not obvious from anyone's behavior, including Anne's, who her lover could be. Then it occurred to me, "Oh my God, it could have been two men!"

The following day I mentioned what had happened to Naomi. She was also surprised. She said she would keep her eyes open to see if Anne favored one of the boys. Although she flirted with several of them on occasions, especially Richard and Alan, and of all people quiet Martin, whom she knew slightly from Cambridge, we could not tell who Anne's lover might be.

The next morning, as we left our tents, we were surprised to find ourselves camped under the stern gaze of a bust of Dimitri Mitropoulos standing alone in the center of a large empty field.

We descended towards the Aegean in a haze of beauty, and camped by the sea at a small village, Nea Kios. That night we got drunk to the singing and dancing of the men in the local taverna. We stayed there a few days; it was idyllic. For a time, amity prevailed. Those who wanted to went on trips to Mycenae, Corinth and Epidavros. Robert refused to go to see such barbaric ruins. Alan sunbathed. Both of them demanded their share of the gasoline costs, which was contemptuously refused. Mycenae was the most impressive site, huge stones and the surroundings giving it an eerie atmosphere of glory and desolation.

From there we drove to Athens and after some dickering ended up sleeping on thebeach south of Athens at Vougliameni. This was about as different from Nea Kios ascould be imagined. It was crowded and filthy. But we had used up so much money that we had to stick to the cheapest places. For several days we drove into Athens to see the city.

The heat was incredible and the conditions began to tell on us. There was now constant bickering over trivial things. Living on watermelons with little fresh water and primitive toilets, with a plague of roaches, was too much. We began to quarrel, and to get sick. Naomi especially complained about the lack of toilet facilities which got on several people's nerves. Richard responded by mocking her which led to a strong antagonism between us. Even the sublime beauty of the Parthenon, the excitement of the Plata and the antiquities in the National Museum could not totally distract us. Most of us had diarrhea, and so cut down on our intake of food. Only Steven, who as the son of a doctor and a medical student himself, knew better. He continued to eat large meals, only to throw the food up within a few hours. He was a conceited snob and would not listen to advice. For two days he dragged himself around, refusing to eat carefully, to rest, or to see a doctor.

We reasoned that there would be a doctor on the boat, and that since we were sailing tomorrow we would all be able to recuperate and rest during the trip. We arrived at the dock early, then we found that the opening through which the cars drove onto the ship was too small for our bus with the roof-rack on. After unloading and removing the rack the bus just scraped in. It was quite a performance with the crew and passengers shouting their encouragement. The roof rack with all its contents was then laid on the floor beside the bus. This would prove to be a big mistake.

Unfortunately, Steven still refused to eat carefully, was unable to keep food down, and now had a high fever. A half-day out of Piraeus I went to find the ship's doctor and asked him to look at our friend. He said to bring him there so two of us dragged a weak but protesting Steven to the doctor's cabin. The doctor went into a rage when he saw him and screamed at us in a mixture of languages. He had Steven transferred to his sick bay and gave him intravenous sugar injections and antibiotics. For two days we thought Steven was going to die. Then his condition stabilized. His eyes were dark and sunken, and he was very weak. Apart from this preoccupation, we found the rigorous separation of passengers into classes very irksome, and our third class below-decks cabins were so congested and smelly that we mainly slept up on deck. A friendship seemed to be developing between Richard and Anne. I wondered if he had been the one.

The ship called in at Rhodes. We spent a day touring the island. As my camera was not working properly, I took it in to be repaired at a watch repairer, to be picked up after the tour. We wandered through the maze of narrow streets until we were lost. We realized time was passing and we would soon have to leave. Finally, at a run we came into the small square where the tiny kiosk of the watchmaker was located. But, he was not there. We created a disturbance, we called his name; finally someone went to fetch him. He had not finished the camera. It was in pieces. The first warning blast came from the ship's siren. We were frantic. Naomi went to stop them from leaving without us, while I tried to get the watchmaker to hurry. Then, of course, his price was increased. We began to shout at one another. The final warning blasted, I grabbed the camera, stuffed the money in his hands and raced off. He stood behind me shouting and waving. I just made it. Naomi was standing in the bows almost in tears, expecting never to see me again. The camera never did work properly.

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Arriving in Haifa, the view of the Carmel was thrilling, a return after two thousand years. However, I could not indulge my sentiments; as soon as we docked I ran to the Israeli officials with a letter from the doctor, and explained the situation. They rushed Steven and me through customs, and I found myself racing through Haifa to Rambam Hospital in an ambulance with sirens blaring, an unusual aliyah. They kept Steven overnight in the hospital, so I went to the Youth Hostel on the outskirts of town, where I arranged places for the rest and went back to meet the others at the docks. It transpired that during the journey or unloading, our roof-rack had been pushed across the metal dock and the metal prongs, which usually projected into rubber holders on the truck roof, had been broken and twisted. Consequently, we could not fix the rack on. We demanded that they repair it but they refused and just dumped the whole thing on the dockside. The First Officer told me to return the next day so we loaded what we could inside and made two journeys out to the hostel where we unloaded our stuff in a pile in a spare room. The manager was very helpful and when Steven was released next day with strict orders to rest for three days, he was very agreeable that we remain there.

Meanwhile Richard and I returned to the boat, got the address of the shipping agent, and visited his office. From there we were sent to the bursar and so on, back and forth. Finally, they agreed to pay towards the cost of repairs. We had the prongs repaired by a blacksmith in a back alley in Haifa and had most of the cost refunded. Richard was reluctant to use the roof-rack since the supports could give under the load on the hilly routes we had planned. We decided to leave our camping gear and the roof-rack in the hostel, which the Manager agreed to, for a small fee.

Of course, we had intended to camp in Israel, but without our roof-rack this was impossible. Although the hostels were cheap, the cumulative costs would practically exhaust our funds before we left Israel for the return journey.

We soon discovered why the manager of the hostel was so cooperative. He was trying to seduce Anne. Several of the others were jealous since she alternately encouraged and then discouraged them. I decided to speak to her about this problem in a fatherly way. We sat alone in a darkened hut conversing about the trip and the personalities of some of the people. We got onto the subject of Jewishness and I asked Anne why she seemed so eager to be with Jewish people and why she really wanted to come to Israel. There was a long silence. Then slowly, quietly, she began to talk. She had been brought up to hate Jews, her father had always been anti-Semitic and was always making anti-Jewish remarks. So it had been natural for her to copy him. However, although her mother or grandmother never said anything to contradict her father, they themselves never made such remarks. Generally speaking, she had a happy home life.

One day when she was about 12-years-old, she was alone with her grandmother.

"Grandma, you've got a long nose, just like a Jew,” Anne remarked.

"That's because I am a Jew,” her grandmother replied.

At first Anne thought she was joking and she could not believe it. So she asked her mother who reluctantly confirmed it. The shock to Anne was quite traumatic. All the years, her father’s remarks had not only been against Jews in general but had been directed specifically against his mother-in-law.

I listened without comment as Anne continued the thread of her story. It was obviously painful for her to reveal herself this way. What Anne could not understand was why her grandmother and her mother never responded to the insults. On this she could never get a satisfactory answer. As she pieced the story together, it seemed that her grandmother had been disowned by her family when she had married her grandfather. Out of revenge, they had made sure that their daughter, Anne's mother, was brought up as a good Christian. When her husband had died, she became dependent on her daughter and son-in-law. He had used her Jewish origin to taunt her, perhaps out of jealousy over his wife's attentions to her mother, Anne's grandmother.

Anne's grandmother never went to Church and this had puzzled her. She began to ask questions and when she received no replies at home, began to seek out Jewish children to ask them questions. She became fascinated with the subject and began to read about it and look things up in the encyclopedia. She soon discovered that since her mother was Jewish by birth, according to Jewish law, she was also Jewish. It took her a long time to assimilate the fact that she had been taught to despised Jews when suddenly she herself was one. Now she began to respond to her father's anti-Semitic insults. At first, he laughed at her. Then he accused his mother-in-law and wife of putting her up to it. Finally, he began to punish her whenever she answered him back. He called her his little “Jew-lover,” and many were the occasions when he attempted to beat it out of her. Anne accepted these punishments as a natural consequence of her earlier transgressions. She felt she was suffering for a faith she neither knew nor understood. Finally, she refused to go to Church and the family was on the verge of breaking up when she decided to leave home.

At the age of 16, Anne went to live with an aunt then left there and lived with a friend for a while. When her father died of a heart attack, she had gone back to live with her mother and grandmother in Cambridge. All the while she learned more and more about Jews and Judaism. Although she never seriously considered formal conversion, in a strange way she considered herself a Jewess. She finished her monologue and lapsed into silence. We could not see each other in the darkness inside the hut. I was unsure what to say. Obviously, this was a story she had revealed to very few people, and the pain she had experienced in telling it was evident from her tone and hesitation. I said I was pleased that she had felt it possible to confide in me and I would not tell anyone else about her story. At least now I understood a lot that had puzzled me about her and her behavior on the trip. Although I did not say it, I suddenly now realized that it must have been Martin she had seduced.

Those of us who had relatives or addresses to visit went off on our own and left the others with Steve until he had recovered. It was a relief to be by ourselves.

Naomi and I set off for Hadera where we arrived in the evening to visit some friends of my cousins. They had all been together in a group, or *garin*, which went from England to settle on a kibbutz. In trying to find their apartment, wandering down a dark street, we saw a light at a door as some people were saying goodnight. We inquired in broken Hebrew and were answered in a broad Scottish accent. It turned out that the speaker was Lionel's boss,and we were invited in for tea. Our host had been in the British forces during the war and was one of the few who had defected to the Israelis in 1948 as the British Army left. He had settled down there but had never really mastered Hebrew. Later he took us to Lionel and Zena's apartment.

They were an incredible couple. Lionel was not Jewish but had been an ardent socialist. He had heard about the kibbutz movement while studying chemistry at Liverpool University. So he had arranged to go to work on a kibbutz that summer and enjoyed it so much that he gave up his studies and joined a *garin* intending to settle in Israel. Eventually he and Zena, a dark, vivacious, intelligent woman, had married and left the kibbutz. Life had not been fair to them. Lionel was one of the most intelligent people I had met, with a biting, informed, brilliance. He gave up his own easy way of life to share that of the Israelis. He was basically a pessimistic man and if I said that he had a rare moral commitment he would have scoffed. He was then working in the quality control department of the paper mill in Hadera, and eventually set up his own small business in Haifa dealing in ancient coins. We sat and talked late into the night.

The following day he was expecting a visit from the Arab who worked under him at the paper mill. Lionel asked us if we would like to visit their village. He assured us it would be safe since he had a very good relationship with this fellow. We said we would like to have the opportunity, which most tourists would never have, and so Lionel said he would ask him.

When he came, we were introduced to Abdullah and his cousin Mahmoud. Abdullah was a charming gray-haired ma, who took great pains to show his command of English. He had learned it when he had worked in the food services of the British Army in Palestine during the war. His cousin was a taxi-driver in Netanya, the nearby coastal resort. He spoke practically no English. He was a big brute of a fellow with one bad eye. Abdullah agreed enthusiastically to show us around his village, Kalansawa.

When they had left, Lionel and Zena explained that Abdullah was the Mukhtar, or headman, of the village, and that because he had invited us we would be perfectly safe because of the Arab's strict adherence to the rule of hospitality. Nevertheless, we should be careful, since they regarded European or Israeli women as little short of prostitutes because they showed their legs. He had arranged for them to pick us up the next morning when Abdullah had a day off from work. They took us to Netanya where Mahmoud had to attend to some business. While Abdullah sat on a bench, Naomi and I enjoyed a swim. Then they drove us inland past Hadera to their village. It was close to the border with Jordan. In fact, the road to the village ran along the border and we could see a small town across it which we learned was named Tulkarm. Mahmoud pointed to his watch and said, "King Hussein.” I didn't understand. Had he been presented with the watch by King Hussein? After some discussion, I finally understood that the watch had come from King Hussein's Kingdom, in other words they were engaged in smuggling. Mahmoud gave me a sly wink.

Naomi had been warned to cover herself up, so after our swim she had put on a long-sleeved blouse. Also, she had been told by Zena not to expect to see any women there since they were kept mostly at home. First we took a tour of the village which had very few sidewalks and was quite decrepit. We were proudly shown the fountain in the center of the village which had an inscription attesting to its age. Turning a corner, we were suddenly confronted by a horrible spectacle, a boy, obviously crippled and dumb, lying in filthy rags in a corner surrounded by flies. His eyes were red and raw and he slobbered uncontrollably. We looked at each other. How could they allow him to lie there in the dirt? Abdullah quickly walked us by unperturbed. We went out to see his farm where his brother cut open a huge watermelon for us, opening it in slices like a flower. Abdullah explained that he and his family owned all this land, and he was obviously very proud of that fact. It was very hot.

He took us back to his own house where we had a meal, presumably specially prepared for us, of greasy chicken and soggy French fries. We ate with the men. After we had finished, his two young sons were allowed to come in and they picked over the chicken bones left lying on the central plate. Finally, the plate was removed to be given to the women. They could eat what was left. Naomi insisted on meeting Abdullah's wife. He was very reluctant but finally agreed and took her around the back of the house. I followed. His wife was squatting down over a primitive earthen stove. She was embarrassed to see us and covered her face with her head cloth. Smiling broadly, she proudly showed Naomi her primitive kitchen. Later we agreed that if we had seen how the food was prepared, we might have had trouble eating it. Zena had purposely not warned us about that. Under the circumstances, it was obviously a great effort for them to accommodate us. We had avoided talking about political matters but we hoped at least that we had improved human understanding between our different cultures.

From there we drove to a cafe in another nearby larger village. We did not know where we were. This area was known as the “little triangle” and had been an area of major fighting between Arabs and Israelis. We definitely wanted to leave before it got dark. However, we could not refuse a cup of traditional Turkish coffee. We were both feeling very tired by now from the swimming, the heat and the walking we had been doing. Abdullah suggested that we go upstairs to a private room. After drinking our coffee, sitting around in easy chairs, Abdullah suggested that we take a brief rest and then he left. The room was shuttered and rays of light came in only through the slats. It was very quiet except for the distant sound of Arabic music, probably from Radio Cairo. We could not help ourselves, we began almost immediately to doze.

After some time, I had no idea how long, I became aware of Naomi shaking me. She was saying something to me and the urgency in her voice made more impression on me than the incomprehensible words. I opened my eyes. They were so heavy**,** it was a real effort. I felt like lead. I tried to move but it seemed impossible. Naomi was standing in front of me and I became aware out of the corner of my eye of someone else standing behind me. I slowly turned my head and saw that it was Abdullah. Naomi was shaking me.

"We have to go,” she said.

It was very difficult but I pulled myself together and staggered up to my feet. I felt awful. Naomi supported me and we staggered towards Abdullah who was standing between us and the door muttering something. I took no notice of him and before we collided he moved aside. Then he followed us down the stairs. Mahmoud was sitting at a table sipping a drink. Naomi said that we must return to Lionel and Zena's since they were expecting us. Abdullah tried to persuade us to stay but I was feeling so bad that I said we must go. They reluctantly drove us back to Hadera, and everyone was good friends when they left.

After they were gone, Naomi broke down and began to cry. She explained that while I was asleep Abdullah had come back in and as she was dozing he had begun to touch her. She had woken up with a start and he had grabbed her. She had managed to break away and he had chased her around the room. She had called out for me, but I did not stir. She was sure that I had been drugged because I just didn't respond. Abdullah had tried to prevent her from both getting to the door and from reaching me, all the while making grabs for her. Finally, she had eluded him and had reached me, but I did not respond. She thought that if I did not wake up then we were finished. In desperation she began shaking me while Abdullah grabbed her and tried to pull her away. Finally, as I showed signs of waking up, he had retreated behind me and Naomi, in great relief, shook me until I finally came around.

Lionel and Zena were very apologetic. Zena said that Abdullah had several times touched her but nothing as serious as that had ever happened before. Lionel could not believe that they would have drugged me yet I felt terrible with a splitting headache and dry tongue. It had been very strange, even he had to admit, how quickly I had dozed off after drinking the coffee and how difficult it had been for Naomi to awaken me. On the other hand, they must have thought us fools to put ourselves so readily into their hands. Yet their rules of hospitality were supposed to protect us. As Lionel explained, this only applied to their own house or village. Luckily for us, Abdullah's necessary relationship with Lionel had probably saved us, yet we would not have been there apart from that. So much for improving relationships between Arabs and Jews.

After a few days, we set off for Tel Aviv, which we found to be a big, modern, ugly city. There we met up with the others in the bus and drove on to Rehovot, to visit the Weizmann Institute, where I had arranged an interview for a possible Fellowship the next year. We were very impressed by the ultra-modern buildings and the beautiful exotic gardens. Richard exclaimed when we went into the San Martin Guest House that these were the first civilized toilets east of the Channel.

My interview went well, and then we drove on to Jerusalem, a further 50 miles. My cousin Sholem, always called Shuky, was a reporter for the English language daily the *Jerusalem Post*, and that night Naomi and I slept in his room. This was a few feet from the barbed wire marking the division of Jerusalem on a hill called Abu Tor. Before the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967, that was one of the few vantage points from where one could see the Old City and the destroyed Jewish Quarter. We also went to the top of the Notre Dame Convent, one wing of which was in Israel and the other in Jordan. From there one could overlook the Old City which, contrary to the armistice agreements, was closed to us.

My cousin arranged a tour of the *Jerusalem Post* building, and while we were in the newsroom, the ticker tape chattered out the news of the devastating earthquake that had hit Skopje in Yugoslavia. Apparently, all roads were closed, and we immediately began to worry how we would be able to return.

We made several other trips, especially south to the Dead Sea and the most beautiful oasis of Ein Gedi, a dream of cool splashing water. In the north, in Nahariya, a quiet sea-side resort, we stayed with Martin's cousins. Martin was one of the quietest and most agreeable of our group. At a wonderful night beach party he got to know his cousin better, and went back and married her the following year. Life is full of surprises. They still live happily in Nahariya.

Finally, we returned to Haifa, picked up all our gear from the hostel and drove down to the docks. There we found the bus was going to have to be lifted aboard the Turkish ship by a crane. We were anticipating disaster but all went smoothly. We had to pay more, of course, for this service, but we were already so low on funds it did not seem to matter. The Turkish boat was a delight, plenty of food and lots of singing and dancing.

We were now so short of money that we realized we could not make it back. All sorts of arguments and recriminations took place. We were also warned that the roads in Anatolia were terrible and would probably destroy our bus. Then someone discovered that the boat fare to Istanbul was only 5% more than from Haifa to Izmir. By unanimous agreement, quite unusual, we paid the difference, and by doing so saved the cost of all the gas, food and accommodation for the days we would have been on the road instead, as well as the probable repair bills. This unexpected stroke of good fortune helped to make our relationships friendlier, temporarily.

Arriving in Istanbul after an interesting and relaxing journey, including a visit to Izmir, we were confronted by the anticipated problem. The crane on the dock was not heavy enough to take the mini-bus and its load. What were we to do? We could hardly leave it there. Before the eyes of thousands of onlookers we engaged in a running argument on the deck with various officials, the net result of which was that we unloaded the bus all over the deck and agreed to take our chances. The empty bus was lifted up and the wires began to slip, and the crane swayed and made strange groaning noises. To everyone's relief, the bus jerked and jolted to a safe landing on the dock. The crowd burst into spontaneous cheering and applause, and to seal the performance, I vigorously shook the hand of the beaming customs inspector as if I had been the lead in an open-air play.

We spent our first night in Istanbul at the men's youth hostel across the road from the huge, ancient Hagia Sofia. We could not sleep because of the bugs or lice. We had to move to a cheap, but clean, hotel. The girls stayed at the dormitory of the female University students, this being vacation time. Unfortunately, this was Naomi's turn to come down with some dreaded disease but I was not allowed to enter the building. Each day we shouted to each other through the second-floor window while Naomi fought the fever. The old lady who would not let me in was nonetheless very kind to Naomi and brought her a concoction of chicken soup, rice and lemon juice four times a day. Anne brought me bulletins and at first we really feared Naomi was paralyzed in some way since she could hardly move. Thankfully, she was miraculously cured within a few days.

Meanwhile, we toured the mosques, the Topkapi Palace, the bazaar, and when Naomi was recovered, we went on a boat trip up the Marmara Sea to Uskudar. It was very invigorating. The next day we drove out of Istanbul towards Greece on the European Highway number 1. Imagine our surprise when a few miles out of the city, the four-lane highway suddenly became a field, or more accurately a construction site. They were still building the road and there was no alternate route. We just ploughed along behind the bulldozers. Finally, we came to the border town of Edirne which boasts not much more than the second biggest mosque, after the Hagia Sofia. Clearing customs took some time since matters were tense between Turkey and Greece. As we had been driving, we had seen columns of men in dark brown fatigues trudging along the roadside.

On entering Greece, we felt a wave of relief. Turkey had been so poor; Greece was more developed, more European, more familiar. Rather than risk crossing Bulgaria, we headed south toward the coast, camping overnight in a field. Driving along the coast road the following morning, we saw truck-loads of soldiers racing towards the border. We suddenly realized we had not been smart to stop where we had and got away from the border area as quickly as possible. Although the Greek soldiers looked much more disciplined and smarter than their Turkish counterparts, they were clearly outnumbered, and the odds would be against them. We hoped there would be no war.

In Kavala, all those of us who could gave blood. Not for altruistic reasons; we were paid. This greatly supplemented our funds. Several of us repeated the process in Salonika. By the time we arrived in the suburbs, it was dark. We slept by the beach in an uncomfortable place only to find in the morning that we were right next to the town garbage dump. Actually, Salonika was a pleasant, clean city, quite different from what we had seen in Turkey.

We drove North to the Yugoslav border and were informed that we would be allowed through but we had to keep to the main road and were not allowed to stop for fifty kilometers around Skopje. This suited us since we now wanted to get back as soon as possible. Dissension had now become common, factions formed and reformed.

Although we were required by law to camp only at Government sites in Yugoslavia, we had been warned that these were unsanitary, and they were also highly priced. So we decided to chance camping out. After finding a suitable hidden site, we went about setting up camp in the dark without lights. The roads in the South were atrocious as the scenery was beautiful. We used the water running from the many mountain streams.

When we approached Belgrade, we turned off down a quiet, deserted lane and camped on a green patch by the road-side. At about 6:00 p.m., as it was getting dark, a group of people came walking by from the highway. They were returning from work in Belgrade and were very curious about us. Shortly after they had left, some children returned with beautiful tomatoes and other vegetables for us. Then a motorcycle policeman came by to check us out and looked through our passports. He left apparently satisfied.

The next morning, those who had to wash went in search of water. As I was walking through the village, with a towel over my shoulder and soap in my hand, one of our acquaintances from the previous night called me into his garden, and there pulled up a bucket from the well. I washed myself, and although we had no common language we toasted each other in the clear, fresh water. At the time it seemed a perfect moment, but it was a gesture I was to regret.

We spent the morning touring Belgrade. When we returned to the parked bus, a young girl was waiting there. She spoke to us in perfect English. She invited us to visit her apartment, and although there were eight of us, she insisted. We crowded in while her mother fixed sweet, thick coffee on a small primitive stove. In return for their hospitality we gave them some of our reserve rations. We had in fact already been living off the People's Republic, in other words we had been surreptitiously raiding their corn fields. We had also been using our emergency reserve rations of lentils and split-peas. For several days these had been our only food.

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The next day as we drove north from Belgrade, the climactic argument erupted. Richard pulled over to the side of the road and there we had it out. His grabbing the knife forced the issue. Up to that point the argument had been unresolvable. Richard felt that he would show that he meant business and the others would rally to his side. In doing this he had made a bad blunder.

"I don't think you should threaten us with that knife Richard.” said Steven, who during the argument had remained silent, partly because of our previous treatment of him. “Why not let her have her bread now and the rest of us can have our share later."

Meanwhile, Naomi had been crying bitterly. Anne and I had been trying to calm her but now she began to push towards the back doors in order to get out. Her eyes were red and puffy.

"You're animals, all of you, I don't want to be in the same place with you,” she shouted as she crawled out of the bus. “Let me out of here.”

Richard's crude display of power and Naomi's obvious distress had their effects. Alan wavered.

"OK," Richard said, "I'm prepared to let her have her share as long as she doesn't expect to get another one this evening."

"Give her a piece of bread now, and if she wants an extra piece this evening she can have mine!" Martin responded with a note of contempt in his voice.

Now they were gradually rallying to our side. I decided to call Richard's bluff. “Why don't you start driving? We won't stop tonight. We'll go as far as we can,” I said, keeping as calm as I could. “As far as I am concerned, the sooner we get this trip over with the better."

"Now wait a minute,” Richard blurted out, “it's the drivers who will have to do all the work. It’s up to us to decide."

"It makes no difference," I said, "there's no point in pretending we can enjoy any more stop-overs together. In any case, we have no more money and the weather's getting worse. So just give the knife back to Bob and get going."

He looked around and no one disagreed. I was at least saving him the embarrassment of a vote.

"I agree, let's get this travesty over with as soon as possible,” Richard declared, trying to save face. He threw the knife down and turned the ignition. As we drove away, Bob picked up the knife and without saying a word cut a slice off the loaf and handed it to the still sobbing Naomi.

We drove through the night. For those of us in the back of the bus, it was very cramped and uncomfortable. At some point in the early hours of the morning, we crossed the frontier into Austria. I remember waking from a troubled sleep with pains in my stomach. It became worse as we went on. I was sweating and felt feverish. I could not tell what was dream and what reality. It was a nightmare.

Finally, after an excruciating ride, we stopped on the outskirts of Salzburg. I could hardly get out of the bus, I was so doubled over with cramps. We drank some hot tea, which was all we had left for breakfast, and that seemed to help me. Then we drove to the center of town and parked and went our separate ways to see the sights.

My pains began to worsen and soon I found it difficult to walk upright. As we were standing at a busy intersection trying to decide what to do, I suddenly doubled over in agony and collapsed on the street. Naomi screamed and people came running. In my semi-conscious state, I was aware of a policeman appearing, and then I heard the siren of an ambulance. I was thinking of Haifa and then I must have passed out.

I was delirious. I could hear people speaking German and when I managed to open my eyes I saw figures swathed in white coats. Then someone familiar said something to me about an operation. I lost control, I screamed with all my might that I did not want to be operated on by Germans. I was in a sweat, struggling against the terrible pain inside me to get up. Then all was darkness.

I awoke in darkness, still in great pain. I slowly moved my hands over my body. As far as I could tell I had not been operated on. I called quietly for a nurse, but no-one came. Then I searched for a button and finally found one within reach behind me. After a while, a nurse came, but I could not communicate with her. Then some others came. They put some lights on and screened off my bed. Then a young male nurse, who I discovered was Italian, gave me an enema and bathed me. We could not converse, but we managed over time to communicate. After the enema I felt a bit better. By the time Naomi came several hours later, I was feeling almost human again.

Fortunately, she could speak German quite well. She told me they had diagnosed a severe blockage and intestinal infection. Presumably, this resulted from the diet we had been eating and the water I had drunk from the well the day before (was it only yesterday, it seemed an age ago). At any rate, I was the only one who was sick. Naomi had prevailed upon them not to operate. When she had managed to get back to the bus, the others were frantic, not out of concern for us, but because they were delayed. When she had explained the situation, they agreed to stay that night in the Youth Hostel. They voted to leave the next morning for Munich where one of them had an address at which they might be able to stay for free. The weather was terrible now; it was raining heavily, and it would be impossible to camp.

The next morning, Martin, Steve and Anne came to visit me in the hospital. After several enemas, I was feeling much better, and the doctor had reckoned that I would be in for two to three days more. Naturally, I was going to have to pay for this treatment but we had essentially no money left. Fortunately, Steve had a private emergency fund which was substantial by our standards. Naomi found out the estimated cost and he agreed to loan us the money He insisted on receiving an IOU. Since they were leaving for Munich, although they gave us the address in case we could catch up with them, it was very likely that we would have to make our own way home. We guessed the train fares for the two of us and borrowed a lump sum from Steve. Then they drove off, leaving Naomi staying at the hostel. Fortunately, people there, as if to compensate, we very nice to her, and she was able to borrow some more money from an Israeli girl who befriended her.

I remained in the Salzburg Krankenhaus for three more days. I had plenty of time to muse on the events of the trip and to realize how thin is our veneer of civilization. I also remembered that fortunately I had taken out health insurance, so that we expected to be reimbursed for our expenses. We decided not to even try to catch up with the others. In any case, the weather was terrible, and I felt very weak. We paid the hospital bill, pawned a watch and a bracelet, and with the proceeds bought our tickets and caught the first train to London.

We crossed the English Channel on a beautiful sunny day with a mirror-calm sea. Later we learned that the others actually crossed the next day after a miserable wet stay in Germany. Their crossing turned out to be the worst crossing in history. The storm was so bad the ferry had to stand offshore for hours. Then the bus finally gave out half-way to Cambridge, and Richard ended up sleeping in it overnight only an hour’s drive from his home. Ironic justice! It had been a wizening and chastening experience.

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### Birth and Renewal

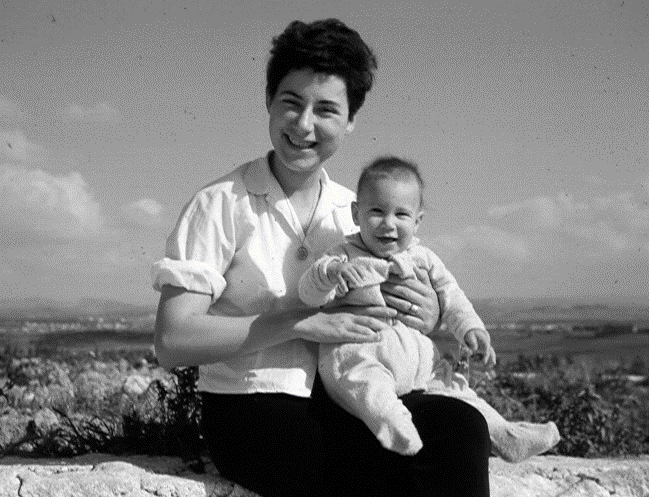
I had been insistent on being present at the birth. We had managed to arrange this with some difficulty since we were only staying in London for a short time in 1964, *en route* from Cambridge to Israel. We were able to book a place at University College Hospital in London, which was one of the best and most enlightened maternity hospitals. It was a long way from Naomi's parents' flat where we were staying in Stamford Hill.

I had been an attendant expectant father. One day we were sitting alone in a corner of Finsbury Park, shaded from the sun by the towering, swaying trees. I was relaxing instead of reading when Naomi said quietly, “I think they're beginning.” We immediately began to walk slowly and cautiously back to the apartments, with the contractions gradually becoming more regular. On the way, we realized that neither of us had the key. It took about ten minutes to return, and of course no one was home during the middle of the morning. I went to a neighbor to call the ambulance while Naomi sat in a deck chair on the landing outside the locked door, trying to stay calm. I had noticed that the toilet window was open and, fortunately, the neighbor's son was small enough to squirm through. We had just enough time to gather our things when the ambulance arrived.

The journey in the ambulance was a long one. At one point, with siren flaring, the ambulance waded through a large crowd. For some reason it disquieted me and I concentrated on holding Naomi's hand as the pains increased. Several hours later, in the bright light of a sunny day, I watched elated as the baby's head emerged. It was a boy! Something stirred inside me, something beyond the usual significance of fatherhood. It whispered to me of deep, ancestral memories, of past injustices, of the mysteries of birth and death, and of renewal.

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# **Israel, 1964**



**Fig. 2**. Hulda, Israel, 1964

### An Attack?

The hot sweat clustered around my brow as I awoke. We had not become used to the heat after a month in Israel. I had come to do a Post-doctoral Fellowship at the Weizmann Institute in Rehovot. Our rented bungalow had a flat roof, and during the day the interior cooked. Of course, we kept the doors and windows closed, but at night when we opened them the place had no real chance to cool off. The mosquito netting was essential to keep out the myriad of insects, but it also reduced the airflow. In the evenings, after a few miles walk from the Institute, I was exhausted. Naomi and I would sit on the balcony and enjoy the cool breeze, while suffering the mosquitoes. After a meal I would generally collapse into bed, only to awaken a few hours later bathed in sweat.

As I lay there, drowsy and uncomfortable, hearing the noises of the night, I thought I could hear...in the distance...yes...gunfire. I moved quickly to the window, pressed my ear against the netting, and listened intently. Sounds traveled far in the still night, better be sure. After a while, I heard it again, faint but distinct. Then it faded once more. There had been some shooting on the Syrian border recently, hardly unusual, but here in Rehovot, in the heart of Israel, everything had been peaceful.

I turned to Naomi, but she continued to sleep soundly. In his cot Julian slept the profound sleep of childhood. My mind raced, what should I do? Out on the street there was no sign of activity. Nothing appeared to be stirring in the darkened town. Surely, if there were any danger they would sound an alarm. The police would go around waking people. Were we all to be caught in a surprise attack at night? Was it for this we had come to Israel, to suffer the same fate?

With these thoughts gripping me I ran to the radio in the kitchen and turned it on, softly (how absurd). The light and army networks both had music playing. There was no interruption or urgent voice broadcasting an appeal for mobilization, or calm. Perhaps they did not know yet, or they were trying to avoid panic. On the other hand, perhaps my imagination had played me a trick.

I ran back, now in a cold sweat, to the bedroom window. Yes, after a few minutes I heard it again. What to do? I slipped out of the front door, and down the path. I scanned the street, but all was dark and quiet. I began to run towards the main road, and as I did I noticed there were many buses parked along the street. I thought that was peculiar, considering how late it was. As I continued along the street the sound of intermittent gunfire increased in intensity, intermingled with other sounds, people talking...and then it dawned on me. The buses were there to take people home from the late movie showing at the theater down on the corner. Tonight they were playing a Western!

I let myself silently into the house. Julian was sleeping fitfully in his crib. I lowered myself gently onto the bed so as not to waken Naomi. I lay there hearing Julian's intermittent sounds. Perhaps he had sensed my absence.

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### Death

Noise... a noise... the phone ringing in the middle of the night. “What, what's that?” Awakening to shrill blackness, senses confused.” Who could be calling at this time?” “I'll get it!” I struggled to get out of bed becoming entangled in the blankets, urgently wanting to stop the reverberating sound. “Must stop that noise!” The blankets seemed irretrievably tangled around my legs. Endlessly I tried to run, but slipped on the tiled floor and painfully struck my leg on the corner of the low bed. The jangling ringing continued intermittently. Swearing, in terror, I scrambled on all fours across the floor, an animal answering its call.

Finally, I grabbed the receiver. A disembodied voice asked my name. In dread anticipation I confirmed my identity. Then I recognized my mother's trembling voice, and immediately I knew the truth, “Dad's dead.”

I tried to picture my father, but I was not sure if it really resembled him. I would never be able to compare my vision with reality. My mother regained her composure and explained the circumstances, avoiding details over this impersonal distance. I tried to comfort her. We made the necessary arrangements. It was **1977**. He would never get to visit Israel, the trip that they had planned for that summer.

Later, after I had booked a flight to London, and when I had time before the taxi was due to arrive, I sat alone on the patio. Across the orange groves the sun was rising. All was still, tranquil, beautiful. I saw it with incredible clarity, the verdant groves spreading up the hill to the stucco buildings of Netzer Sereni, already shimmering in the gathering heat. I wept silently at the loss, the missed chances. We had never once talked about Julian, perhaps the most tragic event in my father's life. What could I have done? I asked myself. At least I could have offered comfort. Too late, too late. Why was it so difficult? The dawn was cold, I shivered, and marveled at the sharp contrast, death and being, ever co-existing.

Words, hollow receptacles of reality which fail to convey the complexity of meaning. What was it he said to me? I could picture us, me tightly holding his hand as we wended our way through the crowd going to a soccer match at the Arsenal stadium. I had gone unwillingly, I disliked crowds, and at school avoided sports. The huge crowd crushed in around us. Were we there because my father thought that I wanted to go, or because he thought it right to take me? As we came closer to the stadium the huge green building destroyed the sky.

The intermittent ringing of an ambulance siren approached. It divided the crowd and stopped just before us. A stretcher was carried out of the adjacent entrance of the stadium. Someone was lying on the stretcher, his face a strange, purple color. Two uniformed men maneuvered the stretcher into the ambulance. My father bent down and said something to me. What was it he said?

I could not remember. It was not important, yet somehow it had produced a moment of insight, an instant of self-awareness that still lingered in the fastnesses of my mind. I am me. I am standing holding my father's hand before a huge green stadium encompassed by a crowd of people. Someone has died.

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He looked up with unseeing eyes. I stretched out my hand to touch my father's face for the last time, to feel the grizzly stubble with which he had fended off tenderness. The guardian of the body grabbed my wrist. “It is forbidden,” he murmured. We stood in the annex of a Church in Leytonstone. At any moment my father would jump up and protest this travesty. “You're going to bury me in a Church?” he would yell, “have you no feeling?” “Dad, Dad,” I would reply soothingly, “we're not going to bury you here, it’s only a place for me to see you... for the last time. They bring everybody here, Christians as well as Jews. I wanted to see you. From here they'll take you to the grounds for the lavoya.” “Oh,” he would respond, half-conceding, “but why did it have to be in a Church.” Then he would resignedly return to his coffin, his energy never stilled.

I said goodbye. Somehow, I had left the annex. In the Churchyard the paths were silent, the gravel crunched beneath my tread, the graves were in repose. Suddenly the Church bells began ringing deafeningly.

“Had I made up for him, Julian, my brother, lost, dead? I tried, but I could not. If I had asked you about him, Dad, what would you have replied? Ineluctable words that delineate existence. I had blamed you, and had been aloof.” I slammed the car door. The engine purred into life and we sped away.

After the official mourning period of the Shiva was over, I went to the East End to see the places where I had grown up. I took the tube to Old Street Station, and wandered around the completely rebuilt circle, until I found Cowper Street. From the outside the school looked unchanged, perhaps the bricks a bit grimier. A janitor was polishing the brass work on the door. It was vacation time and the school was officially closed, but when I told him I was an “old-boy” he allowed me in. The entranceway had been modernized, but the same old dark pictures of the school founders gazed down. I passed the door to the Head's office, resonant with memories. I looked into the Hall. It was smaller than I remembered it, remembered...

I walked down Rivington Street and past Shoreditch Church. Everything was shabbier than I expected. The school and Hospital still stood eyeing each other on Virginia Road, both looking more dilapidated. The Hospital did not have as much impact, it was just an old building. Where the bomb-sites had been on both sides of the road was a new housing estate. The old rusty gate had gone completely. As I walked along I noticed a Pakistani family walking parallel to me on the other side of the street. The man walked in front with an astrakhan hat on his head, behind him his wife wearing a coat with a sari under it, and behind her a girl, dressed in conventional western dress. The girl stared back at me and we caught each other's eye. What was she thinking, as we exchanged a glance, alien stare? How could she possibly comprehend the ambiguity of our juxtaposition? The family turned a corner and moved obliquely away. We made it possible for you, I thought, our suffering unrecognized.

The bombsite on the corner was now a park, and the old flats had been replaced with a modern high-rise. They were actually in the process of demolishing the houses on my side of Brick Lane, so that it was almost impossible to locate the actual house where I had lived. The alley that had been opposite was no longer there. I found an old, wooden gate, twisted and darkened by years of neglect. Next to it had been the confectioner's shop. There was still an old faded sign reading “Tizer, the appetizer.” It should have been three houses before that. I counted over and looked up. There was a chimney stack poking up from the half-demolished house into the gray, cloudy sky. Suddenly a surge of emotion hit me. It constricted my throat and caught my chest in mid-breath. I recognized the pattern of the kitchen wall-paper flapping in the cold, sharp breeze. I walked over and lovingly ran my fingers along the familiar row of mortar between the rough bricks. Had it all been a dream?

I walked down Brick Lane, across Bethnal Green Road and under the railway tunnel. It was even more grimy and dank now, with people walking zigzag paths to avoid the dripping water. Beyond the tunnel loomed the chimney of the Truman brewery. I turned left into the narrow alley and found the entrance of the Shoreditch Underground station. The trains from here only run in the rush hour, but they had already started at 3 pm. The place was practically deserted. The train ran through the old brick tunnels, still preserving their Victorian origins under layers of accumulated dirt. I got off at Stepney Green and came out onto the High Road. As I walked, I looked for the Cinema where my parents had met. My mother had told me how my father had asked her for a light for his cigarette as the lights went on during the interval between the two films. They had started talking, and he had asked for her address (that was long before people like us had telephones). From such threads our lives hang.

As I crossed the road towards my Uncle Izzy's store, I saw the movie theater still there. His old store had stood on the corner, a huge building, surrounded by bombsites. But in order to widen the road, it had been taken over by the Council, and he had been given a smaller modern store below a block of flats. I saw it now, the sign above the store 'I. Cohen.' I ascended the stairs on the side to where I knew I would find Uncle Izzy and Aunt Dora in their little flat above the store.

“Let me make you a cup of tea,” was the usual greeting. After they had told me about their plans to sell the store and retire, and we had a cup of tea, Aunt Dora returned to her vacuuming. I wanted to ask Izzy about my dad. Who else was there to ask, he was the youngest brother, perhaps his memory could be trusted. But, it was difficult broaching the subject. As we talked and reminisced the years between us slipped away. The formality to which I had been brought up was dropped. I was now, after all, a grown man. My father was dead. Some questions must finally be asked.

On the way back home, on the Underground, in the car to the airport, in the plane, I tried to make sense of what I had learnt. It was the fuel that had propelled my life.

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Hazily at first, I imagined my father, younger, shabbily dressed, standing with cloth cap in hand, in the hallway of the Shoreditch Mission Hospital in Bethnal Green. The walls were a dark, depressing green. The air was cold and damp. My father's breath formed a spike, vanishing and reappearing as his harsh breathing disturbed the calm surroundings. There was a strong smell of carbolic. Ahead of him wide stairs lead upwards and then divided to left and right. Between the stairs on the wall a large clock ticked insistently. Upstairs were the wards.

It was very quiet on Sunday morning. Occasionally nurses walked briskly by. Doors opened to reveal distant conversations and then banged closed. My father waited. He was unshaven and looked tired, even grim. A Staff Nurse entered the hallway from the door to the right and marched over to him. She wore a uniform a shade darker blue than that of the ordinary nurses. She stopped before him,

“I'm sorry Mr. Cohen, but we cannot disturb the doctor.” For an instant he did not reply, the silence was oppressive. Then a twisted smile crossed his face.

“Sister, my wife is dying upstairs, my baby is dead, and you stand there and tell me the doctor has no time to see me.”

“Well, Mr. Cohen, I'm sorry, but it is early Sunday morning.”

“But, the other nurse told me that Dr. Connor is on duty this morning.”

“That's true, but we have orders not to disturb her.”

“What do you mean, not disturb her?“ growing angry now,

“If you don't call her I will,” and he walked forward to the stairs shouting upwards, “Dr. Connor, Dr. Connor!”

“Really, Mr. Cohen, this is a hospital!”

“Is it? Fine hospital where doctors are too busy to be disturbed,” and he continued to shout her name.

“Very well Mr. Cohen, if you insist on being difficult I will try to locate Dr. Connor and see if she will see you,” and she marched briskly back to the door from whence she had come.

Once more silence prevailed. After a delay of about ten minutes the Staff Nurse returned, “I was able to locate Dr. Connor, and she has kindly agreed to see you. She will be down shortly.” Once again she turned abruptly and retraced her steps. After a further delay the door opened and the Doctor appeared followed closely by the Staff Nurse.

Dr. Connor was a young woman, in her early thirties. Her face had a well-scrubbed, ruddy appearance, and she was wearing a stiffly starched white coat.

“Mr. Cohen, your wife had a good night. I think she will survive.”

“Thank God, that's what the nurse also told me.”

“Then,” sharply, “why did you insist on seeing me, why have you been creating a disturbance?”

“I wanted to know what the sex of the child,” his voice catching, “was?”

“It was a boy.” “Julian,” the name crossed his mind, “dead.”

“Surely you could have asked the nurse that too.”

“I also wanted to know why you didn't do a Caesarean operation earlier?”

“I don't have to answer that question, or any other questions,” her face growing redder. “I wanted to know why my wife was left in labor for nearly a week? If she needed a Caesarean why did you delay so long, so that the baby died and she almost did?”

“Are you questioning my competence? You Jews are all alike, you always know better.”

“Whaddya mean, 'you Jews,' what has that got to do wiv it?” He was shouting now, his face contorted in anguish, while Dr. Connor stared fixedly at him in blind fury, and suddenly blurted out,

“The Jews are an accursed people!”

“Was that why you let my wife suffer, was that why you killed my son? “He was overpowered by emotion, his body shook uncontrollably. Dr. Connor observed the unkempt, trembling man with disgust.

“I don't have to stand here wasting my time with you.” The Staff Nurse tried to interrupt,

“Please, please, this is not the place for such goings on, please you must stop!” They glared at each other with mutual hatred, then the Doctor smiled to herself, turned her back and walked away.

After a few minutes my father broke the heavy silence and spoke to the Staff Nurse, “You 'eard what she said, you're a witness. I want to see the chief doctor, I don't know oo 'e is, but I wanna see 'im.”

“Now really Mr. Cohen, this has gone far enough, you cannot possibly see the Chief Surgeon today.”

“Then tell me 'is name an make an appointment for me. I wanna see 'im termorrer, I wanna make a complaint.”

“Alright Mr. Cohen, his name is Mr. Adair. I will inform his office that you will be contacting them tomorrow.” For a moment they continued to eye each other hesitantly.

“Tell me something Sister, would you agree to tell the Surgeon what you 'eard the Doctor say before?”

“Mr. Cohen, I must remind you that this is a hospital, and people die here all the time. Why don't you see the Surgeon tomorrow and I'm sure that he will explain things to your satisfaction.” With that she too left.

My father stood alone in the quiet lobby. He looked up through the stairwell to the fanlight above and gazed unseeingly for a moment. Then he groaned, “Oh God,” and slowly turned and trudged from the building.

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The Chief Surgeon agreed with my father that it was unusual to allow labor to proceed for five days before carrying out a Caesarean delivery. However, he also explained that each case is different, and that there was a formal complaint procedure to be followed, so that he alone would not be responsible for judging every case. He agreed to look into the incident and since my father expressed his intention to lodge a formal complaint he was taken to the Administration Office. There, since he was functionally illiterate, he was helped to fill out the complaint form. It was not easy for him to dictate to the patient clerk a charge of murder by virtue of incompetence or prejudice.

Eventually the matter came before a Disciplinary Committee. Each of the protagonists gave testimony. Fortunately, the Staff Nurse confirmed, albeit reluctantly, the remarks that Dr. Connor had made. The Committee found that Dr. Connor had been negligent in allowing labor to proceed for an extended period, particularly since it was clear from the outset from the medical evidence that Mrs. Cohen had a narrow pelvic opening, and should have been delivered by Caesarean section. Dr. Connor was dismissed from the Hospital. The question of prejudice as a motivation for Dr. Connor's negligence was not addressed.

My mother had to remain in the Hospital for some time. The night that they heard she might still be able to have children they were feeling better for the first time in a long while. As they were sitting quietly together in the ward they suddenly heard a commotion, someone shouted, “'ere come and see this, wot a fire!” Everyone rushed to the windows, and from the darkened ward they saw in the distance a huge conflagration. Exclamations of “cor blimey,” and “what's burning?” were heard. The distant sky blazed with a disturbing intensity. Someone shouted that it was the Crystal Palace that was burning, the great glass construction that had been built for the Great Exhibition many years earlier, and which stood on a height in south-east London. Gradually silence descended over them. They stood, lost in thought, staring at that fascinating, terrifying sight. The distant flames reflected coldly off their careworn faces.

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**In the Land**

The Land of Israel is covered with historic sites. The map shows dozens of tels scattered wherever a hill would support defensible human habitation. In this fertile crossroads, armies marched and counter-marched, destroying cities and re-settling them. Some tels show evidence of twenty or more levels of civilization stacked one on top of the other, stretching back four thousand years through the Babylonian, Greek, Roman, Arab, Crusader, Turkish and British conquests.

I was most fascinated by the remains of the biblical period. Three of the biggest tels occupy strategic sites controlling the coastal strip, along which all commerce proceeded. Where the route turns inland through the Jezreel Valley, known as the *via maris*, stands Megiddo. This was Solomon's northern capital, and it was destroyed in a manner so extreme that it has been enshrined in our minds as the ultimate eschatological armageddon. The ruins of Gezer guard the foothills of the route inland to Jerusalem; and in the south, huge and forbidding, stands the largest tel, Lachish.

To the casual eye Lachish appears from the distance a strange, black, flattened mountain. Few tourists come this way and no signs indicate how to reach it. Closer up, it looks like nothing more than a great, if ancient, slagheap. Walls and terraces wander in all directions across its steep slopes. Clambering to the top took me a half-hour of hard work.

On the top it was quite flat, but here and there were humps and holes disappearing into the depths. Walking across the top I was confronted by a massive stone wall. I passed through it at an opening that once must have been the gateway to a great and magnificent city. It had been the last, and hence topmost, city on the site. Then the location was abandoned thousands of years ago. While there was some evidence of excavation, it was clear that modern man had only just scratched the surface, literally, of this huge mound.

On the top there was the strange feeling I always associated with such sites. A strong, but gusty, wind tugged intermittently at my clothing, making quiet whispering sounds. The air was hot and dry, and dust rose in small whorls and then settled quickly. The weight of history hung heavy, stifling, almost tangible. The ground was littered with fragments of stone and pottery, the accumulated detrita of millennia. I stooped and picked up one particular shard that attracted my attention. It was warm and sharp in my hand. It felt strangely familiar.

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# **Discovering America, 1966**

Unwittingly, I discovered America on Columbus Day, 1966. In the package of explanatory material that I received from Harvard University there was all kinds of useful information, including a list of dates of National Holidays, such as Labor Day and Memorial Day, on which I should not arrive. But, no mention was made of Columbus Day. While this was not a National Holiday, it turned out to be a State Holiday in Massachusetts. When I arrived full of eager anticipation in a taxi from Boston airport at the University Center in Cambridge it was closed, totally deserted!

I was shocked, I could not understand why the doors were barred and the elevators did not work. I was supposed to report to a specific office to obtain the address of the lodging which had been arranged for me (they would not give it to me in advance). Instead I stood disconsolately in the gloomy arcade, with my two suitcases, wondering where I could find a place to sleep that night.

Then I heard voices. Was it my imagination? No, I was not that tired. The voices and sometimes music were drifting to my ears from somewhere in the arcade. I dragged my suitcases across to what appeared to be the back door of one of the stores. It was ajar, so I entered cautiously. A fellow was sitting with his back to me wearing earphones. I spoke to him. He ignored me. I presumed he could not hear me because of the earphones, so I shouted at him. He was talking, but not to me. Then he turned round and gestured rudely to me and waved me away. Then I realized he had been speaking into a microphone.

I sheepishly hung around by the door hoping he might eventually be able to help me. When he got off the air he really told me what he thought of me. A woman came in from the studio in the front to find out what was happening. I explained my predicament. It transpired that this was the radio station of Harvard University. I was flabbergasted, in England no university had a radio station. Short of broadcasting an appeal, they said they could not help me. But, after some discussion they remembered there was an International Center nearby. So she called to see if they had a spare bed, and indeed I was lucky, they did.

They said it was only ten minutes walk, so following directions I set off carrying my two suitcases. I negotiated Harvard Square and began to cross the Common. The cases seemed very heavy and my hands were getting sore. As I stopped to change hands I noticed several baseball games in progress and people lolling on the grass. The further I went the more often I had to stop. Halfway across the Common, at the intersection of the main paths, there was a small memorial with a plaque. I set my cases down and sat down to rest and read the plaque. It commemorated the spot where George Washington took command of the First Continental Army in 1775. "Well George," I thought, "here we are, both starting out at the same point. Of course, you had certain advantages over me, you were taking control of an army while all I'm doing is shlapping suitcases. But, we both apparently face insuperable obstacles. Anyway, good luck!"

People passing by were looking at me strangely. At least that is what I thought, although I was chronically self-conscious. Steeling myself I continued the arduous journey. Finally a few blocks past the other end of the Common I found the International Center, which proved to be an old rambling house. I was exhausted and gratefully accepted a bed in a dormitory. When I went upstairs there was nobody around, so I immediately began to undress.

As I stood there in my underpants the door was thrown open and a girl dashed in. She stopped in surprise. I was as much amused as embarrassed. She blurted out an explanation; that she had a date with her boyfriend, but that when she had arrived they had told her that he had checked out. Since he had said nothing to her about leaving she thought they were covering up for him, So she had come to check for herself to see if his things were there (she obviously knew where his bed had been). Imagine her surprise when she found me in his place, dressed only in my underpants.

I explained to her that this was my very first evening in the United States, that I knew no-one at all, and that I was going straight to bed. I appealed to her sense of patriotism and suggested that she join me. She was very pleasant, buxom, and with a warm personality. She gracefully declined my offer, but countered with one of her own. She had been going to a concert with her boyfriend and now she had an extra ticket. Before she could say much more I was re-buttoning my trousers. Ah, America, land of opportunity!

We went to the Concert Hall at Harvard University where a brass band was playing. I sat next to her in the first row of the balcony, but we could not speak much because of the thunderous sounds. As the concert was ending a young man entered and came to sit next to her on the other side. He was small and dark and later I found out that he was Persian. They engaged in an intense conversation as the clapping began. Finally she turned to me and said “Sorry, I have to go now,” and she followed him dutifully out of the balcony. I found my way back to the International Center and collapsed into bed.

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First thing Monday morning I was at the University Center office to register and obtain the address of my lodgings. Since I was going to Harvard Medical School, the place was located in Brookline, over the Charles River in Boston. I took a taxi there.

My landlady was Mrs. Sawabini. She had a large house and rented to several students. She was friendly and took me into her living room for a cup of tea. I saw that she had many artifacts from Jerusalem and the Holy Land, so I mentioned that I had just come from spending two years in Israel. She stopped, stared at me and then said very deliberately “I am Palestinian.” I was taken aback, but not wanting to get into an argument with her, I exchanged pleasantries and then retired as fast as possible to my room. Just my luck!

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My first friend in the USA was a Dutchman, Cees van der Vlies. He was spending three months training in the same Department at Harvard Medical School in Boston. He was a wonderful person, a bit older than me, and full of stories and experience. He was a typical phlegmatic Dutchman. Nothing seemed to bother or upset him. He had a good word for everyone. Cees wanted to see the US while he had the opportunity, and I wanted to buy a car, but was broke. So we pooled our resources and bought a very cheap green Rambler. It was old and decrepit, and if my memory is correct we paid $150 for it. But it took us on several trips, the first one to Provincetown at the tip of Cape Cod.

The most memorable trip we took was to New York City. I drove for the first time on the Interstate highways, and it was quite a thrill and experience. Cees navigated and somehow we managed to arrive at our destination. Going through the intersections of Interstates near Hartford Connecticut, I remember holding onto the steering wheel and driving straight ahead in a panic.

We had a great time sightseeing in NY, Times Square, Rockefeller Center, etc., but on the way back to Boston on a late Friday afternoon, as we were driving on the Long Island Expressway, the car started to malfunction. Gradually a repetitive noise from the front right side became louder, and the car started to bounce up and down in the front. So I drove off at the next exit, and fortunately for us there was a garage right there. I drove straight in and told them the problem. The mechanic said it must be a bearing, but he could not fix it then, he needed a part. So he told us to come back on Monday.

There we were lost in darkest Brooklyn, as night was falling. We luckily found a bus and returned to Manhattan. Cees was leaving to return home shortly, so he decided to go back to Boston by train and left me alone in Manhattan. I stayed over the weekend in the YMCA near Central Station. This was not an experience that I would care to repeat, but then I was a naive foreigner. I tried to stay out of trouble, and spent a hellish night in a room so small that you couldn't swing a cat in. The blanket and sheets were threadbare, and a pipe going through the room from floor to ceiling right near the bed banged loudly and irregularly throughout the night.

In the morning I discovered that no bank in NY would cash a check for me on a bank in Boston (and I did not yet have credit cards). I had no money and I knew no-one in New York, and I would have been really stuck apart from one phone number. My mother-in-law is a friendly person, some might say exceptionally friendly. A few years before, she had been in a London restaurant and had heard two American women talking at an adjacent table. She struck up a conversation with them, and it turned out that they were also Jewish and from New York. One thing led to another, and she invited them to visit her home. They found this experience really stimulating and gave her their phone number so that they could reciprocate if she ever visited New York.

Out of necessity I called the number, and spoke to Pearl, whom I had never met before. I explained who I was and the situation, and asked if she would be kind enough to cash a check for me, and I would be eternally grateful to her. To my surprise she readily agreed, and since she lived on Long Island, she explained to me how to take the Long Island Railroad from Central Station. She picked me up at the station and took me to her home.

It was a great experience for me, since they were so generous. I met the whole family, and in some respects it was like being at home, but they were so much wealthier and more communicative than my own family. They gave me lunch and dinner and were shocked that I was staying at the "Y." They wanted me to stay the night with them, but I declined since my things were still back in the City. Most importantly they generously cashed a check for me, and so on Monday I found my way back to the garage and retrieved the car. Then I drove back to Boston alone.

The distances between towns were greater than in Britain or Europe. Speeding along, alone in the blackness, I knew that out there lay a great continent, vast and unknown, waiting to be discovered.

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### Moving to the NIH, 1969

On a bluff overlooking the city of Bethesda, Maryland, just outside Washington DC, stands a huge conglomeration of buildings. This is the campus of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the largest biomedical research center in the world (**Figure 1**). It stands as a beacon of science protecting the health of the hinterland. Its campus is green and even beautiful in places, notwithstanding the huge glass and concrete structures. It is a temple to man's drive to conquer disease and live in good health.

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**Fig. 3**. The campus of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda Maryland, USA, consisting of many disease-related research Institutes. The Clinical Center is in the foreground.

The long corridors of its many buildings are busy with the tread of doctors, scientists, students, and patients in a hive of focused activity. On the surface, all seems peaceful, yet, vicious turf wars for control of resources, for success and for power and fame are going on here. In this war, there are winners and losers and incidentally sometimes cures for human diseases are also found.

There is a major dichotomy between the two main groups that work towards the elimination of disease, the scientist and the physician. While the former seeks the truth, searching for understanding and the mechanisms that underlie disease and the attempts to overcome it, the latter are more interested in “the cure.” While the scientists deal with molecules and cells, the physicians deal with patients, some of whom are very ill or dying. Treatment at the Government-run Clinical Centre that dominates the campus is free, but only to patients who are referred by their local physician because their disease is either rare or unusual or if they are terminal. So in the nature of things, the physicians rule the roost, they control the government hierarchy that runs the place, and they tend to treat the scientists as useful technicians.

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When I moved to the NIH, I was initially employed in the newly formed Division of Computer Research and Technology (DCRT), even though I knew nothing about computers. This is how it happened.

I was invited to Washington DC by a colleague, Steve Heller, who was aware of my work using the nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) method to study the structure and function of proteins. At the time this was quite novel, and he featured it in a symposium he organized for the American Chemical Society.

Steve told me that DCRT, which at that time had lots of money to buy computers, had agreed to buy the latest NMR machine, at a cost of ca. $250,000, as if it were a computer, which no other institute could afford. And there was a position available with the machine to run it and bring data into the computer division for analysis.

So, I applied for the job, was interviewed, and got the job. This involved moving to Bethesda MD outside Washington DC. We rented a nice townhouse in Rockville MD and I drove about 15 mins to work. The new NMR machine was located in the basement of an old building and I had a lab there, but my office was in the Computer Division. Paddy Scott, the colorful Head of DCRT didn’t want to just give the money for the machine, he wanted data from it to be brought into the Division and analyzed there using the computer system.

I generated data on proteins, put it on computer cards and read it into the IBM computer complex and then found myself sitting at a console in the huge IBM complex where I could retrieve the data and see it on the monitor. This was one of the first such interactive workstations. Then I analyzed the data theoretically and this led to the publication of several papers. I was happy with this arrangement, although it was not entirely convenient.

One day in **1973**, I learnt that the permanent job that I had been promised by Scott would not be possible. DCRT, that had been set up by a separate act of Congress, was going to be incorporated into the rest of the NIH and research would not be allowed there. I went to see Scott about this, and at first he would not see me. So, I told his secretary that I would sit outside his door until he did. Finally, he saw me and confirmed that because of the changes my position would no longer be available. Since I was just in the process of buying a house, I was desperate! I pleaded with him to help me find a position elsewhere at NIH.

He agreed to do this, and while I was sitting in his office he immediately picked up the phone and called the heads of other institutes and asked them if they had a position for a talented researcher, specializing in biochemical studies.

Quite independently a friend of mine had decided to learn how to sword-fight, but with sabres, not the usual rapiers (!). He went to evening classes and there met someone who had the same interest who had just moved to a new job at the National Inst. of Child Health and Human Development (NICHHD). He said they were looking for biochemists to set up a new program. My friend then met the Head of this Inst. and also got a job there, and told him about me, and the next day coincidentally he received a call from Paddy Scott about me. So, he asked me to come over for an interview, and offered me a job right then and there, and that’s how lives are changed.

Ten years later, in **1983**, I moved to the Clinical Pharmacology Branch of the National Cancer Institute (NCI) on the sixth floor of the main Clinical Center at NIH, to initially do physicochemical studies of the differences between drug resistant and drug sensitive cancer cells.

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### Frank Portugal

My friend Herbie Olarsch in NJ had a neighbor whose son worked at NIH. He introduced us, and that was how I met Frank Portugal. When we moved down to Bethesda MD, near to NIH, Frank was the only person I knew, and over the years we became close friends. Our wives also got along well, and we enjoyed their company and they showed us around DC and the good restaurants.

We moved into our house in 1972 behind the Wildwood Shopping Center in Bethesda. One evening during Chanukah, Naomi received a frantic phone call from the neighbor across the street who said, “Your curtains are on fire.” Actually, it was the candles on the Chanukia that she had seen that are traditionally put in the window. It turned out that she was from India, her name was Shoba and her husband Siv worked at the World Bank. We became close friends with them, and Frank, Siv and I often went down to Georgetown together to have an Indian meal and talk about our work and lives.

One day, Frank came to me with an interesting proposition. I had done my PhD with Lord Todd, who had won the Nobel Prize for proving the chemical structure of important organo-phosphorus compounds such as ATP and the nucleotide subunits of DNA. Frank was working with Marshal Nirenberg at NIH, who had won the Nobel Prize for discovering the genetic code. Frank suggested that we get together and write a book on the history of the research on DNA, I would do the chemical and physical aspects of the structure determination, such as the important X-ray diffraction work, and he would do all the genetic and biological aspects. I thought this was a great idea and agreed.

We did a lot of research using the National Library of Medicine, which is next to NIH, and we read a lot. We also received a travel grant so we could go to some of the places that were important for the story of DNA. Most people have the misconception that Watson and Crick discovered DNA in 1953. That is not correct, what they discovered was the double helical structure of DNA, DNA itself, the substance, was discovered in 1869 by Friedrich Miescher in Tubingen, Germany, although at the time, he did not call it DNA. He discovered this gel-like substance from the nucleus of cells (that he collected as pus, that is mainly white blood cells, from the bandages of injured soldiers) and he found the substance was acidic, so he named it nucleic acid.

For most of its history, it was considered a simple, obscure and unimportant substance, and it was believed that proteins would be the genetic substance. But in 1944, Oswald Avery and his associates working at Rockefeller Inst. in NYC, proved that it was in fact DNA, although it took some years before this was generally accepted.

Frank and I went to Europe, we visited Tubingen, and Stockholm for a conference, and then we went around interviewing people. It took us 6 years to write the book, which I must say was difficult at times, but we managed to remain friends. When we had finished, we chose the title “A Century of DNA: a history of the study of the structure and function of the genetic substance,” and Lord Todd wrote the Foreword. After a year it was published by MIT Press in 1977, and then in paperback and is still available. However, it did not make us instantly rich and famous as we had hoped.

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# **Confessions of a Jewish Activist**

"If I am not for myself,

who will be for me?

If not now when?"

Rabbi Hillel

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Beginnings

I became a Jewish activist in the wake of the Six-day war in June, 1967, in which Israel defeated the armies of its surrounding Arab neighbors, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. Notwithstanding the splendid victory, I could never forget how the world had once again stood by and left the Jews to their fate against seemingly insuperable odds.

The event that triggered my activism was the decision in 1969 of the pompous French President M. Pompidou to cancel delivery of fighter planes to Israel that it had paid for and that were scheduled to be delivered according to a legitimate agreement. Israel needed those planes for its defense, and there were no other suppliers immediately on the horizon. In 1969 I moved to the Washington DC area, and I saw my opportunity to make a statement on behalf of Israel a few months later when it was announced that M. Pompidou would be visiting the US.

But, just as WWI did not start with the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the basis of my activism had much deeper and earlier origins. I have written elsewhere about my experiences of anti-Semitism growing up in Britain in the 1950’s (“Amanuensis”). The long-term psychological effects of these experiences and the prevailing sense that being a Jew was always a factor (and usually a negative one) in all aspects of life led to a sense of personal frustration. Upon living in Israel and then in the USA I felt a great deal of relief, a freedom from an over-powering sense of limitation, that came to a catharsis after the Six-day War.

Being somewhat naive I called around to several Jewish agencies in the Washington DC area to find out what activities would be planned for the Pompidou visit. I found that nothing was in the works. I was appalled. Here was the most powerful Jewish community outside Israel in the world, and in the Capital of the USA the Jewish community was moribund. What I did not know, and was to learn to my regret, was that a deeply smug Jewish community was engaged in that typical of Jewish activities, “not rocking the boat.”

I spoke to several people and began a series of conversations that would eventually lead me into a leadership position for several years. The person who was most receptive was David Amdur, who was the Assistant to the Executive Director of the Jewish Community Council of Greater Washington, Isaac Franck. He arranged a meeting for me with Franck and the President of the Council, Harvey Ammerman. The JCC was the umbrella organization of all Jewish organizations in the Washington DC area, and Isaac Franck had been its Executive Director for some 25 years. Franck was a formidable didact and ran the JCC with an iron hand. Harvey Ammerman was a nice, rather timid man. In effect, the Executive ran the show, while the elected President was sidelined. Franck treated me with a customary mixture of condescension and contempt.

They were not sympathetic to my idea that the Jewish community needed to make a strong public statement on behalf of Israel. I wanted a large demonstration and they wanted a letter. The leadership of the Jewish community in Washington, as in most of the US, had not yet come out of the conservative 50’s. But, this was the period of the Vietnam War, society had changed, and demonstrations were de rigeur. The very idea of actually organizing a demonstration was anathema to them. There had been spontaneous demonstrations in 1967 on behalf of Israel when it was in danger, but this was different. Suppose they agreed to organize a rally and nobody came? Somehow or other, with Amdur’s support, we managed to persuade them to at least let him talk to the administrations in DC and the State Department, to find out what their thinking was.

Washington DC had no problem letting us have a permit for a demonstration, but the US Government was not sympathetic. In discussions, a compromise was arrived at. M. Pompidou was due to arrive in Washington on Monday, February 24, 1970. It was agreed that if the JCC organized a demonstration on the Sunday, the day before, that would not interfere with the Government’s program. Since the Sunday was a good day to expect to get a good turnout, the decision was made. As the initiator I was co-opted to be the main organizer of the event. I spent several days in basements working with various friends making spray painted placards. The JCC handled the legal aspects, the permits. We chose the grounds of the Washington monument as being big enough for a rally and far enough away from the White House so as not to overly annoy its occupant, Richard Nixon.

Before coming to Washington M. Pompidou visited Chicago. There, Jewish demonstrators managed to get into the lobby of his hotel, and this deeply embarrassed the Administration. Pres. Nixon declared publicly that M. Pompidou would not see any demonstrators on his visit to Washington. That was OK as far as the JCC was concerned since our demonstration was the day before his arrival. With a great deal of effort we managed to organize a demonstration, of ca. 4,000 people. With flags flying and banners aloft the message was made clear and was in all the newspapers on Monday morning.

This was the first Jewish demonstration I organized in the DC area. In 1970 I joined the Executive Board of the JCC as an unaffiliated delegate (i.e. I was not there representing any of the Jewish organizations in the City), and willy-nilly I became the organizer of most of the demonstrations organized by the JCC for the next 15 or so years. Of course, I did not do this alone, the staff of the JCC was very much involved, notably Buddy Sislen, but a great barrier had been broken. Although there was considerable resistance to me, for being what was considered by some a “dangerous activist,” nevertheless I became the Marshal for most of the demonstrations organized in Washington for Israel and Soviet Jewry thru the 1970’s and into the 1980’s.

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### Getting Arrested[[1]](#footnote-2)

On Monday February 24, 1970, I was arrested in Washington DC. I had not intended for this to happen, in fact I had not even intended to go along to this demonstration. Any demonstration at that time and place, the official arrival of M. Pompidou, was clearly likely to have untoward consequences. It was the sabotage of the Swissair plane en route to Israel that finally convinced me to go.

I had been one of the organizers of the official Jewish Community demonstration on the previous day, which about 4,000 people attended. The police had been very cooperative with us then, and there had been no problems. Of course, the police were very pleased that we held the large demonstration on the day before M. Pompidou’s arrival in Washington. That way they avoided a potentially difficult situation.

I was only vaguely aware of the plans for the activities on the day of Pompidou’s arrival through my dealings with the Baltimore-Washington Union of Jewish Students (BWUJS) that I had been helping to organize as a counter to the more passive Hillel Foundations. A number of student groups were co-operating in a mock-funeral to bury French honor. It was not intended to be a violent demonstration and, in fact, after some difficulties, legal permits had been obtained by Raphael Perl to walk around Lafayette Park across from the White House.

When I drove up to the meeting point in Georgetown, I was mobbed. It seems that a station wagon with a roof rack on top is an ideal vehicle for displaying a coffin. Within a short time my car was duly bedecked, with the coffin aloft, draped with the tricolor, and with signs reading “we mourn the death of French honor.” In this way I found myself to be the lead car of the procession.

Two men were sitting nearby in a car and the word was that they were Secret Service agents. A couple of our people went over to talk to them, and it turned out that they were quite friendly. Just as we were about to move off, one of them came over to us and warned us that we had to remove all the signs, the coffin etc., otherwise we would be holding an illegal procession. We were very cooperative and at that late stage tore the coffin off the top and installed it inside the station wagon.

We moved slowly down Pennsylvania Avenue with our lights full on, but inevitably became dispersed in the heavy traffic. As we approached the White House and when we could see only a few of our cars behind us, we stopped momentarily. This was a mistake, the police were waiting for us, and in the best Hollywood style, a car swung across our path and others came from all sides. A huge traffic jam developed throughout downtown DC. Eventually a top-brass police officer handed down the verdict, the drivers were to be arrested for holding an illegal procession. Some of the passengers slipped out of the cars and went back along the route warning our drivers to turn off their lights and stay in the traffic and avoid the trap. In the end seven cars were lined up and escorted to the Third Precinct Police Station nearby.

Everything was done very correctly, we were even frisked for weapons. Most of the policemen were friendly, but the Chief was quite adamant. He was a parody of himself, down to the cliché “tell it to the judge.” Of course, we had legal help immediately, my friend Ernie Shalowitz (“Ernie the Attorney”) arrived from the JCC. But we were booked, our belongings were taken (including our ties and belts in case we decided to hang ourselves), and we were each put into a separate small cell. A woman who had been driving one of the cars was taken elsewhere and her little boy was separated from her.

We talked, we sang Jewish songs, Dr. William Perl, noted Jewish activist (later head of the JDL), lead the singing. We watched the police taking photos of my car in the yard of the Precinct House. Then quite boldly two of our people walked in, went to the car, opened it and simply removed the coffin (which was later sent air-freight to Paris for a further demonstration by French students). We were kept there for about an hour. We were not advised of our rights, nor had we been ordered to disperse before we had been arrested. This made the whole procedure seem dubious. Finally they took us out, but instead of letting us see our lawyer, we were frisked again (in case we had manufactured a weapon out of the cell bars?) and they put us in a paddy wagon. This was wet inside and they informed us that it had specially cleaned and sanitized for our benefit. The police were quite amused by us, not their usual clientele. One man, a professor and ex-police official was in his 60’s, one was 37-years old with a high Civil Service position, and the ages went right down to an 18-year old student.

We were taken to the DC Courthouse and put into a large pen in the basement with many other criminals. Finally, we spoke to our lawyer and were allowed to make one call each to our family. The place was very dingy, with trash strewn all over the floor, half-eaten oranges and sandwiches, and papers, since there was no trash can. Also, the floor was filthy, probably not having been washed for a week or more. Wooden benches crossed the room, and men lay sprawled on them. Most were Black. They came and went, up to fifty at one time in one large room. Drug addicts, morals cases – and us.

Finally, after another few hours the charges against us were dropped with no arrest record. The lawyer was angry and was sure that we had a good case for false arrest and denial of civil rights since our temporary removal from society had clearly been politically motivated. It was good to feel free. We ascended to the Courthouse, a magnificent building with wide marble corridors. The contrast was absolute. The juxtaposition of the house of Justice was somehow symptomatic of the state of society. A depressing condition to find in the Capital of the richest country in the world.

Other people had been arrested that day, including the couple who had shouted out at M. Pompidou’s press conference in the National Press Club. They were lucky to be released together with us. At least we got some publicity. At least the world would know we were angry, and that Israel is not alone. At that juncture in history and under the prevailing circumstances, jail was a good place for a “nice Jewish boy” to be.

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### The Soviet Jewry Movement

The movement to free the Jews from the Soviet Union started as a response to the actions of several brave Jews who defied the Soviet authorities. The first one that I remember hearing about was Boris Kochubievsky, who wrote a moving letter to Brezhnev that was smuggled to the West. It read like a latter-day version of the speech by Shylock in the “Merchant of Venice,” calling for elementary human rights for Jews. In principle, since the Soviet Union was a signatory of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Jews should have had the choice to emigrate from the USSR to Israel. Legally they could not simply go any place, but could only be repatriated to their ethnic homeland if invited by a relative. As the trickle of Jews leaving the USSR increased more and more invitations were being sent back.

I was appointed the Chair of the Soviet Jewry Committee of the JCC, and one of our first actions in 1971 was naming the entrance to the Jewish Community Center in Rockville, Maryland, as “Kochubievsky Square.” In effect our actions were as much publicity as possible for those who had “outed” themselves. Such people were in grave danger, and having their names known and mentioned in the West was their main protection.

Two groups developed at this time, the official Jewish organization, the National Conference for Soviet Jewry (NCSJ) with an office in New York, and the grass-roots more radical “Union of Councils for Soviet Jewry” (UCSJ). As the name indicated the latter was a loose affiliation of groups that had sprung up around the county. Because of my position with the JCC I had a direct relationship with the NCSJ. But, because of my activism I was on good terms with the people who represented the UCSJ, often the same ones who were in the SJ Committee of the JCC.

I tried my best to keep the two groups on good terms and communicating with each other, but it was not always possible. Some people in the JCC did not trust me because of my good relations with the UCSJ, but I suppose they recognized that I did have an ability to bridge the gap and keep the two groups from each other’s throats. One of the main differences of political position was that the NCSJ’s official position was that we were aiding Soviet Jews to emigrate to Israel, while the UCSJ wanted to get them out in any case, and wanted to help them immigrate to the USA. I suppose the USSR knew about this dissension.

At one point they clearly tried to infiltrate our group. I received a phone call one evening from someone identifying himself as an immigrant from the Soviet Union. He wanted me to meet him at his hotel in the District. This was suspicious, since most emigrants were destitute and left the Soviet Union with nothing. How could he afford to stay in a hotel (even a cheap one as it turned out). Also, they usually came to us through official channels as legal immigrants. Nevertheless we had had several strange people come out of the Soviet Union, and so I decided to meet him, but I also decided for safety to take along Buddy Sislen, the JCC official in charge of the Committee.

We went downtown and met the person at his hotel. Right from the start we were both very suspicious. First of all, he seemed strangely nervous. Second, he wore a jacket that seemed much too big for him, and I suspected he had a recording device inside. Third his story was convoluted and although his English was passable, it was unclear what his story was. It was truly a dark rainy night, and with a few quick asides Buddy and I decided that this was not the real thing. Without committing ourselves to anything we told the guy, that sorry we couldn’t help him, and beat a retreat. Maybe there were other more successful penetrations by the KGB, but this attempt was very amateurish.

It was not always easy dealing with these Soviet Jewish immigrants. Some expected to be given everything on a silver platter, including being found well-paying jobs. I had to explain to many of them that this was not our role, there were social service agencies that dealt with that, and they had their own rules. Also, some of the immigrants were very strong-willed, perhaps they had to be having defied the USSR, and some had their own political agenda. I well remember one such person, a former “refusenik” (someone who had been refused the right to emigrate and then had to wait until it was eventually granted), who treated me like his chauffeur, “drive me here….drive me there…let me do the talking… take me to Senator so-and so…” After several hours of this, I told him to make his own arrangements and to get a taxi and dropped him somewhere in DC. But overall, the activity was rewarding as the numbers of Jews being released gradually increased.

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### Secret Briefing

In "The First Circle" Alexander Solzhenitsyn describes the predicament of those prisoners in special camps of the Soviet Union known as "sharashka", who by virtue of their technical qualification are forced to work at developing scientifically advanced products for the regime. While their conditions were perhaps the best in the whole of the "Gulag Archipelago" they were nevertheless prisoners. In an important sense all scientists in the Soviet Union were "slaves".

This became apparent in the 1970’s as a result of the activities of a few brave men who documented the situation. Most notable in this respect were Zhores Medvedev the biologist, and Andrei Sakharov the physicist. Another example was provided by those Jewish scientists who had applied to emigrate from the Soviet Union to Israel.

Following the 1967 Mid-East war, and the thinly disguised anti-Semitic tone in the Soviet press, many Jews applied to emigrate from the Soviet Union. Of course, they followed the established legal procedures, and as a result of the international situation the number being allowed to leave gradually increased. Many were also refused permission, and these were mainly the technically qualified. As a result of the selective discrimination practiced against these would-be Jewish emigrants, the number of scientists and technically qualified persons, centered mainly in the large cities of the RFSSR, grew until they represented numerically a significant group in unprecedented opposition to Soviet Government Policy. In 1972, by which time there were several hundred of these refuseniks, people in the West were becoming aware of the problem.

My own involvement in this situation came about as a result of a visit I made to the Soviet Union in August 1972, to attend the Fourth International Biophysics Congress in Moscow. What follows is an account of my personal experience.

My interest was naturally aroused when I received a letter announcing the setting up of a briefing service in London for groups of American Jewish students taking the cheap tours to Russia available from there. Since it was sponsored by a well-known organization involved in helping Soviet Jewry it seemed reliable. I replied and soon became involved in helping the American student (let's call him A) who would organize this project, to find cheap accommodation in London. I was arranging my own trip to Russia but A and I planned to meet in London so that he would brief me following a visit he would make to Israel, where he would gather information on the current situation from the newly arrived immigrants.

I first began to worry about A when the people with whom I had helped locate him in London said they had not seen him for weeks. In effect he had not returned from his trip to Israel, and there was a pile of mail waiting for him. I called several times and left my number, but received the same annoyed reply. Finally, just a week before my departure for Moscow A called.

We met in the West End of London, walked around a bit, and then found a place to eat. I asked where he had been all this time, how the project was going, where he was staying, and so on. It quickly became apparent that he was avoiding answering questions. He told me he was cooperating with a group of people who were interested in helping Soviet Jewry, that they were quite reliable, but that he could not tell me anything about them. However, if I wanted to make effective use of my trip to Russia, then they would like to talk to me. I went over this with him, but could get no further details, so I took the plunge and said yes.

He made a phone call, gave me a number at which I could reach him (because he knew I was trustworthy), and he said he would call me. Absolutely no one else was to know about this. The next day he called, and he took me to a restaurant. It occurred to me that this was all a joke, or that I was being conned. The thought that this person was someone else other than the student A had also occurred to me, but I had recognized his voice from our few telephone conversations in the States. Also, when we went to pick up his mail at American Express, I looked over his shoulder to check his identification.

When they arrived at the restaurant, the two men were obviously sizing me up - asking me discrete questions. One of the men was a taxi-driver, the other was the "contact" D. He was a flashy dresser, hardly inconspicuous by English standards, wearing a light blue suit, quite long hair over his ears, and a large glassy ring. They both spoke with that unmistakable twang which was familiar to my ears as Jewish cockney. Everything seemed kosher, so we left, driving through the labyrinthine maze of London streets in the accustomed rain.

I had received a briefing in Washington before leaving. This had been a friendly affair, not taken too seriously, even though one of the memos said, "read and discard this sheet". But, this was a different matter altogether. An hour of intense discussion sufficed to show me that this was meant to be taken very seriously. The situation as D explained it was that they were an underground Jewish group interested in helping Jews in the Soviet Union - nothing more could be gleaned.

Unfortunately, many American Jewish students who were going to the Soviet Union were parading themselves openly in an extremely naive way. Many had been detained and threatened in one way or another after taking in books, etc. in a very amateurish fashion. This was bad since most were unprepared, and the impact turned them off further involvement. While the Soviet authorities could not legally do anything to them, nevertheless the threats to an isolated youth in a strange environment were enough. Also, some could perhaps succumb and say things that might be used against them later (how to develop Soviet spies).

Finally this situation was affecting the work of their own group, since they sent people in and out of Russia, and it became more and more difficult for them to operate with hundreds of Jewish students running around contacting Soviet Jews at the least excuse, and dropping books and goods all over the place. It ruined the scene; they had actually not heard from one of their men for several months and assumed that he had been caught. For these reasons they had decided to help A to brief people in a more realistic way, so that we would be prepared for eventualities over there. Of course, they had a dossier on me, they had contacts in the States and they knew I was coming. They knew they could trust me.

During the discussion I asked some questions. No they were not JDL. In fact, they had tipped off the British authorities to a JDL member sent over from the States to plant a bomb in England. Since this was their backyard, they called the action, and they didn't want reprisals. A said he had been worried about the same thing and had done some checking and was satisfied. Of course, it occurred to me that they could be Israeli or British intelligence or even American or Soviet (!). This last possibility seemed so remote - how could a group of Soviet agents operate so openly in London; but such a possibility could not be ruled out.

It appeared that the young woman who brought us tea was the taxi driver's wife. I had to make a phone call and noted that the number on the telephone was taped over. D, while talking, kept watching the window. It seemed very authentic.

Then A began to brief me. A map of Moscow - notoriously difficult to procure - was produced. Names and telephone numbers were given, for me to write down in convenient form. How to get to places. Who to try and see, in what order or priority? What to tell certain people and what to ask them. The information was dense and compelling. But, above all else was the feeling they gave me for the place. What to expect. To expect to be followed after making "contact", to expect telephone calls at night in the hotel. Where to make telephone calls from and how to obtain the confidence of people contacted. Where to meet people, and how to pass things to people (always alone, preferably in an elevator)? It was an unusual experience. I was pretty confident by the end that this was on the level.

But, then came the blockbuster, would I take some microfilm into the Soviet Union. I said I would think about it (it is difficult to suddenly say no to people who are helping you). They asked me if I had a leather belt that could be cut lengthwise in two, and they could insert the film into it. Since I was not a "professional" and as long as the Russians assumed I was an amateur, although a bit more circumspect than the next, I would not be in any danger. However, if they should find microfilm secreted on me the situation would change drastically. This was a warning and it was up to me. I asked if I could know what was in the microfilm. They showed me some samples - most innocuous. Could I be present when the microfilm was inserted into the belt (by an expert, it would take several hours) - no, absolutely not.

I said I would think it over and let them know. They took me back to the subway. I would meet A the day after next to go over the names and numbers and give my final word about the microfilm. The day after that, having received my visa in London, I would leave for Moscow.

It was a difficult decision; I even went alone to buy a suitable belt - but I had more or less decided against it. Although I had a good chance of being unsuspected - a respectable scientist going to an International meeting organized by the Russians themselves - but the eventualities if detected were too horrible to contemplate. It was unpleasant not being able to discuss it with anyone, especially as we were meeting good old friends in a holiday mood.

When I met A I told him I had decided not to take the microfilm, unless I could see the actual material put in the belt. There would be no possibility of substitution if I were present. We made a phone call and spoke to D. He said no, once again, and I felt very relieved. We stepped out of the phone booth and went to get a bus.

We were standing in line at the bus-stop when a small van pulled up in front of me. The line had about 50 people in it; we were just about at the middle and I was by the kerb. The van stopped, an old man with a yellowish, wizened face, whom I had never seen before, opened the door towards me and said "get in". I bent down towards him, my heart pumping wildly and said "No thanks, here comes a bus" (I half expected A to push me in, but he didn't). I moved back, the man slammed the door and drove off. It happened so quickly, but we both got his number.

We immediately telephoned again and told D what had happened. About an hour later a taxi came by where I was staying and we had an intense conversation about the incident. They said it was probably nothing, but, it was a strange feeling going out to dine that evening with a group of friends, not being able to tell them about it, and drinking to my departure for Moscow the following morning.

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### Moscow, 1972

The Soviet Union was still an under-developed country. This fact hit me as we arrived in Moscow - an unusually shabby capital. I was staying in the modern "Rossiya" hotel - a huge monstrosity of a hotel. Notwithstanding its size (reputedly 5,000 rooms) each floor had its "concierge" - checking you in and out.

The room was quite respectable - but no air conditioning in the sweltering heat of the hottest summer ever on record. A pall of smoke hung above the city. I assumed it was fashionable pollution. But after several days I was told it was due to a huge forest fire burning 150 km south of the city. Although it was plain to see, it rasped one's eyes and nose, it was apparently not reported in the newspapers until several days later when a small item appeared, as I was shown, saying "our gallant firefighters have brought under control . . ."

I waited for a day to acclimatize myself and then made contact. I took a bus laid on for the Congress to the University. I walked for a long way to find a telephone booth overlooking Gorki park. (The Soviet authorities don't want too many telephones - the more there are the more taps needed.) I made several calls, and several contacts. That evening I met Victor Yachot at Karl Marx Square.

Victor was a young engineer, who had applied to emigrate to Israel 18 months before. After due ceremony at his place of work, replete with anti-Semitic remarks of the vilest forms, he had been thrown out of work, but had not, of course, been granted permission to emigrate. I asked him to take me to see Professor Levich.

He took me through the marble halls of the Moscow subway. Such a spotless contrast to the grime of the London Underground I knew so well. He told me, openly and loudly, how it had been built by slave labor, and how hundreds of thousands of human beings, under commissioner of Public Works Kruschev, had toiled to their deaths down there. He said he normally preferred to walk rather than take this subway, erected on the crushed bones of humanity. He had a strong personality.

He took me to Levich's apartment on the fashionable Leninsky Prospect. Benjamin Levich was a corresponding member of the USSR National Academy of Sciences, and a physicist of international repute. As such he was one of the most eminent of those who had applied to emigrate to Israel. The Soviet authorities would naturally be reluctant to release someone who had risen to such a level in their hierarchy, but was still a prisoner within their perfected order.

We shook hands warmly and he drew me quickly into his book-lined, cluttered study. One of the first things he did was write on a slate on his desk, "there are good devices here, be careful". So while we exchanged pleasantries, we also exchanged comments on a small pad. Each piece of paper was retained for final destruction (torn or burnt and flushed down the toilet, as per instructions - Victor thought it was a good joke, but the Levich's were serious enough). They had applied the previous April to leave. All the family - Tanya, Benjamin's charming wife, a translator, his oldest son Alexander, an architect and Yevgeny, an astrophysicist at Moscow State University, and their wives, Valentina and Janna.

Things were bad for them. Professor Levich had been dismissed from his position as head of the Department of Theoretical Physics at the Institute of Electrochemistry of the National Academy of Sciences. He was still a corresponding member of the National Academy of Sciences, since this required a two-thirds vote for expulsion. He was supporting his family of six people on a stipend from the USA and royalties from his books.

I met Yevgeny, who struck me as a very bright young man. It was explained to me that he had a condition from childhood usually referred to as ulcerative colitis, and high blood pressure. For this reason, he had been given exemption from military service. Now, however, the authorities were attempting to reverse themselves, even though at 26 he was several years past the normal age for conscription. That was the main threat, since once he was in the Red Army how could the family leave - and for how long would they keep them on the pretext of "State Security".

I asked Professor Levich if he could get for me a list of scientists and other technically qualified people who had applied to emigrate. He showed an understandable reluctance, lists of people in the Soviet Union could mean an organization and that could mean serious trouble. But he said he would see what he could do - given also the circumstances that several were out of the city due to the oppressive heat. In fact, Yevgeny was leaving on a vacation with his wife and another couple in two day’s time. I bade them good-bye and Victor took me almost all the way back to the hotel.

The following day, after elaborate precautions I met another contact, who turned out to be a friend of Victor's and so we both went off to meet him too. Then they took me to meet Vladimir Slepak, one of the elders of the movement to emigrate - a "vatik" he and his family had then been waiting four years and they are still in that purgatory. Slepak's telephone had long since been cut off, so he was at another friend's house, where he was to receive a call from England.

We went up dark flights of stairs in a dingy apartment block, a contrast to the comparative luxury of the Levich's. Big forbidding iron doors. The very top one opened to our knock to reveal a sharp, energetic little man, Vladimir Zaslavsky, one of the few biologists awaiting emigration (most are physicists or engineers). There with Vladimir Slepak and his wife, we had a pleasant evening and conversation. In the midst the telephone rang, and it was Greville Janner, member of Parliament and Chairman of the Inter-Parliamentary Committee for Soviet Jewry, on the line for Slepak.

I too had a word with Janner and mentioned the coincidental fact that here we were talking from London to Moscow and our fathers had been neighbors in the East End of London. He asked me to obtain photographs of "our friends there," since they had spoken often, but lacked that personal bond conferred by the sight of a recognizable and unique human face. I promised to do so, thinking of a friend who was attending the conference and who as usual had a magnificent camera with him. Naturally, I assumed flash equipment would be necessary to take their portraits indoors. Finally, five of us left Zaslavsky to his old American magazines, arranging to meet the next day to take the photographs.

The next day I couldn't make contact with any of them. Finally I got through to Victor Yachot, and he told me abruptly that Yevgeny Levich had been arrested while driving to vacation, outside the city, that they did not know where he was, and thatI should call back later. He rang off. It sounds so natural now to describe it that way, but then, for me it was like a bombshell. I had met him so recently, and now he had been "snatched", I couldn't help but worry that it had been my meetings with them that had precipitated this.

In the meantime, I was attending the scientific conference at the University and touring Moscow like the other tourists, as well as renewing friendships with western scientists at the conference, including my camera-toting friend, from Toronto. Finally I learned that somehow Yevgeny had been able to get word to his parents that he was being held at a military hospital usually reserved for higher officers (the class system in the Soviet Union is very rigid).

They and a group of other "refuseniks" had gone there and created a scene. In addition, I was told that news items of the arrest had appeared in the western Press and over the radio. Benjamin Levich was able to meet with a senior administrator (probably KGB, the secret police) and insisted that they either bring charges or release his son. His son had refused to sign anything and insisted on knowing what charges were being brought against him. He was told that he would receive excellent medical treatment here in Moscow if he signed his cancellation of exemption of military service. If he did not he would be conscripted anyway and sent to Siberia. Finally, they relented in the face of the inevitable publicity and released him to his waiting family and friends, but he had to report the next morning.

That night I went to see the Levichs and they were clearly very shaken by the experience. I asked if I could be allowed to help, and in view of the presence of a distinguished gathering of Western scientists in Moscow at that very moment suggested that Benjamin Levich meet with some of them if it could be arranged - and tell them how his son had been dragged from his car, beaten and driven off to detention in the very same city; and now the harassment was to continue. It was agreed, and he sat down and began to compose a letter of protest to the International Congress of Biophysics, and I said I would call him the next day.

One significant point I remember from that night was his taking a book of Soviet law in his hand and saying in effect "with sufficient knowledge of this we may yet out-maneuver them". Under the random terror practiced by Stalin the things that they had done that day would have been so unthinkable as to incur immediate execution. Now it was the knowledge of their fate in the West which in large measure protected them in their unequal struggle with the post-Stalin Soviet authorities. It reminded me of the speech of Sir Thomas More in Robert Bolt's "A Man for all Seasons", of erecting a thicket of laws to protect himself from the devil.

The following day, Saturday, I approached three eminent scientists of my acquaintance and explaining the situation asked if they would meet with Professor Levich. They were John Edsall, Professor of Biological Chemistry at Harvard University, Harold Scheraga, Professor of Biochemistry at Cornell University and Shneior Lifson, Scientific Director of the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot, Israel.

All three willingly agreed, and we met that afternoon in a restaurant adjoining the Rossiya Hotel. Levich and his wife Tanya told the story of Yevgeny's arrest, and continuing harassment (he was required to report each morning for interrogation), and also handed them a handwritten letter which was addressed to the Congress and protested his own exclusion from it. Of course, this contradicted all the rules of non-discrimination under which international scientific organizations are supposedly governed. John Edsall, a wonderful human being and one of the leading American biochemists, agreed to hand it to the Secretariat of the Congress, of which he was a member. Naturally, we hoped that Soviet knowledge of this concern for the Levich family would act to protect Yevgeny. Nevertheless, such is the nature of Soviet society that whenever the waiter came by the Levichs would modulate the conversation.

While the Levich matter was going on, other activities occupied my attention. On Saturday (Sabbath) morning I went with a group of Jewish scientists to the Moscow synagogue on Arkhipova Street. There I met Victor Yachot, Vladimir Slepak and several others. I was also intrigued to meet a group of young high school students who were learning Hebrew together (an Ulpan) - although this was a "dangerous" activity. A dispute had arisen over obtaining Hebrew books. As Victor Yachot pointed out, while these young people were very idealistic, they had not yet committed themselves to migration to Israel, and as such no single one of them could be trusted. It was best therefore if each group went its own way, since the authorities would be glad to have a potential case of distribution of anti-Soviet propaganda (in the form of Hebrew books) to bring against those who had applied to emigrate in their already precarious position.

One American couple collected some interesting stories outside the synagogue, which included close contact with this particular group of high school students, and also a tragic story from an old man named Kreisky about his son being imprisoned in a psychiatric hospital. (later efforts confirmed his story, and eventually the old man was allowed to emigrate and after much pressure his son was released and allowed to follow him.)

We then met Slepak and the others, now including Alexander Voronel. This personable and modest man had made important contributions in the field of critical phenomena. We met in Red Square on a bright sunny afternoon, and instead of taking the photographs in a secret indoor setting, we simply sauntered down to the Moskva River and, with a typical Russian electrical Power Station as a background, took their pictures.

The following day, Sunday, several people were invited to Voronel's apartment for an informal seminar. This was a purely scientific gathering, which those ousted from their jobs and not able to practice their science, including even exclusion from libraries, were in the habit of holding on Sunday afternoons. With the Congress in progress from which they were excluded it would be an important gesture if some Western scientists attended.

[This type of "rump" session was enlarged the following year with about 50 people who were attending the International Magnetism Conference in Moscow in July 1973, and subsequently led to the organization of a unique conference set for July 1974 which unfortunately coincided with President Nixon's visit to the USSR. All the conference organizers were arrested and held for several weeks and the conference was quashed.]

I promised to ask several colleagues and so on Sunday afternoon a group of us took taxis to Voronel's apartment, where we met several more of the scientist-refuseniks. We heard an introduction from Benjamin Levich followed by a seminar on the organization of Israeli Science by Professor Lifson. Since these people had committed their lives to inclusion in Israeli science they eagerly listened to what for most Western scientists would have been a pedestrian subject, but for them was a glimpse of a tantalizing unknown.

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### The Refuseniks

Five Israelis were registered at the Congress, notwithstanding the usual harassment (last minute visas, Israeli flag not displayed until protested). However, two of them were not actually Israelis, but American scientists who had been working in Israel at the Weizmann Institute when they had applied and had been considered as Israelis. I knew one of these people very well, but the other I had not met. Quite naturally he was at the "rump session."

I arranged to return that evening to Levich's apartment for a social gathering, bringing Shneior Lifson and several others. For some reason I had to leave the session earlier than most and with another American couple took a taxi. As we were leaving this second "Israeli American" (let's call him IA) accompanied us and asked to share our taxi to the hotel. The couple asked if they too could go to Levich's apartment and since Levich's daughter-in-law was right there we asked her. She said fine and at that moment we got into the taxi. Once in the taxi IA exploded in a veritable avalanche of questions; "could I come to Levich's" "who are you?", "how do you know Levich?" and so on. Natural curiosity?

Perhaps, but my friends in London had warned me to beware of any person who was unusually curious about my activities. While I could not refuse to take him to Levich, I did feel reluctant at introducing someone I knew not at all, and who seemed rather strange. Apart from his demeanor, he had not an American, but rather a German accent, and was a post-doctoral student in West Germany! After we got out of the taxi my friend said, "he was obviously pumping you about things you were reluctant to tell him, but he wouldn't give up". So my next problem was how to avoid taking this unknown quantity into Levich's apartment.

We were due to meet for dinner at the Rossiya Hotel and then leave thereafter for Leninsky Prospekt. Fortunately, this arrangement floundered on the incompetence of the Soviet system. Not only was it impossible to choose one's own table, people were seated as they arrived with others already present, but in general it took two hours to have a meal, with most of the time spent waiting for service as well as for food. Nothing in our experience could compare to the poor service in one of the best restaurants at one of the best hotels in Russia.

As I was finally leaving someone ran down the length of the restaurant - (you guessed) it was IA and wanted to make sure we would not leave without him. I assured him we would be back at the appointed time outside the entrance to the restaurant and we made our getaway. I had decided not to return for him - when as we were walking through the lobby of the hotel we saw Benjamin and Tanya Levich hurrying in. Apparently, they had been invited to meet with Professor Kendrew, Nobel laureate and (retiring) President of the International Union of Pure and Applied Biophysics, in his hotel room - a tangible result of the letter and our meeting the previous day. So my problem was solved. How could I have returned to meet IA to take him to Levich when Levich was here. We waited for the Levichs, and with several others returned with them to their apartment. I believe the meeting with Kendrew helped, because Yevgeny Levich was left unmolested for several months thereafter.

At the Levich apartment we had a pleasant social gathering, meeting with several other would-be immigrants. During the evening Levich inquired after the letter he had handed to Edsall, and Lifson, who was also on the Council, said it had been discussed by the Western members. But, the majority, not wanting to embarrass the Soviet organizing committee, had agreed that it should be raised by the new President of the IUPAC, Fyodor Lynen of W. Germany (also a Nobel laureate) with his Soviet opposite number in the morning. Levich felt this was a serious error, since nothing would be accomplished by this private representation, and further according to well-established procedures, the Soviet organizer would ask for the letter and that was the last that would be seen or heard of it.

After a discussion, Lifson suggested that he write an explanatory note and that I leave immediately (it was already 11 p.m.) and deliver it to Lynen. The note would request that Lynen return the letter to me, but he should discuss its contents with the Soviet organizer. Not wanting to carry out this difficult task alone I persuaded Bob to accompany me, and at about midnight we found ourselves knocking on the hotel door of this eminent, but very pleasant and unassuming man. Fortunately, he was not asleep, and with no more than a few words of explanation, he handed the letter back to me.

The next morning, who should appear behind me as I entered the bus to the University, but IA. I mumbled my excuse, and there followed what could be described as a tete-a-tete, covering all those intimate details such as philosophy of life, marriage, etc. It was now a question of who was pumping whom. I never saw him after that.

Around the Soviet Union over 100,000 Jews had applied to emigrate to Israel. Among these were several families who had experienced great personal tragedy. And one of the foremost among these was the surviving family of Peretz Markish, who had been one of the leading Jewish writers in the Soviet Union. His loyalty to the Soviet regime during the difficult days of World War II could not be questioned, since he was (allowed to be) one of the organizers of the Jewish Anti-Fascist League. However, being both an intellectual and a Jew were dangerous in themselves after 1945, and Markish was arrested and with 23 other leading Soviet Jewish intellectuals was executed on August 25th, 1952, in the cellar of the Lyubyanka Prison in Moscow. Was it any wonder that his wife and son, Esther and David, were among the first of those who wished to leave the Soviet Union? On the 20th anniversary of the "night of the murdered poets" I was privileged to-visit the Markish apartment and talk with them and their friends. Many had gathered, and others came and went to mourn the loss of these leading Jewish thinkers - the flower of their generation. But how many died unknown.

The situation of the Markish's was complicated by the fact that David's wife Irina, in one of those sadistic quirks of the Soviet system, had been given permission to emigrate the day after their marriage. She had gone and was now trying to aid their release. Her activities included a dash onto the Center Court at Wimbledon, and now we were shown newspaper clippings of that event. Fortunately, the combination of pressures proved too much for the Soviet apparatus and eventually they reluctantly let the Markish family go, deprived long since of its worthy head. [Esther Markish has since told her story in "*The Long Return*," Random House, 1978].

At these gatherings, and elsewhere, I met further people, some whose names were known to me and others not. Some I asked specific questions, others, especially those newly applying, I asked for the commonplace details of their lives. I was gradually building up a file of information. This was considerably added to several days later when Levich gave me the listing of scientists in the Moscow area, all of whom had applied to emigrate. It was written in both English and Russian, but in capital letters, and described people in the third person (one cannot be too careful). It was also agreed that I should attempt to take out the letter written by Levich. In addition, Alexander Voronel had given me a package of reprints of his scientific papers to pass to an American colleague.

One strategy that my friends in London had suggested was to transfer some material to others who could be trusted and would be less suspect. I had my friend take photos of the papers with one copy for each of us. I kept the original of the Levich letter, and simply mixed it in with my voluminous notes - which I had partly brought along for the occasion. One of my favorite memories of Moscow is of the two of us in a sweltering bathroom, with tap running, and he taking photos of the papers on the toilet seat.

It was only during these last two days that we were obviously followed. We had been "tailed" by a police car after leaving Levich's apartment. And at Voronel's apartment, they had pointed out the black car with the men sitting in it in full view just up the block. As they said, on their own territory they have no need to hide. Also, I had been propositioned by women calling late at night in the hotel. The first night it had been 11 p.m., in Russian, the second at midnight in French - the third night at 2:30 a.m. a woman's voice in English said, "shut your window". That was the only time that I was really scared. How the hell did they know my window was open. The windows stretched from floor to ceiling, and we were very high up. On an impulse I yanked the telephone cord out of the wall and placed the table in front of the window (it was much too hot to close it), but it was difficult to get to sleep after that. I believe that was the main motive behind these late calls, and to be sure you were where you were supposed to be. Some others had received similar calls and felt the warning to close the window might have been to protect us from the prevalent fumes of the forest fires, but I doubted that the Soviet authorities were that concerned about our health.

Two mornings before we were due to leave I was surprised to be followed down the corridor by a man no more than 50 feet behind me, all the way to my friend's room. Then just across from his room on the roof of a section of the building another man was looking straight at us (or so it seemed). My friend poked his head out of the door and sure enough someonewas waiting there. We considered various maneuvers, and finally we went in opposite directions down the corridor. Apparently not wanting to be seen too closely the agent retreated. We met later, and were not aware of being followed, but probably were.

Apparently, my new Soviet Jewish friends were interested in me too. They wondered why I was asking so many questions. They asked me to meet with them, and so with Victor Yachot I took a train ride to the outskirts of Moscow. There we were met by three others, and at the end of the line took a walk into the Ismailovsky Forest. In apparent seclusion a further question and answer period transpired. This time I felt I had to assuage their curiosity and told them almost everything. Even though I had been sworn to secrecy I felt I had to mention the supposed underground Jewish group in London, which had prepared me so well, although my own credentials were good enough. Clearly it was my degree of detailed knowledge and questions which had made them curious. Of course, it had occurred to me that one of them was a "plant" or "agent provocateur", but since I felt they were all trustworthy, and I indeed knew no more than I had told them, there was little else that could transpire. We then made an arrangement for future meetings which could be used if all telephone contact was cut off (as indeed it would be in July 1974 during President Nixon's second visit). During our talk one of them would occasionally take a walk around to detect any listeners.

Another strange image I have of this visit was the experience of sitting alone in the forest while the four of them discussed me in incomprehensible tones. But all seemed well, until on the way back we "lost" two of them, only to find they had walked ahead and entered the station by a different entrance. Such an inconsequential detail, except for the circumstances.

The night before I was due to leave I was asked to visit the Levich's apartment for a last time. In the street walking from the station to the apartment I was told something important had arisen. Apparently, the Soviet authorities were instituting an education tax on all emigrants. Only two cases had been reported so far in the provinces but a friend (they still had some) had warned them that a secret decree of the Supreme Soviet had been passed instituting such a measure. Henceforth all technically qualified people would have to retroactively pay (grossly overpay) the Soviet Government for their supposedly free education. I was urged to tell this to everyone I could. Levich wrote introductory notes to Senators McGovern, Kennedy and Javits (Jackson was not then the leader he later so effectively became). My friends were extending their visits to other Soviet cities, but I was flying straight back to London from Moscow, and the following day on to the States.

So I left them, wondering how I was going to pass this message by myself to the world. But, that was not the end. We went out for a last walk around the city and suddenly on returning to the hotel we were surprised to find Levich and his daughter-in-law Janna waiting there for us. Apparently, their telephone had been cut off that very evening. They asked that I call another number in the morning since they feared for Yevgeny that night.

Contact with the Levichs has been maintained in one way or another. But that did not stop the authorities from snatching Yevgeny from the street in April 1973 and keeping him in Siberia, from where he was released on May 15th, 1974.

Leaving the Soviet Union is not easy for a tourist. You need three forms just to leave your hotel. The first is from the concierge (read KGB informer) who has to certify that your room is in order, namely that you haven't stolen anything from the workers' hotel. This is how the saga of the "Chainik" occurred.

In Soviet hotels there are buffets on several floors which are useful for snacks and small meals (especially considering how slow the restaurants are). In my room was a teapot, which after several days I realized one was supposed to take to the buffet and have filled with life-giving "chai" or tea. One morning I did this, but unfortunately forgot it when I left. It was impossible to converse with the ladies at the buffet using a phrase book when I returned that afternoon. I gave up.

Waiting for my form on the morning of my departure - not realizing the nature of the formality - another lady had to be called to check the room - I was suddenly assailed by the word "chainik". Then I realized the problem. But these ladies wanted 10 rubles for a replacement, and it was easy to converse with them using a phrase book. I wanted a receipt-"Nyet"; then I would not pay 10 rubles. OK, then five rubles or no form. Never wanting to leave a place so badly I paid up. At least I know I was exploited by the workers rather than vice-versa, which gives me a nice little moral edge.

But that's not all. One then has to go to the reception, and with the first form claim a second form (all hotels are prepaid) which then one takes back to the concierge to obtain the release of one's bags. She then gives one a third form to use for transportation to the airport. Without that no one will take you. Then we were driven in separate cars to the airport - inefficient but better security.

I will not attempt to describe the chaos at the airport. But, the customs search was an interesting little experience. Perhaps I should have been more concerned since the letter from Professor Levich could have been considered a "provocation". But, I knew that what I was doing was right. So I got on a line, and when I reached the front an officer showed a piece of paper to the customs man and they gave me the treatment. While he was searching my suitcase under the watchful eyes of the officer, another man was brought in. He could only be described as an "apparatchik".

Dark blue suit, metal rimmed glasses, crew-cut hair, extremely serious; conformity to a caricature. He called in an interpreter and the five of us played games for an hour. The only relief I had was that it was all done in the open. The "apparatchik" spent a long time looking through my papers. There were several files, and he could not be blamed - I hope he wasn't - for missing a few "state secrets". Several friends came over to see what was happening, which also gave me a kind of edge. So they didn't really give me a body search, although they investigated the contents of my pockets. Things only got really serious when they discovered the packet of reprints from Voronel. Since they were in Russian and they were scientific they aroused a great deal of interest. To no avail I explained (as was stated on each) that these were reprinted from Soviet scientific publications, which are available in the U.S.A.

Most of them were confiscated, since I did not have the appropriate export form! Then came a difficult moment, I was asked to sign a form describing the material confiscated. Since this was all in Russian I refused. The apparatchik said I would not be allowed to leave without signing. I asked for the interpreter to read each word to me and checked with my dictionary. The plane was due to leave in a few minutes, so I signed. I thought of Voronel, and his wife, and teenage son with diabetes, and the whole Soviet history of conspiracies. But, that is the way it was. To the best of my knowledge nothing happened to Voronel, and I sent back word of the fate of his reprints. They were probably checked over for pinholes.

Actually, my experience was mild. Another friend, Harry Saroff, an older established scientist, who made the mistake of visiting Levich a few days later (by which time news of the letter may have reached the Soviets) and then going directly to the airport from there, was given the full treatment -- isolation room, told to undress to his underwear, interrogation, his toothpaste and medicines were emptied out and he was threatened. Harry is a tough character. Since he was totally innocent, I think he rather enjoyed the experience. He was not the only one who exchanged words with the KGB, but my two substitutes had no trouble. One went through customs carrying a huge samovar for which he didn't have an export license either, but it was bought for hard cash, and wasn't potentially anti-Soviet.

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### Returning home

Returning to London was like returning to another planet. I had been instructed to call a number to be picked up at the airport. I had been warned to remain vigilant till in safe hands. But, instead of being whisked from the airport I was told to take the subway across London and call from a certain station. Since I had to do this I decided I might just as well go home and see my family and dump my cases. So after a relieved homecoming and a cup of tea I called the number again. "'Where have you been?" Brief explanation, very suspicious. Now my instructions were to walk down a certain street and a car would pull alongside. In this way I found myself back at the same house as before, now for the debriefing.

When A had briefed me, he had tape-recorded the conversation. So now I had brought my own tape recorder and one cassette, enough for 1 hour’s playtime. But, incredibly the debriefing lasted eight hours. There were three tape recorders, mine, A's and D's all running, and several other people flitting in and out. Most of the questioning was done by X, D's boss. Since I was leaving early the next morning for the U.S. and since I had to repack and make a few phone calls, and in any case was exhausted from the journey, I first gave them an overall outline of the meetings in Moscow, and the important results. I also let them make copies of the papers.

But things quickly became more complex. Minute details were requested, "how did he look?", "what was he wearing?" . . . then they were (naturally) very interested in IA, and lo and behold, after a few minutes of checking told me he was a Colonel Vasky of the KGB. It seems too pat now - but it was an unreal experience. The most difficult part was when they began to put me on the defensive "what's the matter, don't you want to help the Soviet Jews", “only this way can we find out if one of them is an informer", "are you trying to gloss over something". They didn't actually physically restrain me, or threaten me, but now I know in a very small measure what a real interrogation must feel like. And these were my "friends".

I told them practically everything. At times I regretted it but on a minute by minute schedule it is difficult to avoid. At times things got confused, and this made me even more defensive. The thought kept recurring, which I gave voice to, what if my one percent suspicion of them was correct (within me it was growing exponentially). Finally, when I was practically tottering they called a stop (they had not let me use the telephone during the interrogation) and delivered me home. We were all good friends at the end, they even said I had done a “good job", to which I replied I had done what *I* considered right.

As I told them I would, when I got back to the States, I did some checking and, although to this day I know nothing more definite about them (nor want to), I believe they were genuine.

Many Jews have visited the would-be emigrants in the Soviet Union in the last few years. Many other people have had more dramatic and damaging experiences in the Soviet Union than I. But, I present the above description as one man's experience from a particular point of view under prevailing circumstances. There were implications. Fortunately for me the very day of my leaving the USSR the scientists I had met - now having more cases to quote - called an unprecedented news conference in Moscow and told the world about the infamous Soviet education exit tax. The morning of my arrival it was reported in the New York Times and Washington Post. This made my task a lot easier. I also gave copies of Levich's letter to certain people, and an op-ed piece on it appeared in the Washington Post.

As a result of this and other contacts, a few of us set up the Committee of Concerned Scientists, principally to help the Soviet Jewish scientists. This is now an on-going organization, which has interested itself in the U.S. - U.S.S.R. Scientific and Technological Exchange Agreements initiated by President Nixon with Chairman Brezhnev in May, 1972. We believe the treatment of scientists within the Soviet Union in the broadest context, including such so-called dissidents as Andrei Sakharov, cannot be dissociated from the exchange of scientific information for the greater benefit of the USSR However, these views are expounded upon elsewhere.

[\*In his book "*Refusenik: trapped in the Soviet Union*," (Houghton-Mifflin, 1981) Mark Azbel tells a story (p. 252-253) that confirms my activity in 1972 in the Soviet Union. I was the mysterious unnamed "American scientist" and it was through my mistaken intervention that Mark Azbel made the decision to begin the process of emigrating from the Soviet Union, thus becoming a refusenik:

"*During a break from the meetings, while we were all moving around, and making one another's acquaintance, an American scientist came up to me and introduced himself "I wonder if I could talk to you for a minute," he said. "Could we step outside and take a walk before the conference starts up again?" In the Soviet Union, where "the walls have ears," this is an invitation you hear very often—but hardly from a Western scientist! I accepted, and we left the building. When it was possible to talk without being overheard, he began with a question that simply astounded me.*

*"Is it true that you want to go to Israel?" I was really amazed, because I had told no one of my intentions. But I decided not to lie about it, and said yes.*

*"Well, I'm a friend of Veniamin Levitch. I know that you and he are very close. He's told me a lot about you." Once more I was astonished, because Professor Levitch and I didn't know each other particularly well. But I didn't want to let Levitch down: maybe now that he had applied for his visa, he needed all the support he could get from other scientists, and he may have had some very good reason for mentioning me to this man. So again I said yes.*

*"What I wanted to ask you is this," said the American. "Do you have any suggestions to offer as to how someone like myself could help? What can we do to assist the people who are trying to get to Israel?"*

*I had a great many ideas; I had thought about it constantly for an entire year. Nothing could have been more encouraging than this question. Because the Soviets valued their international scientific contacts and presumably would not want seriously to alienate scientists from other countries, I felt that concern on the part of friends from abroad was a tremendous asset to those of us who were trying to emigrate. Here was someone who evidently was willing, not only to interest himself in the trials faced by beleaguered fellow-scientists, but to take some risks on their behalf I was very grateful to have met him. We conferred for a couple of hours.*

*It was more than a year before I discovered why this man had sought me out. When he heard my name and ascertained that I was a friend of Professor Levitch, he concluded it would be most unlikely that there were two Professors Azbel, both of whom knew Levitch, and both of whom were hoping to leave for Israel. So he believed I was the man about whom he had heard. This was a mistake. There was another Azbel, David, who had recently applied for his exit visa, had been refused, and who at that time—although a man over sixty years of age—was about to start the battle on behalf of Soviet Jews for which he later became so well known*."]

It was Professor Levich who coined the term "Slaves of the Twentieth Century" to describe the scientists who are mere chattels of the state. Alexander Solzhenitsyn's "Gulag Archipelago" provides us with the historical insight needed to understand the full implications of that phrase. While my own experiences were comparatively mild, I nevertheless feel Western Scientists should be aware of the circumstances. We pose no real threat to the Soviet State, we seek only to help individuals, thereby perhaps to improve human society.

I remember fondly the time I was invited to the home of Sen. Edward Kennedy, in Maclean, Virginia, when Prof. Levich was finally released from the Soviet Union. He was affiliated with Tel Aviv and New York Universities until his death several years ago. In telling my story I eliminated some events, not only because of considerations of space, but also for fear of affecting the situation of others still trapped at that time in the Soviet Union. The eventual release of all the people mentioned here, and the downfall of the Soviet Union, happily have made these considerations outdated.

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### The Brezhnev Demonstration

One of the highlights of the pro-Soviet Jewry movement was the huge demonstration organized in Washington DC when Chairman Brezhnev of the USSR made his first visit to the USA in June, 1973. Although this was a national undertaking, organized by the NCSJ, I was head of the local organizing committee. The plan was to have a rally at the Congress, with a stage and speakers, and then a march down Constitution Avenue, turning at 16th Street to the White House and then circling the White House. The route is important for what happened later. By this time the Soviet Jewry movement had grown tremendously, and a huge crowd was expected.

Through my contacts I heard that the JDL was planning to disrupt the demonstration. I had some meetings with them, and we came to a compromise. In exchange for us letting them march with their own banners, they would agree not to disrupt the demonstration or march. I gave this information to the JCC leadership and although they were unhappy, it was better than the alternatives. As the day drew nearer, the plans became more concrete. There were to be a group of academics in gowns and mortar boards leading the parade, each carrying the name of a Soviet Jewish refusenik scientist or academic who had been refused permission to emigrate. Since I was one of the main organizers, and an academic myself, I was to lead the parade.

I had marshals organized from a group that I was affiliated with called the Jewish Athletic League, which was basically a Jewish karate club. I had taken karate lessons with them for about 6 months until I hurt my leg; because of confusion some people thought that I was a member of the JDL, but that was never the case. I had the JAL organize the security at most of the large Jewish demonstrations in DC, and they gave us a measure of confidence. On one notable occasion a group of Nazis showed up from Virginia, sporting their swastikas, there was a fight and they were thoroughly beaten, as well as their cars being attacked (tires slashed) as they retreated. The police, most of whom were Black, did not do much to protect them.

On the day there was great excitement. The speeches were organized by the NCSJ, and several eminent Senators spoke. When the March was ready it was my turn, with my marshals to direct and lead the huge crowd of many thousands. Just as we were going down the steps on the west side of the Capitol, the JDL group suddenly appeared and pushed themselves to the front. They were carrying a man dressed in a striped prison garb inside a cage on their shoulders, and there were several hundred of them. I quickly told them that they could participate in the March but not at the front, as that would make it appear as if it was their March. Also, we had these eminent academics to lead the March. They threatened to stop the March unless I agreed to them leading it. There was some pushing and shoving, and I tried with others to hold them back until the academics got to the front. Eventually they agreed to accept second place in the March, since the academics were already out front.

I was incensed that the JDL would break their word and embarrass the whole Jewish community in front of live TV cameras by trying to disrupt the March. I thought of a way to trick them. As we walked down Constitution Avenue, I told the academics to continue and not turn at 16th Street, then I went back and told the other marshals to turn the March down 16th Street after the JDL group had passed it. With the crowd stretching all the way back to Congress it would take them a long time to realize what had happened and they would never get back to the front of the March. I stationed myself at the 16th Street intersection and waved the JDL group to continue following the academics. I had told the academics to walk about half a block then break up and individually cut across the grass of the ellipse back to the March.

Then I lead the JDL further down Constitution Avenue. By the time we came level with the Washington monument the JDL realized that they had been duped. I started to run, hoping they would follow me and went diagonally across the ellipse but in the opposite direction away from the March. A group of them did follow, predominantly youngsters, and they were shouting “get the guy in the gown!” There I was, running with my black cloak incongruously flowing out behind me, holding onto my mortar board. They were catching up to me, so I turned and faced them. I was prepared to fight, but I shouted at them “I’m not your enemy!” and they stopped and gradually backed away.

Meanwhile the March had progressed, and the JDL, after retracing their steps had a hard time getting back into the throng. I ran back to the head of the March, but it was too late to have the academics lead as a group since we had been dispersed. Nevertheless, it was a great success, and even Isaac Franck of the JCC congratulated me on the March and what I had done to trick the JDL. Later that day I met William Perl of the JDL and we patched up our argument and he also congratulated me on the March. I thought that it was ironical to be congratulated by two such opposite leaders of the Jewish community on the same day. Overall, the demonstration had a great impact and helped enormously to convince the Soviets that they faced serious opposition.

Over the subsequent years I became disillusioned with the new executive leadership of the Jewish Community Council in Washington. In 1982 I had to deal with the consequences of the Lebanon War, and it was not easy, but we managed to put Israel’s valid case.

Then times changed, radically. The Jews were released from the USSR, the Soviet Union collapsed, and Israel became relatively stronger as a result. I gradually became older and wiser and stopped being the “activist” I had been. So, by the mid-80’s it was time to leave the Jewish scene in Washington to a new and younger generation and move on.

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# **Antisense**

### Introduction

***Science*** is revered in the western world as the rational subject par excellence. But, what people tend to forget is that science, the struggle for new knowledge and understanding, is in fact a human endeavor that suffers from all the same passions that both ennoble and degrade every other form of human activity. It is the content of science that is rational, not necessarily its human actors.

There are many well reported examples of how human attributes, such as jealousy, dislike and even hatred, as well as commercial rivalry, have influenced all forms of science. One example was the fact that Thomas Edison, who had invented direct current (DC) electricity, did everything he could to prevent his assistant Nikola Tesla from implementing and exploiting the preferable form of alternating current (AC) electricity, that subsequently became the norm throughout the world. Other examples were the barriers that were placed in the way of Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud at several stages in their careers. It required confirmation over time for their then provocative theories to be accepted. That is the way of science.

Even less well-known scientists have experienced strong opposition, sometimes amounting to nasty innuendo, from older more established peers. One example was Dan Shechtman, who won the Nobel Prize for Physics in 2011, whose work on quasi-crystals was roundly rejected by such luminaries as Linus Pauling, whose own early work was considered just as unacceptable in its time.

In my own career, I experienced a great deal of personal animosity, petty jealousy and unpleasant behavior, on a far greater scale than my early training in Cambridge University prepared me for. Instead of the expected collegial atmosphere and cooperative attitudes, I encountered extreme rivalry, downright dislike, back-biting, name-calling and actual hatred. Surprised as I was to repeatedly discover this, I began to question my own character and the whole fabric of science. Certainly, there are many who stop at nothing, including the manufacturing of results as well as the sensationalizing of mediocre results that provide false hope to many suffering patients. What was most upsetting was to find these attitudes present in abundance in the revered laboratories of one of the most famous scientific centers in the world, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, Maryland.

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### Antisense – Genetic Drugs

In **1986**, the door of my office was thrown open and in burst my two bosses, Ace Ericson, Head of the Clinical Pharmacology Branch, NCI, and his boss Bernie Kaplan, Head of the Oncology Research Program, NCI. Bernie was at that time working very hard on trying to find an agent, any drug, that could counteract the effects of HIV, the causative virus of AIDS. He had worked on the first such anti-AIDS agent, namely AZT, work for which he had become famous. They were excited and had been arguing about a scientific paper they had seen in the literature. The paper that caught their attention was by someone I knew, Paul T’so (pronounced Cho), a very good scientist, who worked at Johns Hopkins Medical School in Baltimore, Maryland.

Ace had been very good to me. He had taken me into his Department three years before, he had supported me, and had enabled me to set up my own research program, which was running quite successfully. He was a small man, with a bland face and a short sharp nose with piercing pale blue eyes. He had lank blondish hair that hung across the right side of his face. He usually wore a tie and jacket. He was a vegan and as far as I could tell he only ate dried vegetables, which explained his trim build and possibly his stoic personality.

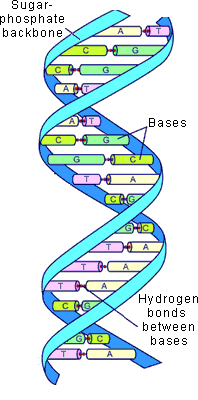
Bernie Kaplan was quite different, he looked and sounded like Groucho Marx, except he was short without bending his knees. He had a Groucho moustache and round Groucho glasses. He was one of those important people who was too busy to stop working when you entered his office or if you encountered him in the hallway. He would say “talk to me” as he continued walking while reading a document. His intonation was so Groucho that I had to keep myself from laughing. But he was a very serious and earnest clinician. He usually wore a pullover with a “v” neck. His favorite phrase was “lighten up.”

The paper they were interested in described the use of short sequences of DNA known as oligonucleotides (shortened to oligos) to bring about the *selective regulation of gene expression*, an amazing feat if true (*oligo* means few, so an oligonucleotide contains a few of the basic units of DNA, or nucleotides, strung together). But, the oligos T’so used were not the natural units bound by phosphate bonds found in nature, since they would be easily degraded by enzymes called nucleases present in all cells to protect them against foreign DNA. He had used a chemically modified form called a *phosphonate*. Since I was the resident expert on phosphorus chemistry and DNA, they came to me for clarification.

I had done my PhD on DNA and phosphorus chemistry in the laboratory of Lord Todd in Cambridge University, England. Lord Todd had won the Nobel Prize for his work on the synthesis of such important phosphate-containing compounds as ATP, the energy conserving component of cells, and had also proven the chemical structure of the nucleotide units of DNA that contain a phosphate group. I was therefore qualified to advise them. They wanted to know “what is antisense?” “what is a phosphonate?” and “why should it work?”

So, I went to the blackboard and started to explain the whole process to them….

*”Antisense* sounds technical but it really is simple. The base sequence that determines the function of DNA in the gene is called the *sense* sequence, and the complementary sequence that binds to it through base pairing is termed the *antisense* sequence. DNA is the genetic substance that it consists of a series of bases in a specific order. The bases are adenine (A), guanine (G), cytosine (C) or thymine (T). It was shown by Erwin Chargaff at Columbia University in the 1950s that the ratio of bases is: A=T and G=C. Watson and Crick, when they determined the *double stranded* *helical structure* of DNA, used the results of X-ray diffraction of DNA fibers to determine that these so-called *base pairs* were the basis of the structure and around them spiraled the DNA backbone consisting of alternating sugar (deoxyribose) and phosphate groups. Since there are two strands the *sense* sequence was the name given to the strand that is used by the cell to synthesize proteins and *antisense* was the name given to the complementary sequence (see **Figure 2**). *Oligonucleotides* or oligos are short sequences of the units of DNA chemically strung together. A breakthrough occurred when it became possible to synthesize them automatically using a machine called a *DNA synthesizer*. Of course, the longer the sequence strung together the harder it is to synthesize it and the less the amount of product that is obtained. Short sequences of up to 15 units are optimal for research purposes.”



**Fig. 4.** Schematic diagram of DNA structure, showing the double helical structure with two strands, sense and antisense. The base pairs are in the center of the structure holding the two strands together and the backbone (ribbons) consists of an alternating sugar (deoxyribose) and phosphate chain. Hydrogen bonds hold the base pairs together. This model proposed by Watson and Crick in 1953, was subsequently confirmed by physicochemical studies.

It was a novel idea to use these short sequences of oligos as *antisense drugs*, the idea being that they would interact with their complementary sense sequence in the cell and thereby prevent a particular gene from being expressed into its gene product or protein. In a study published 14 years earlier, Paul Zamecnik and M.L. Stephenson had reported that they could kill the Rous sarcoma virus in cell culture using a specially selected sequence of bases, but their oligo had been made up of natural phosphate esters which are susceptible to degradation by natural enzymes. Perhaps because of this, it was difficult if not impossible to repeat this work.

Using the *chemically modified forms of oligos* such as phosphonates (with a phosphorus-carbon bond) in place of phosphates (with phosphorus-oxygen bonds) would protect them from degradation by the prevalent nucleases in the cell (enzymes that degrade phosphorus-oxygen bonds but not phosphorus-carbon bonds) and allow the short sequences of DNA to be used as drugs. The attraction of this form of drug was that unlike the usual drugs which bind to proteins or enzymes, this form of drug binds to the messenger-RNA (mRNA) that takes the coding sense sequence into the cell and blocks its expression and so it could in principle be used against *any* genetic disease, including cancer. We called them “*genetic drugs*.” [[2]](#footnote-3)

After thus explaining this novel drug approach to my two bosses, I was given the immediate task, “see if you can synthesize such chemically modified oligos with the appropriate nucleotide sequence so that we can test them against the HIV virus.”

You might ask, now why is this research against HIV being done in the National *Cancer* Institute? But, in fact HIV attacks the immune system thereby allowing many opportunistic infections, including some that lead to cancer, such as the prevalent Kaposi’s sarcoma. Also, in the face of the then growing epidemic of AIDS it was all hands-on-deck. Of course, there were other Institutes and groups doing AIDS research, including mainly the National Institute of Infectious Diseases (NIAID), but many in the Cancer Institute were also focusing on that urgent problem.

But the concept of antisense was itself quite innovative. If you could *prevent the expression of a specific gene*, you had a new kind of drug, *a genetic drug* that could in principle *cure any genetic disease*. For such a golden concept people had struggled their whole lives. This was the stuff that dreams are made of, that people win Nobel Prizes for, and that could save innumerable lives.

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### Antisense against AIDS, 1986

Although Bernie had been successful in the development of AZT as an anti-AIDS drug (how successful is still a matter of controversy) he was still desperately searching for other more effective, agents. Together we agreed to test the *antisense method* against HIV.

This is what I did. I immediately took T’so’s paper and rushed to the library to look up and get copies of the papers detailing the synthesis method. One of them was quite obscure, by a German author detailing the preparation of the necessary chemical precursors, and I had to search for this in the National Library of Medicine nearby. When I had got all the information together, I reviewed it and prepared a short report giving my proposed approach. In it I estimated how much the syntheses would cost for enough of the oligos, natural and chemically modified phosphonate versions, to carry out several tests against HIV with the necessary controls.

However, there was a catch, I did not have one of the new DNA synthesizers in my lab and there were none in the Oncology Program. I proposed to approach a friend in another lab on the NIH campus, Bob Henderson who had been a post-doc student of mine and who I knew had such a synthesizer in his lab, being tested in what is called “beta-testing,” i.e. it was a prototype of a new commercial product. I would ask him to collaborate with us, but I proposed that we should immediately put in a request for such a machine ourselves so that we could be independent and so that we could obtain unlimited quantities of these oligos. I was immediately aware of the fact that we could also test them against other diseases with a genetic origin (note that the genetic origin of AIDS is the exogenous HIV virus, while the genetic origin of cancer is an endogenous oncogene). The catch of course was that these synthesizers were not cheap, each machine cost ca. $50,000.

I gave this brief proposal to Bernie, and he read it and immediately said, “go ahead!” I asked him about buying a DNA synthesizer, and he said “well, we’re nearly at the end of the fiscal year, so prepare an order and get the official government pricing, and I’ll see if we can push it through as part of the AIDS funding package.”

There are two things to note here, first that often expensive equipment is ordered at the end of a funding cycle, when funds that are left over can be estimated and used most efficiently. The second crucial aspect, that was to affect my future career, was that I did not go through my immediate boss Ace Ericson, I went straight to his boss Bernie Kaplan. Now I did this because Bernie was the one working on AIDS and Ace was not. Also, I was an independent researcher and had been for many years, and since this was my area of expertise and not that of Ace, who was a clinical pharmacologist, I did not feel I needed his involvement. This was what could be called an elementary political mistake, one that carried the seeds of future disaster.

I went and visited my former post-doc Bob Henderson in his lab in another Institute at NIH and he was very cooperative, but he told me that the DNA Synthesizer was not really controlled by him, it was controlled by his friend and close collaborator Gordon Sunshine. They had a division of labor and he had taken the structural analysis of the products and Gordon had taken the synthesis.

But, it so happened that I knew Gordon Sunshine quite well, he had been Bob’s collaborator when Bob had been working for me and Gordon had been an Assistant Professor at Catholic University of America in Washington DC. But, there Gordon had essentially no laboratory space, so I had allowed them to do a collaboration together using my lab space, particularly when I was away on sabbatical for a year. Gordon was very grateful for this and their successful work together had enabled them to get jobs working together at the NIH, with my recommendation. So Gordon was very receptive to my request for a collaboration, whereby he would synthesize the oligos we needed and I would supply them to Bernie for testing. This tended to make me a passive intermediary, but it was my knowledge and contacts that had initiated the project and I had every hope that within a reasonably short period of time I would have my own synthesizer running. Meanwhile I could learn a lot from Gordon (later he moved to California to work for the company making the DNA Synthesizers).

When you say that someone who runs a lab is going to collaborate with you, you know that he himself rarely actually does the bench work, Gordon had his post-doctoral fellow and I had mine and Bernie had his. So there are at least 6 people involved in this project that had yet to get off the ground. The cost for the precursors to synthesize the needed oligos would come from Bernie’s major AIDS funding. In order to formalize the collaboration, I wrote a memo that covered the work to be done by each group and distributed it to them.

In discussing the project with Gordon, he told me that they were actively synthesizing some other chemically modified oligos that have a sulfur atom in place of an oxygen atom on the natural phosphate. They were doing this for structural analysis, but it immediately occurred to us that we could also test these analogues against HIV, and this was a serendipitous occurrence. Gordon agreed that his Japanese post-doc would synthesize the needed oligos, the natural phosphates (abbreviated PO) as controls, the phosphonates (abbreviated PM) as described by Ts’o and since they were working on them also the sulphur analogues, called phosphorothioates (abbreviated as PS).

I was naturally curious about their synthesis of the PS compounds that they had developed in collaboration with a Polish group. It turned out the synthesis was not working as well as expected, and the yields of the PS product were in fact only ca, 70%. This was not adequate for biological testing, so we agreed to see if we could improve the yield. The synthesis required heating of the reaction chamber of the synthesizer and this was proving difficult to do, leading to big variations in temperature and leaking from the joints. I knew a fellow who worked in the equipment design unit at NIH and so I went to him with this problem. He suggested some technical improvements and I paid for the making of the improved heated reaction vessel and with this (which took some weeks to get made) we were able to raise the yields of PS compound up to ca. 95%.

Meanwhile Gordon’s Japanese post-doc Matsuo Shinokura had synthesized the natural PO oligo controls, then focused on the PM oligos, that proved quite difficult to make, and then when we had the improved heated reaction vessel, he made the PS oligos. It turned out that the PM oligos were very difficult to make since they were inherently insoluble in water. This was as a result of the substitution of the charged oxygen atom with a neutral carbon containing group, and the longer the oligos the less was the yield. By contrast, the PS compounds with a charged sulphur atom in place of a charged oxygen atom were still quite soluble. So we had three series of oligos to test.

I took these to Bernie’s lab and gave them to his Japanese post-doc Kaito Matsura for the antiviral test against HIV. The theory was that if an agent killed the HIV virus selectively more than the controls then it might be an anti-AIDS drug, but if it had no effect then it was not worth taking further into more biological trials and into clinical trials on humans.

We were at this point unsure what would happen, it was after all a novel research project. As far as we were aware until then no such experiments had been done anywhere. Such is the nature of frontline pharma-cological research against human viruses.

When we got the results we were flabbergasted, the PO oligo controls had no activity against HIV and this was not surprising, and the PM oligos also had no activity, but surprise, surprise, the PS oligos, that we had added as a second thought had high activity against HIV. We had inadvertently found a new potential anti-AIDS drug, and we were very happy. We quickly wrote a paper that was published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (PNAS) in 1988 (note that it takes ca. a year for a paper to actually be published) and we made sure that the DNA Synthesizer order was expedited.

However, this work showed that the PS compounds had a non-sequence effect that was very worrying. In other words, in that HIV assay it didn’t matter what PS oligo one used, they all had an inhibitory effect on the growth of HIV. It was still an anti-HIV agent, but we were looking for a sequence-specific antisense effect. So we changed the assay to another one that had been developed in Bernie’s lab to search for a sequence-specific antisense effect.

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### Fateful decision

I stood poised before the white Formica desk, my back to it, facing Ace Ericson, my boss, head of the Clinical Pharmacology Branch. He said "I know you have a place in your lab, and I have a great candidate for you." I remained in a defensive posture, unsure how to respond to his suggestion.

Over time our relationship had subtly changed and I realized that he was somewhat upset with me, which I thought was due to the fact that I had not included him in my research and in my publications. I could understand why he might be resentful at not being included in the antisense research that had great potential for future drug discovery. I instinctively thought that this new candidate might be a “Trojan horse” inserted into my lab to find out what I was doing. These thoughts ran through my head as I tried to answer him in a neutral manner. "Who is the candidate?" I inquired, "and what is his background?"

"His name is Sam Schwartz and he has a PhD in chemistry as well as being an oncologist, and when he approached me for a job, I immediately thought of you. He did his PhD with a well-known man out in California, and I told him about your antisense wor and he is very interested in that. He is a clinical fellow and it won't cost you anything to have him in your lab, as the Department will support him. He is waiting outside and he is eager to meet you. Since your lab is the most appropriate for him in the Department I would very much like you to take him in."

My mind was racing, considering the options, because even at this stage, I did not fully trust Ace. Nor did I have any idea who this new candidate was, this Trojan horse. In order to play for time, I asked, "can I see his cv, and could he give a seminar so that I can see how he presents and the level of his work?" Ace answered, "sure, I'll get him to give you his CV, and we’ll arrange for him to give a lab seminar on his chemical work. Now, shall I call him in so you can meet him?" Of course, I said "yes", I felt as if I owed Ace a lot, and I could not say “no” directly to him, but I had a bad feeling.

I shook hands with the candidate, Sam Schwartz, and we exchanged pleasantries. He was from New York, he apologized that his chemistry was a bit rusty since he had been a medical student for many years, but he would brush up on his Thesis work and he would be happy to give a seminar on it. Soon he gave me his CV, which was not so impressive, but he gave a reasonable seminar, and I could see no overt reason to reject him. So, in 1988, Sam Schwartz entered my lab as a clinical fellow to do a research project in the area of antisense oligonucleotides as anti-cancer drugs. This was a decision I would later live to regret.

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### Sam Schwartz

Sam Schwartz was a short, stocky figure, almost as wide as he was tall. His head seemed somewhat too large for his body, and presented a macrocephalic aspect, with his jaw and forehead jutting forward, the kind of thing one sees in athletes who have taken too much steroid. This can also be a natural condition produced by having too much growth hormone during development. His prognathus jaw gave him a slightly menacing appearance, and his tendency to having red blotches over his face made him seem unnatural. His fingers were stubby, and he tended to twirl them in front of his chest when he was sitting and talking.

As soon as he arrived in the lab, he placed a stereo tape recorder on the shelf in front of his desk, with a stack of music tapes next to it. Although these tapes were of classical music, I never actually heard him playing them, like much else in his personality they were for show. He also placed a brass Indian wheel representing the wheel of life with the figure of an Indian deity on it. I soon realized from his demeanor that these were symbols of his need to impress.

The layout of the office was that there were benches covered in white Formica on each side. However, on the left there was a small safety door between the office and the adjoining lab, so that someone could escape in case of fire. This meant that there were spaces for three people to sit at desks on the right-hand side, but only two on the left. Sam occupied the place at the end on the right next to the door, between him and my small office at the end sat my Indian post-doc Satcharya Ram. On the other side, were the Dutch guy Otto van Rijn, the Japanese fellow Nomi Edoh and the British chap Walter Hazen, altogether a very international bunch. Life is too short to describe the mutual interactions and often humorous encounters between this group of post-docs. Note that Hazen was a pediatrician, and they are usually the nicest of docs, and he never got along with Sam Schwartz.

At least in my tiny office I had a window overlooking part of the campus, since we were on the 6th floor, and I had a door that I could slide shut if I wanted to have privacy. But generally I kept the door open, so that there would be a sense of openness in our relationships and I tried to foster good communications between the fellows so that they could both feel at home and could learn from each other. Each one of them had a separate project, some of them on similar topics, and it was my practice when each joined the lab to not only go over the project I was proposing for each of them, but also to follow up with a detailed memo outlining the project and the experimental approach that would be needed to accomplish it. Naturally, I also did this for Sam Schwartz when he joined the lab. I also told him and Leila that she should help Sam by synthesizing oligos for him at first, but that he should learn how to do this for himself as part of his research.

I became Sam’s confidante, he would come to me and tell me stories without any prompting from me and without any reciprocation. On one occasion, Sam came to my sliding door and pulled it close next to him and opened his lab coat and showed me a wad of $100 bills. I asked, “where did you get those from?” and he said, “one of the patients from New York was very grateful that I got their daughter into an NCI protocol.” Although I was not a clinical oncologist like him, I knew that it was strictly illegal for him to take money from a patient at NIH. But, at the time I did nothing about it.

Sam used to regale me with stories of his doings, some that were downright weird. For example, a well-known couple in the Jewish community of Virginia got into financial difficulties, leading to tension, leading to murder. The wife shot the husband dead, claiming that he was stealing their money and having affairs with prostitutes. She was arrested. This was all reported in the newspaper. They lived in a large house in the affluent suburb of McLean. Realizing that there would be no one at their home, since the husband was dead and the wife incarcerated, Sam rented a large truck, and with a nefarious friend, drove to their house, broke in and during one dark night removed all their furniture and belongings into the truck. He used the furniture to furnish the basement in his house and the rest he sold and made a lot of money off it. He said, “Well, they certainly don’t need it anymore!”

Sam had one very annoying habit, he liked to snoop around, find out what was going on and then call me, very often in the evening around 6 -7 pm just as I was eating dinner, to tell me the latest scuttlebutt and rumors going around. What Ace had said to whom, whose status was high and who’s low, whose work was going well and who had problems. Out of about 30 post-docs I had never had one who had ever done such a thing before. I tolerated these calls, but my wife was very annoyed by them and said, “you mark my words, this person is trouble!”

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### Setting up the laboratory

Our collaboration with Gordon Sunshine was going well and they were churning out oligos for HIV testing, but then Gordon came to me because he had a problem. His post-doc position was for only one year and it was due to run out in a few months, and if he could not find other support his Japanese post-doc Matsuo Shinokura would have to return to Japan. Gordon’s boss had told him that there were no funds to renew it, and without him Gordon would not himself be able to run the synthesizer and provide the oligos for the research. I immediately went to Bernie and told him the situation and pointed out that we would soon have delivery of our own DNA synthesizer, whereupon we would no longer be dependent on Gordon Sunshine, but, we would need our own post-doc to continue the research.

This was providential, if he could get me the post-doc position, then Matsuo could simply transfer to my lab and continue the work. He agreed, so this was very fortuitous for me. In addition, I had the technician Leila Subramanian who would do the routine work of making sure the machine was supplied with the necessary chemicals and was kept running efficiently to output as much oligos as possible. Both of these two, Leila and Matsuo, would sit in the laboratory with the DNA synthesizer.

Sure enough during this time using a different HIV assay we then discovered a *sequence-specific antisense effect*, but only for the PS oligos, so we wrote another paper for PNAS and when this was published in 1989 we were *very* happy. Also, in 1989 I edited and published the first book on the subject of “*antisense oligos as selective inhibitors of gene expression*.”

At the time it really did not occur to me that Ace, who was technically my boss, would resent my success with this antisense work and also my direct relationship with his boss, Bernie. After all, we were scientists and the ideal was to pursue knowledge, defeat disease, publish papers and if possible achieve fame. But, I must admit that I deliberately excluded him form this work, because after all he made no contribution to it. So we also went ahead and applied thru the office of Patents at NIH for a patent for our work on antisense agents against HIV

At that time NIH, being a government institution, did not have its own patent attorneys, but farmed out the work to private attorneys under contract. I had a visit from a patent attorney who was very old, smelt of alcohol and seemed incompetent. He wrote a draft that I found totally inadequate and so I complained, and he was replaced and this all took time.

Meanwhile I knew that others had seen our papers in PNAS and were busy competing on the same subject. However, for a patent what matters is when the work was done, and many years later when the patent was subsequently granted to NIH, it was disputed by another group. We were able to show to the patent judge’s satisfaction that we did not copy our competitor’s work, but rather they copied ours. Nevertheless, although this was important and involved a lot of money for NIH, we got only a very small percentage of the payments to NIH from private companies that were set up to try to develop antisense drugs commercially. At a rough estimate of the number of companies, the total investment in this subject came to billions of dollars.

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### The call from California

One morning when I was in the lab I received a call from California, from someone who said he had seen our abstract in the current scientific meeting that was going on in San Diego, where Bernie’s Japanese post-doc was presenting our work. When the caller had approached this fellow, he had referred him to me as the antisense expert and he said anyway his English was poor and he couldn’t understand him properly. He asked me if he could come out and speak to me, and I said yes, of course, and he said, “I’ll be there tomorrow.”

This blew me away, no one had ever taken any particular interest in my work and none had ever come out from California on a day’s notice to speak to me. I had always wanted to be involved in some great adventure, some great task, and suddenly here it was. I had found my niche, I had struck gold.

Charles Brundy when he came was a revelation. He was the golden boy from the West Coast, he was salvation itself. He told me that he worked for a venture capital company in Palo Alto, that he had degrees in biology and business and was a qualified MD. But, he had not practiced medicine, instead he was looking for a novel drug development program to invest in, and he was sure he had found it in antisense. He asked me many questions about antisense and then invited me to help form a company with him.

Of course, it would mean leaving NCI, but it was very uncertain, there was enough money to get thru the first year, but after that we would need an injection of venture capital funds. My role would be scientific director and I would have founder’s shares in the company, but it was clear that he would control the finances and I could not expect much salary until the company achieved some success. I thought about it, then demurred. I told him that I was a researcher, I was primarily an academic and that I could not see myself in such a role. It would mean giving up a stable job for unknown prospects.

He said, “don’t decide immediately, I’ll be in touch with you and you can then give me your answer, meanwhile I want you to be a consultant to the company.” A few days later he called me, as I was having a dinner out with friends at a Chinese restaurant, and on the phone I turned down his offer. Nevertheless, he invited me out to California a few times, and paid me handsomely for advice, about whom I thought would make a good DNA chemist, who would be a good DNA synthesizer technician, etc.

He did in fact employ as chief chemist one of the people I recommended, although this person was a rival of mine and indeed was very negative about everyone else’s work. The last time I went out to see him, after a nice meal in a fancy restaurant up in the redwood hills, he drove me back to the airport in his MG sports car and told me that he intended to build a billion dollar company, and in fact he did. I’ve always wondered what would have happened if I had accepted his offer.

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### Lecturing

Up to the time I started working on antisense, which involved my knowledge of nucleic acids based on my PhD Thesis at Cambridge University, I had worked mainly on protein structure using NMR, nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy. Without going into the technical details, NMR had revolutionized the determination of the structures of chemical substances, and I was intrigued by the prospect of applying it to the structure determination of proteins.

I worked in this area for several years and published many papers, and it seemed very successful, yet I knew that it was not a very fashionable subject. Structure determination of proteins had been carried our very successfully by X-ray crystallographers who had determined the actual structures of many proteins that could be crystallized, and Max Perutz had even won the Nobel Prize for the determination of the structure of hemoglobin, the oxygen carrying protein in the blood. Now NMR provided a way to determine the structure in solution, but there were limits on the size of the protein that could be determined and one needed large amounts of stable proteins, significant limitations. I was very glad to have the opportunity to return to DNA research.

My antisense research attracted quite a lot of attention and I began to be invited more regularly, about once a month, to give seminars and lectures at various conferences and universities. One day I received an invitation to lecture at the University of Pennsylvania at the Johnson Foundation. This was the Department of my esteemed colleague Mildred Cohn, and of the head of the Foundation, Britton Chance. Britton Chance was a very well-known researcher and formidable intellect, whose work had unfortunately come into question. He studied brain metabolism and had been using the state-of-the-art method called “freeze-clamp,” whereby a mouse or rat brain was treated in a certain way and then suddenly frozen to liquid nitrogen temperature in a metal clamp. The brain was then dissected and studied.

However, the results obtained for the level of ATP for example, which is the major source of energy in the cells, was much less than obtained by another method, phosphorus NMR, which did not require the destruction of the brain itself. It was realized that the sudden freezing of the brain caused the formation of ice particles, that breached the cell walls and released an enzyme that degraded ATP, thus giving lower results. When this was revealed by experiment, Britton Chance, instead of defending his former results, showed great resilience and changed his research to using phosphorus NMR,

Anyway, I had spent the weekend with friends in New Jersey and decided to drive back via Philadelphia to give the lecture. I started out early enough and consulted a map. I saw that there was a large road that ran almost parallel with the Philadelphia beltway rte I295 and since I thought I had enough time I decided to take this route into the city. I soon realized that this was a big mistake, since the road was not continuous and took me thru not only suburbs, but also thru the black ghetto area. At one point I got lost, and had to stop to ask the way. The black guys who directed me looked at me strangely, who was this crazy white ass with the strange accent who dared to trespass into their domain. Little did they realize that I had grown up in a worse slum than theirs.

I realized that this was taking a lot longer than I had expected and barely got to the University on time. I found a parking spot and raced into the building barely 5 min before the lecture was due to start. Then I put my slides in the tray just in time.

Early on in my career, like most people, I had an aversion to public speaking. This was especially difficult when you had only 10 or 15 min to tell a story and you had to measure every word. Later I developed a stratagem to ensure that I don’t arrive late for a lecture, out of 100 points, I give myself 50 for getting to the right place and another 25 for being there on time, then 15 are for having the slides ready in a carousel for showing, and the remaining 10 are for actually giving the lecture. This makes sure that I take getting there on time seriously and means that I don’t feel so much pressure for actually giving the lecture. On several occasions I was invited to give plenary lectures at meetings of the Am. Assoc. for Cancer Research, to halls of maybe a thousand people, and this strategy helped me considerably to overcome any jitters.

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### Akademgorodok

Knowledge about the antisense work started to spread and I was invited to speak at many conferences and give seminars in many universities.It was good to have one’s research recognized, and of course, I gave credit to my collaborators and my post-docs.

As antisense came to be known in the scientific community companies were established to exploit the potential. There were companies in Boston, New York, San Francisco, Toronto, and even in Paris. These companies involved the investment of millions of dollars in expensive research. I was invited to lecture and/or consult at some of these, and it certainly increased my income. However, I had to inform the NIH of all my earnings from lectures and it had to be done on my own time.

There were specific conferences organized on the subject. The first one was a small affair in Annapolis, Maryland. I organized the second one near NIH in June 1989, and it was a crowded and very exciting affair. Then there were follow-up meetings in Paris (very elegant), in Les Arcs in the French Alps (couldn’t learn to ski), in Colorado, and in other choice spots on the earth.

The one that most piqued my attention was the invitation I received to go to Akademgorodok, near Novosibirsk in Siberia, for a small conference on antisense. This was quite surprising since Akademgorodok or “science city” had been a closed area and this was apparently only the second conference that they were going to have open to visitors from outside the Soviet Union. Naturally, I applied as required thru the usual channels to go to this conference. Unfortunately, I was told that there were no funds available for this trip, and I did not have any funds of my own to pay for it.

I was very disappointed at this, since it would have been a great experience to visit the USSR during this early period of opening up of “perestroika” under Pres. Gorbachev in 1988. I mentioned this invitation to others in the lab, and then heard to my surprise that Sam Schwartz had also applied to attend this conference and had been given permission to go, which he proudly boasted to all within earshot. It was unheard of for an inexperienced post-doc to be chosen to go to a conference ahead of his supervisor who had been specifically invited.

So naturally I went and complained to Ace. But, he told me that the Institute was not paying for Sam, he was paying out of his own funds. I then told Ace about the money that Sam had shown me that he had received from a patient that I knew was bankrolling his trip. Ace was not shocked and appeared to know about it. I told him if Sam goes and I don’t, I will go to Brian Cranmer, the Head of the Institute, and tell him about this.

Ace said he would see what he could do. In the end, Sam was forced to return the money (I was told) and we were both given permission to go to the Russian meeting at NCI’s expense.

It was quite exciting to fly to Moscow, where we stayed in the drab guest house of the Academy of Sciences, and then fly on to Novosibirsk, a long and tedious flight over vast and undeveloped forests. The food on board was atrocious and the pilot must have been a fighter plane veteran. From Novosibirsk we were taken by coach a few hours ride along rutted roads to the science city, Akademgorodok.

This was a city in a forest of ash trees with large grand buildings of institutes of all kinds of sciences along wide boulevards and utilitarian housing blocks. We stayed in the only hotel in the city, which was quite basic.

The meeting that was held at the Institute of Physicochemical Biology was small and quite intimate and we knew most of the foreigners there, but few of the Russians. Our host, Yuri Osipov, who was working on antisense, proved to be charming and helpful, and at a party at his house, after drinking numerous toasts, he told us stories against the Soviet system that I never expected to hear inside the USSR. In fact, he was so negative that I considered the possibility that he was an *agent provocateur*.

He told us that his father had eaten too much one day and got a blockage of his intestine. Yuri had taken him to the local hospital and told the doctor on duty the problem. The doctor had indignantly replied, “we do the diagnosis here, not the patients,” and had thrown him out of the emergency room. When he came back the following morning he was told his father was dead! It appeared that nothing was done to remove the blockage and his father had died during the night. In a normal country there would have been a case of negligence, but not in the USSR.

It seemed that the head of the hospital was a friend of the wife of a high party official and so his position came from influence not from ability. Further, this Party official’s wife was a believer in the healing properties of the sun, so every day patients in this hospital were dragged out of bed to sit in the sunshine, even when it was freezing cold outside. There was nothing anyone could do about it.

One day we went to visit Novosibirsk. Since I had contacts with Jewish groups in the West who were working for the release of Soviet Jews, I had asked if there were any refuseniks there, people who had applied to leave but were refused, and lost their jobs and income. I was asked by my contacts to visit two people in Novosibirsk who were on their lists, whom no one had ever visited before. I decided to go on the day we had off from the conference, and Sam asked to join me.

We eventually found the small apartment of one of the people. He was very intense, for he had found religion, the Jewish religion I mean, and had been ostracized by all around him. He and his wife were waiting and praying for the time when they would be allowed to leave the Soviet Union for Israel. He had grown a long beard and it was surprising to find the picture of the Lubavich Rebbe on the wall in that god-forsaken place. He pressed me for money, and I gave him some, but Sam, of course, did not.

Later we found the apartment of the other person, but he was out and his wife was very cagey, she suspected a trick, when two foreigners came knocking on her door in remote Novosibirsk. So she wouldn’t let us in, but I wrote a note for her husband in English that she promised to give to him.

While we were making our way back to the train station, Sam had a terrible stomach-ache, and there was no toilet in sight. We walked around asking for one in bad Russian and people looked at us as if we were crazy. Finally, we spotted a building that turned out to be the local college, and we asked to enter. At first the guard at the gate would not let us in, but when we showed him our passports and Sam started to bellow in pain, he finally relented and so let us in. We found the toilets from the stench, they were open and filthy, and I stayed away from them, but Sam had no choice.

While he was busy there I wandered along the corridor and found a small group of students sitting on the floor in a tiny bare room, where they were talking, and smoking and one was playing a guitar. I was struck by how primitive and basic it all was, no lights, no paint on the concrete walls, no bookcases, no books, no desks, nothing. I tried to chat with them for a while until Sam returned from purgatory, cursing the dreadful state of the facilities.

I had brought a Groucho Marx false nose, glasses and moustache, with me that I wore to the social event at the Conference, and it was received with stony looks by the Soviets. I said it was my Karl Marx disguise, but they didn’t find it funny. Then I realized that they had no idea who Groucho Marx was, they had never heard of the Marx Brothers. What a bust!

At the conference I had noticed a particularly beautiful young woman, with a blond braid and blue eyes, who was one of the Russian students at the conference. She, like all of them, was eager to test her English on us and we were soon chatting away. She sat near us at the final conference dinner, where toasts were exchanged, and I had to give one. I learned later that Sam had offered her a position in his lab (that strictly speaking he did not have) in the States and that later she did in fact join him.

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### The Medicine Branch

Mort Feldman was the Head of the Medicine Branch, the largest Branch in the NCI. He was an internationally known expert in Breast Cancer and was highly respected and even feared because he had such a demanding personality. It was known to be inadvisable to get on his wrong side, but in my few interactions with him he had always been pleasant to me.

Apparently he was dissatisfied with the state of the NCI and its leadership, so after some internal dissension he decided to leave. It was front page news in *The Washington Post* when he left NCI and took 30 of his researchers with him to the Lombardi Cancer Center at Georgetown University Medical School, in nearby Georgetown in Washington DC. This was an unprecedented event.

This left the Medicine Branch without a Head, and so a nation-wide search was instituted to find his replacement. However, it proved very difficult because salaries in the federal government were a fraction, perhaps a third or less, of the salaries available in the private medical world. Further, this was a very responsible job with a huge load of work with perhaps 50 clinical fellows under him, as well as research responsibilities. Two candidates were found, but eventually their applications fell through.

As a result, they started looking within NCI for a replacement for Feldman, but no-one obvious presented was available. Eventually in desperation, as a fifth choice, they asked Ace Ericson if he would take the job. This was a big surprise, because Ace was not a practicing oncologist, but rather a pharmacologist, and it smacked of desperation, because anyone who knew Ace knew that he was ambitious but not very efficient.

I was friendly with Ace’s secretary, a nice old Jewish lady, named Gertrude, who was always nagging him to get to his meetings on time, and running after him to sign urgent letters. I spoke to her about his becoming the Head of the Medicine Branch and she said it would be a disaster.

One day when I was in the office, Ace came in and sat down and said he wanted to talk to me. He then embarked on a listing of all the advantages of his becoming the Head of the Medicine Branch, and then he asked me to tell him truthfully what I thought. I told him that I thought it would be a big mistake for him. I couldn’t say that he was barely managing to run the Pharmacology Branch and that was a lot smaller. Also, he had no experience organizing a clinical program with so many people. But, I intimated that it would be too much responsibility and take too much time for him.

Then he disclosed a bombshell, if he took the job he intended to combine the Medicine and the Pharmacology Branches. I thought this was a completely crazy idea, to combine two such distinct Departments, one research-oriented and the other clinical. Anyway, although I was negative about this, he didn’t seem to be interested in my opinion, it seemed that he had already made up his mind and was merely telling me in advance. I realized immediately that this could not bode well for the Pharmacology Branch and for my lab in particular.

When Ace took the job the Branch office now moved from the 6th floor to the 8th floor and we saw much less of him. But, sometimes I had to go up there, and one day I was present when a strange scene unfolded. A young woman, a Clinical Fellow, came into the office and asked to see Ace. The Secretary called him on the intercom and then told her he was unavailable. She became very agitated and insisted, and then went to his office door and pulled it open and started to have a loud argument with him. He came out into the main office and they went at it. She told him that he had no right to switch schedules and that she had to go to her brother’s wedding and he had changed her time slot without consulting her and she simply could not accept that. While they were thus going at it, he insisting that she had no choice, another Fellow came into the office and got involved in the argument and agreed that the organizing of the clinical schedule was arbitrary and insensitive. He said that he was also not consulted when changes were made in the schedule. The woman became very emotional and said “I’m going to my brother’s wedding and as far as I’m concerned you can fire me,” and she stormed out. This only took a few minutes, but I had never seen such a scene as that before at NIH.

I knew it was symptomatic of the lack of efficient organization that Ace was known for, especially as he now had two Departments under his direction. No wonder he wanted to integrate them. I heard thru the grapevine that Ace was hurting for senior positions in the Medicine Branch and I realized that by combining the two Branches he would be able to transfer my position into the Medicine Branch. I knew that my days were numbered, especially since my research did not also involve Ace.

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### Foxhall Road

Through the most salubrious part of the suburban area of Washington DC called Potomac, runs the narrow winding road called Foxhall Road. Along its length are the mansions of the very rich, those who live in a different realm than the rest of us. For example, one of the estates is owned by the Kreeger family and they have a private art gallery at 2401 Foxhall Road that is open to the public at certain times. It contains several impressionists and other valuable artworks.

One of the residents of Foxhall Road was a lady named Georgina Lavelle, a well-connected, wealthy, influential lady, who gave large donations to cancer research and bank-rolled the American Cancer Organization. It was said that a Director of NCI could not be selected without her agreement. She became interested in antisense and I was introduced to her by Brian Cranmer, the Director of the NCI. She exuded charm and affluence. When I met her in his offices she was wearing a grey suit with an over the shoulder jacket with a thin fur scarf attached, with a large shiny black handbag and a small black fitted hat. She was an older woman, but she was striking!

It was clear that everyone deferred to her, and she had a companion who was apparently her business manager or something like that. We sat down and then she asked me to explain antisense to her. I did my bit, and then she cross-questioned me. She was really sharp and knew her stuff. Her business partner also weighed in. I gave them the names of companies that were pursuing antisense and those that were being formed, and I told them about the people involved in these ventures, including my estimates of their capabilities and their potential. Of course, there were several approaches one could take, not only the *PS-oligos* that I had worked on. Other researchers were pursuing synthetic *ribo-oligos* and so-called *ribozymes* that were DNA oligomers that had been selected for catalytic activity against target mRNA, *and triplex formation*, the formation of triple helical segments of DNA that could reduce gene expression. There were also attempts to improve cellular uptake of oligos as well as making oligos with attached chemically active groups to “knock-out” the complementary mRNA. All this was fascinating and indicated a new field of drug development that was in ferment that was attracting millions of dollars of investment money. They seemed to be suitably impressed.

Although this meeting left me with a kind of high, I reflected that my expertise was being used for their personal gain, without me getting anything out of it. Also, it seemed inappropriate that this meeting should occur in a government office where private investment matters were obviously being considered. I decided to raise these considerations with Bernie Feldman, who had arranged this meeting.

The following week I received a call asking me to stop by at the home of Mrs. Lavelle on Foxhall Road. I arranged a convenient time when I was off work and went to her home. It was a huge mansion with its own driveway. A maid let me in and asked me to wait in the reception room. It contained a library and pile of handsome coffee table books. Next to them on the glass table was an open bible in a stand that I looked at and realized was an authentic ancient version.

The business manager came in and introduced himself again. He expressed his and Mrs. Lavelle’s thanks for my splendid interview with them the previous week. He then gave me an envelope that contained a check and asked me to sign a nondisclosure form that meant that our conversations would be privileged and they would like me to continue advising them in this difficult and technical area. For any further communications they would continue to express their gratitude accordingly. Of course, I was glad to accept.

When I had signed the form, he took it and left and then Mrs. Lavelle came in and the maid served tea and we had a nice chat about her books and her interests in supporting cancer research and her travels and so on. It was all very convivial, but I had a bad feeling at the back of my head. I realized that I was being used to help advise their investments in front line research in cancer, but on the other hand I was being paid for it and who could complain. She was certainly very pleasant and took the time to “get to know me.”

Sometime later I was invited to a dinner at her home. It was rumored that at these dinners she chose people who would later be promoted as leaders of the NCI and other cancer organizations. It was a very lavish affair, held in a large dining room with many servants, most of them black, done in the old-fashioned way. Wives were also invited, and we had a very nice time, chatting and drinking and eating to our heart’s content.

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### Antisense Therapeutics Inc.

I was expecting some follow-up to this meeting and indeed I was soon approached by a venture capital firm in New Jersey, who told me that they wanted to start a company focusing on antisense. I was invited to go up to New York and deliver a lecture at a private meeting in a hotel. I was well prepared, but I must say this was somewhat intimidating, different to any other lecture I had given. I was interrupted and questioned by a small audience of eminent experts in various fields related to cancer. One of them was a leading world-famous researcher from a New York institution, and others were well known to me.

After my presentation, the host, an imposing man named Wallace Levine who had been the director of research at one of the leading pharmaceutical companies, cross-examined me. He asked such questions as what would I do if such and such a thing happened? What is your plan B? Suppose the antisense approach doesn’t pan out, suppose it’s due to poor cellular uptake or an adverse human reaction, or …and so on. Of course, I had few answers to these conjectural questions. Nevertheless, at the end of the exhausting day, the committee voted to approve the formation of a company to carry out drug development studies in the antisense area.

The next step was to find someone who could be the CEO of the company, since I had no such experience I was not a candidate for this position, but I was asked to be Scientific Director. Since this would require me to leave NCI and become an actual company employee I turned it down, but instead I was asked to be the scientific advisor of the company, so that I could still remain at NCI, and I received a handsome financial agreement with the venture capital company. Of course, I knew that other such companies had been founded or were in the process of being formed. I discussed this with Wally, and he pointed out that there is a “window of opportunity” for such a venture. We were still in that window, but it would soon close, and then there would be a winnowing out process, whereby those companies that had pursued a dead end, or were not well run, or did not get further funding, would fail. We must make sure that didn’t happen to our company. It was named Antisense Therapeutics Inc. and was located in New Jersey.

According to the agreement I signed with them I had to help with writing the business plan for the company, help with recruiting suitable employees, outline the research plan and attend monthly meetings in New Jersey to monitor the progress of the research program. It was quite a challenging experience to do all this and continue my other research. I also had to request permission from NCI to carry out these activities and receive the consultation fees. This was granted under the new regulations that allowed researchers to help the formation of biotech start-up companies that were seen as the new way forward. In effect, the government funded research was seeding the development of a whole industry of new start-ups.

Wally called me and said he thought they had found a perfect candidate to be CEO of Antisense Therapeutics; Bradford Singer was the head of a department at one of the leading pharmaceutical companies located in NJ and he wanted to leave to start his own biotech company. I was asked to go up to NY to be present at his formal interview. He was great as far as I was concerned, well-informed, experienced and smooth. I voted yes and he was offered the job.

Over time I had a good relationship with Bradford, and the people who were recruited to run the oligo synthesis program at Antisense Therapeutics. We had many convivial dinners and many intense conversations and discussions. But, eventually I realized that Bradford had his own agenda. He was not only interested in antisense, he started another research program involving the work of a famous cancer expert he had met while at the pharmaceutical company. They had apparently turned down his proposed research program with them, and Bradford had now persuaded Wally and others that he should go ahead and do this too. As time went on he gradually phased down the antisense project in favor of his own preferred project.

I approached Wally and asked him what could be done, after all the business plan that we had written did not explicitly include this new project. But, he and others advised me that the business plan was only a rough guide and after some time could be neglected. Also, once Bradford was CEO he could basically do what he liked as long as the Board went along with it. So far he had persuaded them that his project had a greater chance of success than antisense. So I saw the company was being stolen away from under my nose. Even with legal advice it seemed there was nothing I could do about it. But, I had learned a hell of a lot about venture capital and starting a company and I had learned that most of those in the business played hard-ball.

### The falling out

For several months’ things seemed to be going well. I was busy conferring with the six post-docs and two technicians now working in my lab, and then going to NJ once a month. I took the train to Metro Center and a car met me there and then took me back later, and sometimes I flew to Newark and back. But, also I was busy writing up scientific papers for publication as well as reading the scientific literature in an effort to keep up with the fast-moving pace of research.

Every few days I met with each post-doc when he had some results to go over and we would discuss them and then agree on a plan for the next stage of the research. Also, we discussed any pertinent papers that had been published on the subject. Then monthly, we had a seminar meeting where each one in turn presented the results of their project. We also had a monthly Branch meeting where someone from the Branch would present his/her research.

Then one day my technician Paul Laguno asked to see me and unusually he closed the sliding door to my room. What could be so private that he needed to do this? What he told me was very disturbing,

“I didn’t know whether to tell you this or not, but Sam has not been doing his own work, he has been ordering Leila and Matsuo about and getting them to do his work. I told Leila to tell you, but she was scared to come to you because she didn’t want to get Sam in trouble, and she is scared of him. Also, you may have noticed that Matsuo is hardly ever around, he now works only a night when Sam is not around, so that he can work without his interference.”

“How long has this been going on?” I asked. “About 3 months,” he answered.

I was shocked and very upset. I had noticed that Sam was not often working in the lab, but he usually had some results to report, on oligos synthesized and experiments done. I had arranged collaborations with several other researchers, in NIH and outside, where we would supply the PS oligos to test their particular target gene. It was very important to carefully choose a specific cancer gene target to test the antisense oligo method against cancer, and we did this with a colleague in the NCI. We obtained positive results compared to PO oligo controls, and this had been Sam’s project. However, no one had complained to me about him and obviously he had been careful to cover this up.

I spoke to Leila and she reluctantly confirmed what Paul had told me. I also tried to speak to Matsuo the Japanese post-doc, but he remained typically abstruse. But, after speaking with him about the problem and getting nowhere I had a visit from Sam’s post-doc, Kaito, who approached me on behalf of Matsuo, so I supposed this was the way it was done, the more senior Japanese was his representative. He complained to me in no uncertain terms that Matsuo would not take orders from Sam, and I must do something about this. I assured him that I would.

Sam had taken to calling me at home in the evening around dinner time, to tell me the latest scuttlebutt in the lab. I supposed he thought I would be grateful to him, but I basically just listened. On several occasions I had been to the lab late in the evening to check on an experiment, and I had found Sam sitting in the secretary’s chair going through the flimsy copies of the letters that had been sent out that day that she kept in a ring file. At first this didn’t particularly alarm me, but later I realized that he was keeping tabs on everything that was going on in the lab.

When I heard about his exploiting the other members of the synthesis lab I decided belatedly to check up on his previous background at NCI. I spoke to a colleague who was another Section Head in the Pharmacology Branch, and he told me that Ace had first requested that he take Sam in, and he had refused because he knew of his reputation. I knew Sam had been in the Medicine Branch before, but then I learnt that he had also been in the Pediatric Oncology branch. The Head of that Brach was a particularly nice fellow who I had met several times, so I went to see him. What I heard from him was very worrying. It seems he had thrown Sam out of his Branch for being lazy and obstreperous.

Then I went to see Mort Feldman Head of the Medicine Branch and he told me a similar story, that he had allowed Sam into his Branch on a temporary basis and after a few days had asked him to leave. It turned out that I was Sam’s last chance at NIH, and Ace had sicked him on me without reporting this background, I had been the patsy, and it was mainly because I was not in the clinical service and I was not privy to all this background.

I decided to confront Sam about this whole situation. I chose a time when no-one else was around before leaving work. I stayed on a bit later on a day when he was still there. I called him into my little office and said, “I have discovered that you have been ordering Leila and Matsuo around, but they resent this, and it has to stop! I gave you a memo when you started here describing the work you have to do, and you are not doing it.” I was not prepared for his reaction, he became very angry and red-faced and he came right up to me as if restraining himself with his arms held back and he threatened me. He said, “you can’t talk to me like that, I’m an oncologist here and what are you, and if I say so Ace is going to give me your lab and get rid of you, you’re nothing.”

I was completely taken aback by this aggressive behavior, nothing like this had ever happened to me before. Nevertheless, I held my cool and I said to him, ”back off, who do you think you are, you don’t have tenure here and this is my lab, I want to you out of my lab, as soon as possible. I am giving you a month’s notice, or whatever the minimum is. I know I was your last chance to make good here at NCI and you screwed up again, so now you’re finished, get out.” And we stood there glaring at each other. Then he said, “You’ll hear more about this, I’m going to Ace to complain that you are incompetent and preventing me from doing my work and I’m going to see my lawyer and I’m going to sue your ass, you scumbag!” And with that he turned and marched out of the room.

I sat down and immediately wrote a memo to Ace telling him about the problems with Sam, his exploitation of the others in the lab, his tendency to exaggerate his contributions (that I documented) and his abrasiveness, and I wanted him out of my lab at the earliest possible time. I left this on Ace’s desk the next morning and when he had read it he called me in. He tried to be diplomatic, but I would not accept it, reminding him of Sam’s background that he had not told me about. So he reluctantly agreed to remove Sam from my lab and set him up in another lab. But, what I realized was that Ace was more or less siding with Sam. If he was going to set him up in another lab, what work would he be doing, if not the same work he had been doing in my lab, but now with Ace himself.

The following days were difficult with Sam moving his stuff out of my lab, and I realized that I had to make sure he did not take anything that belonged to me. But, this was touchy because he could appeal over my head to Ace and after all most of it didn’t belong to me personally but rather to the Branch and the Institute. However, on one subject I was adamant. Sam could not take any of the oligos that Leila had synthesized, since he had not done any of the syntheses himself. He also had no access to the DNA synthesizer, so if he wanted to duplicate our work he would have to find another synthesizer, because I would not let him have access to mine. And Ace had no control over it, because it had been bought with AIDS money, not Branch money.

I gave orders to everyone in the lab, and particularly Leila, that Sam was not allowed to take anything else out of the lab, specifically not oligos from the freezer.

It was at this point that Walter Hazen, my pediatrician post-doc, who was preparing to leave the lab to take a position in Philadelphia told me something unsettling. He said that Sam had sworn him to secrecy some three months before and told him that Ace was preparing to get rid of me and promote him in my place. I asked him why he had not warned me of this conversation before, and he simply shrugged and decent fellow that he was said,” but, I agreed to keep it secret.” Maybe that was also a warning to him and that was why he was leaving.

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### Leila Subramanian

The phone rang exactly at dinner time about 6 pm, just as I was sitting down to eat. As I picked up the phone, I thought to myself "Oh, not again." but this time the voice on the other end was female, it was Leila Subramanian, my technician. She said, "I hope it's all right to call you now," and I detected a note of panic in her voice. "What's wrong?" I asked. I could tell from the tone of her voice that she had been crying.

"It's just that I'm afraid," she said. "Why?" I asked. "Well, it's just that Sam has been in the lab and tried to take stuff from the fridge and I told him he couldn’t, and then he threatened me, but I told him to leave and then I locked the lab door, and I'm frightened because he's outside waiting, and he is angry, and I'm afraid to leave."

"Don't worry, you did the right thing calling me, what did he say to you?"

"He said, you're a 40-pound girl and I'm a 140-pound guy, and if you don't let me take what I want you will regret it!" Her voice sounded teary, and I could tell that she was afraid.

I asked, "is he still there?" "Yes," she replied. "Well, this is what you should do, hang up and call the NIH police, there's always someone on duty at the entrance, call them, the number is in the telephone directory or it may be directly on the phone you are using, and tell them that a man is threatening you and ask them to come to escort you from the building. Meanwhile I'm coming right over, I'll be there in about 10 minutes, I'll meet you at the entrance." “OK,” she replied, and we hung up.

I immediately put my coat on and ran to my car and raced over to NIH. I screeched to a halt outside the entrance and Leila was there with a policeman. She was a diminutive figure beside him. Her eyes were red from crying and she was obviously upset. I asked her what had happened after we hung up, and she said that Sam had left as soon as she called the police, he could hear her through the door, and when the policeman came he was nowhere to be seen. The policeman asked me what he should do, and I told him that for now all was OK, but I asked him to make sure that he wrote a report of what had happened and he assured me he would. So, Leila went with him into their little office by the entrance and gave him a statement. I also told him what she had told me while we were on the phone. This time it seemed that Sam had gone too far!

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### The Grievance Hearing

Although Sam Schwartz had been the aggressor, he had neatly turned the tables on me by accusing me in writing of trying to destroy his career and by bringing Ace Ericson in on his side. A formal grievance hearing was called by Arthur Grosz, who was the head of Radiation Oncology and was the acting head of the Division at that time. I looked forward to this meeting with dread. I knew Arthur through my other work with MRI and I had always found him a decent fellow to get along with. I hoped he too harbored no ill will towards me.

I entered the Director’s conference room at the appointed time and found the others already there. Arthur sat at the head of the table, Sam and Ace sat on one side and I sat opposite them. Arthur opened the meeting with a formal statement that this was a grievance action being brought against me by my former student Sam Schwartz. He asked Schwartz to enumerate the particulars.

Schwartz then went into a diatribe against me, how I had mistreated him, how I had thrown him out of my lab, how I had refused to give him access to my lab when he had valuable products that he had made and stored in my refrigerator. Finally, he accused me of trying to destroy his career. He said that I had written defamatory letters about him to our collaborators, and he happened to have an example of such a letter that had been given to him by one of them. Whereupon he produced a piece of paper and flung it unceremoniously across the table at Arthur Grosz.

As Arthur picked up this letter, he asked me if I had anything to say in my defense. I replied that I had never tried to ruin his career, that the letter was basically innocuous, telling people that he was no longer in my lab, and that he had behaved so badly that I had no alternative except to ask him to leave my lab. At this point Arthur scanned the letter, then read it aloud. It was short and to the point, it merely said that Sam Schwartz was leaving my lab and in future the recipient should make contact directly with me. Arthur said, "there's nothing defamatory in this letter, I don't know what you're making such a fuss about," and he threw the letter back to Sam in a dismissive manner.

Whereupon, seeing that Arthur Grosz was not so sympathetic to their cause, Ace stepped in. He declared in no uncertain terms that I had mistreated Sam Schwartz, that as far as he was concerned, I was the miscreant, and he certainly felt that I was trying to harm Sam's career. Then Arthur turned to me to give me a chance to respond to these accusations.

I pointed out that I had taken Sam into my lab at Ace’s request as every other post-doc. I had given him a project to carry out and I had documentation to prove it. But, from the beginning Schwartz had been lazy and manipulative. He did not do the work he was assigned, but spent his time ordering others to do it for him, specifically my technician Leila, and he had conspired with Ace Ericson to take over my antisense project. I did not know if it was because Ace wanted my position or because he was jealous of the success of this project, but there was no doubt, as shown by their performance today, that they were in this together to get me.

Furthermore, I added that in fact this should be a meeting to discuss the disgusting behavior of Sam Schwartz towards Leila Subramanian. I recounted that occurrence, and said that Leila should have been here to confront Sam, but she had taken a few days off and was afraid to be near him. However, she had issued a grievance against Sam that preceded his against me, and his action was evidently intended to subvert that.

After listening to all of us, Arthur said in summary, that he saw no evidence that I was trying to destroy Schwartz's career, but on the contrary it was clear that Schwartz and Ace were ganging up on me, although he wasn't sure why. He ordered us to stay apart and to stop this bickering, and he said he would interview Leila to see what her description of her experience was. Then he would make a final written determination.

So although it was a terrible experience to go through, and none of my previous 30 or so post-docs had ever treated me in such a way, at least so far I had come out unscathed and Arthur Grosz seemed fair and if anything leaning in my direction.

A few days later Leila came in and met with Arthur Grosz. The outcome was that Arthur summoned Sam Schwartz to a meeting in Ericson’s office and after asking each of them several questions he decided that Sam had behaved badly, had inappropriately threatened Leila and consequently he had to apologize to her in front of himself and Ericson. Obviously, Sam was very chagrined at having to apologize to Leila in this way. He had gambled and lost.

Several people, including myself, were standing outside the office waiting to hear the verdict. Sam came out first and without saying anything, his face bright red, and seeing the waste-basket before him, kicked it with strength. Its contents flew out all over the floor, but he stepped over the mess and disappeared down the corridor. We laughed at his predicament.

After speaking to Leila and reviewing her grievance against Schwartz, Arthur Grosz wrote us a letter detailing his decision. He concluded that there was no case to make regarding any attempt on my part to ruin Schwartz’s career, but on the contrary, for reasons not fully clear, Ericson and Schwartz had connived together against me, and probably with the intention of forcing me to leave. He said this behavior was unacceptable and must stop immediately, otherwise he would be forced to take more punitive action. I was vindicated, but the atmosphere was such that I had no alternative but to look for a position elsewhere. I could not continue working under someone who was clearly using any tactics to get rid of me.

Later I heard that Sam was threatening to sue me and someone else in civil court, so I approached the Legal Advisor at NIH and asked for his advice and he told me that an NIH employee could not sue another employee for anything said or done in pursuance (that was how he spoke) of his government work. Since I was required to ensure a smoothly operating laboratory and since I had been required to give my opinion about Sam, then there was no case. In addition, since Sam was a post-doc and not a permanent employee like me, he had no status to sue. Well, that was a relief to me.

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### Sabotage

One way in which Ace’s hostility towards me was manifest was that he ordered me not to use any of his labs for my work, and this included the use of equipment in them.

Leila was doing a project for me to test the amount of terminal hydroxyl group on the end of the oligos. In order to do this one treated the synthetic oligo with radioactive 32P-phosphate using a specific enzyme that added the phosphate group to the free hydroxyl end. By knowing how much oligo was used and how much radiation became tagged to it, one could work out how good the synthesis was. Leila had already started this experiment. In order to determine the amount of radioactive material that was tagged one used a piece of equipment that was on another floor that was used by many different groups in the lab. Leila came to me and asked if it was OK for her to use this particular piece of equipment and I said we had no choice, it’s the only one that can measure the amount of radioactivity coming off the column in the position of the tagged oligo.

So she set up the column on the apparatus with the radioactivity counter. Later she told me that while she was doing this she noted that Sam was prowling around and walked by the room several times. But, she ignored him and continued with the experiment. Then she had to leave the column to run for some time and she left it alone.

When she came back several hours later she found that someone had changed the settings on the apparatus, so that the experiment had run through much too quickly and the result could not be determined. What was most worrisome and dangerous was that the 32P labeled material had been allowed to drip onto the apparatus itself and had contaminated it. It was clear that this was a case of deliberate sabotage.

I went to see Ace and told him what had happened. He told me that Sam had complained to him that we were using Branch lab equipment against his order (it was not actually his equipment) and he, Ace, had told him to warn us. Apparently, instead Sam had taken matters into his own hands.

I decided this was too much, so I made an appointment with Brian Cranmer, the Chief of the NCI and when I got to see him, I told him what had happened. Not only was it completely unacceptable to sabotage someone else’s scientific experiment, but in this case also there was radioactivity involved and the outcome could be very dangerous. Now there would have to be a test of the radioactivity spill and a clean-up. Not only that, the experiment was ruined and would have to be repeated.

Sam was called in by Cranmer and was given a final ultimatum. He was told that he would have to leave NCI at the end of his current annual fellowship. He had several months to find another suitable job.

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### The CIA

One morning soon after I arrived at the lab, I received a call from a woman who asked if she could visit me to discuss antisense. I asked her who she represented, and she said she would explain when she saw me. After I said Ok, she asked if she could come then and she said she was in the building and could come right up. So I agreed.

When she came in, I was surprised to see that she was Asian. She introduced herself and gave me her card. She was well-dressed, smart and I guessed around 40 years of age. She had an American accent without a trace of foreign accent. She said that she had seen some of my publications on antisense and she told me that she wished to speak to me confidentially. I asked her why and she replied that she worked for the CIA!

They were trying to assess the potential of antisense, and she asked me to swear secrecy. I agreed, but asked her why the CIA would be interested in antisense. She said she had heard of some work on antisense related to behavioral effects. I told her that I knew about some work on mouse mutants whose behavior (chasing their tail) had been altered by an antisense oligo, but it was published in the open scientific literature. She said she knew about my recent visit to the Soviet Union for a conference on antisense and she wondered if I had heard of any Soviet work on this topic. I told her that I was a loyal American and that I would give her any such information if I had seen any, but I would not spy on my scientific colleagues. She seemed satisfied by that and asked me to call her if anything new came up.

A few days later I received a call from a man who mentioned this meeting and who asked me to meet him at a mutually agreeable time at a particular restaurant-bar called “1789,” that is in Georgetown near the Georgetown University campus. It is always full of students and always crowded, so a great place to meet.

When I got there, I was met at the entrance by this man, who was not remarkable in any way. He did wear a large beige raincoat that might have been a “trench-coat” but I wasn’t sure. He was very friendly and chatty and then started asking me questions about the trip to the USSR. We ordered beers and then he zipped open a small leather case with a thick notebook inside and began to write notes. He became more and more detailed in his questions, asking me about the people we met in the Soviet Union, their demeanor, their conversations, their interests. But, it became too noisy to really hear well, with all the jocks in football jerseys, so we decided to leave. We walked over to the Georgetown University gym and past there to the steep stairs that led down towards the bridge across the Potomac River (the same stairs featured in the movie “The Exorcist”). He wanted to descend, but I said that I had had enough, and I wanted to leave. We shook hands and I agreed to meet him again.

In a way I was disappointed, this was nothing like what I had expected, there was no scientific content in this interrogation. He wanted to know about the people, the Russians and visitors and their interactions. In other words, it was spying on them, precisely what I had said I didn’t want to do. When he called me a few days later, I told him about my reluctance, I said that I did not want to tell him about the people involved. He said OK, if I wanted to talk about the science, that was OK by him, and he asked me to meet him where we had separated last time, at the top of those stairs.

When I met him it was a cold day, and the wind was particularly strong at the top of the stairs. In a flash I imagined he wanted to push me down the stairs (as in the movie) but I resisted the fear. As it turned out we went to have lunch at the Indian restaurant a few blocks away on the main M Street. Over japatis and ghosht he asked me what I thought was the Soviet interest in antisense and whether or not there was any evidence of their work on behavioral experiments. I told him that their interest seemed to be purely scientific, in other words here was a new area of science, with great potential applications in medicine, and they were interested in learning as much as they could from us. I saw or heard no evidence of behavioral work, but that could have been deliberate on their part. I also told him that I could quite easily pick out the KGB or Soviet minders, who were there to watch and check on what was said, since they had no scientific credentials and I gave him the names that they went under and their descriptions (I even had some photos). But then I told him that that was all I had to tell him, and I didn’t want to meet him any more to continue this exchange. We discussed my reasons for a while, but at the end of the meal I said goodbye and left. So ended my brief flirtation with the CIA.

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### Leaving NCI

I had also decided that I had to leave Ace’s lab and my first recourse was to look elsewhere in NCI. I had several meetings with the Head of the Institute, Brian Cranmer, in his plush office on the top floor of the administration building. But this failed to produce any result. As a member of his staff told me confidentially, his management style was to allow matters to fester until a solution arose naturally. He was not going to help me.

The previous Institute Head, Vance La Lotta, was now at Sloan-Kettering in NY and I went up there and had an excellent interview with him in his even plushier office. He offered me a great set-up with a whole new large lab of my own. But then it transpired that the lab was still being built, and that Vance had political problems of his own. It seemed that people there were conspiring against him and I was viewed as one of his plants. The Head of Pharmacology there basically opposed my appointment, while pretending to support it, and the whole thing was a political nightmare.

I called Mort Feldman who had been the Head of the Medicine Branch in NCI before he left a few months previously to head up the Lombardi Cancer Center in Georgetown University Medical School. Mort knew all about Sam Schwartz, because he had thrown him out of his lab before I foolishly took him into mine at Ace’s urging. When I told him what had happened to me, he was very sympathetic and asked me to go over there for an interview. I met with him and the Head of Pharmacology, Ronald Wharton, and they both said they were enthusiastic to have me.

Wharton was quite new to the job and had received funds to establish a Cancer Pharmacology group (he was in cardiology himself), and I fitted right into that. So it was agreed that I would move there with funds from the company Antisense Therapeutics that I had helped found and had an agreement with. It seemed that nothing was available unless you were bringing money in.

Someone told me that a Medical School is like a whore house, they rent you a room and you have to supply them with funds, and they don’t particularly care how you get them. So I made a deal to leave NCI and go to Georgetown Medical School, located in the salubrious district of Georgetown not far away in Washington DC. I would be better off both in terms of income and research funds than I was in the government lab, but on the other hand there was no employment guarantee as there was in the government. To get tenure would take several years and I could be out on my ear if I failed to keep the funds rolling in. Nevertheless, it was a good prospect and so I left the security of the NIH where I had worked for 22 years and moved to Georgetown Medical School, where I became a Full Professor.

I left NCI in **1990** with regret, but maybe I should have stayed and toughed it out. Because within a year they managed to find a really good Head of the Medicine Branch and Ace was asked to leave. He simply was not up to the job. Then again, things change and it’s best to go with the flow. At Georgetown I was in for another of life's unpredictable adventures.

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### Georgetown University, 1990

Things worked out very well at Georgetown Medical School, I was busy continuing my antisense research. I had managed to take a few of the post-docs with me, based on their current status, since it was considered inappropriate to cut them off in the middle of their projects. I had funds from two sources, from an agreement with the antisense company Antisense Therapeutics to support my research (it seemed that Bradford Singer was prepared to be generous as long as I left him alone) and from the money that had been donated to Georgetown for the formation of a Cancer Pharmacology group, of which I was to receive $350,000. I was advised by Wharton to use the Antisense Therapeutics money first and leave the other in the account at Georgetown as a back-up for when I needed it.

While I was at Georgetown a big scandal occurred that was reported on the front page of the Washington Post. The Cancer Center in Georgetown Medical School was named after Vince Lombardi, the former great football coach, “the winningest coach in history” as he was known. He had died of cancer in Georgetown Medical School when he was the coach of the Washington Redskins. As a result the Cancer Center was not only named after him, but the NFL provided funds to support the Center’s research programs thru large donations, partly from a dinner held every year in Washington which most of the NFL players attended.

Mort Feldman was a very aggressive researcher and well-known expert in breast cancer and set about reinstating the high level of prestige of that Center. In order to do this, he decided that Georgetown needed a new research building to house the new Cancer Center. The Dean of the Medical School agreed and arranged for a well-known Italian Pharmaceutical company to provide funds to cover the largest part of the cost of this building, amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars. Georgetown had a close relationship with this company because it was of course a Catholic University and had many dealings with the Church and State in Italy.

However, during the building of this research center, the Italian pharmaceutical company went broke, and overnight the construction stopped. Then there were discussions held within the administration of the medical school whether or not to continue with the building without a replacement sponsor. The Dean and Mort, the Head of the Cancer Center, decided to go ahead, with the total cost being supported by the Medical School alone.

The building when it was finally finished was opened with a grand ceremony and great fanfare and was a wonderful addition to the research facilities at Georgetown. But, because of the extra costs, all the Medical School budgets understandably had to be slashed and all the Departments had their budgets cut by ca. 30%. It also led to the firing of the Dean of the Medical School.

One day when I decided to use some of the money in my account at Georgetown, I was told by Wharton’s administrator that there was no money left in the account. When I questioned this, she advised me not to raise the matter with Wharton. I went to the Dean of research at Georgetown Med to get his advice and he told me “you can’t simply let Wharton steal money that has been allocated to you as part of your agreement to come here.”

I made an appointment to see Wharton and confronted him with the loss of my funds. He admitted that he had used them to cover the deficit of the Department, and that he would make good on them, but not right away, within the next few years. I accepted this, I had no other choice, and I must admit that he made good on his promise. But he was never friendly towards me after that, and I realized that I had to give up any hope of getting his support to apply for tenure.

Overall, I can say that antisense was good to me. I still have not given up my hope that indeed genetic drugs will one day replace the harsh toxic agents used for cancer chemotherapy. Some 22 antisense drugs have been developed and six antisense oligos have indeed been approved by the FDA, one for use in a topical (local) anti-cancer application. I hope another generation of researchers will look again at the potential of PS-oligos as drugs against genetically based diseases. If so, I will be glad to have played a small role in the development of this concept. It was not always easy, but it was quite an adventure. I console myself with the belief that it is only capable and successful people who instill in others the need to subvert and supplant.

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**Glossary of scientific terms**

**Antisense**: The sequence of bases in the complementary strand of DNA that do not code for a protein product (see sense).

**Atom**: The smallest unit of chemical matter, a unit of an element.

**ATP**: Adenosine triphosphate, the energy-containingsubstance in the cell and body.

**Base pairing**: The combination of two bases into specific pairs, A with T and G with C. This was discovered by Erwin Chargaff in the 1950’s and was used by Watson and Crick to help determine the *double* helical structure of DNA.

**Base**: a nitrogenous substance, four of which are commonly found in DNA, adenine (A), thymine (T), guanine (G) and cytidine (C).

**Deoxyribose**: The sugar (carbohydrate) component of DNA.

**DNA**: Abbreviation for deoxyribonucleic acid, a substance found in the nucleus of the cell that is the genetic substance.

**DNA Synthesizer**: A machine in which individual nucleotides are added one at a time automatically to a chain to form an oligonucleotide.

**Drug**: A substance that when taken into the body causes a specific physiological effect.

**Messenger RNA**: Written as mRNA, the nucleic acid that takes the genetic information from the DNA in the nucleus into the cell to be expressed into protein.

**Molecule**: A group of atoms bonded together in a specific way

**Nucleotide**: The chemical unit of DNA consisting of a base, a sugar (deoxyribose) and a phosphate group.

**Oligo**: shortened form of oligonucleotide, a small piece of synthetic DNA with a specific sequence of bases used as a drug to down-regulate the expression of a selected gene

**Phosphate**: A chemical group containing a phosphorus atom bound to four oxygen atoms (abbrev. to PO).

**Phosphonate**: A chemically modified phosphate group with a carbon atom in place of one of the oxygen atoms (abbrev. to PM).

**Phosphorothioate**: A chemically modified phosphate group with a sulfur atom in place of one of the oxygen atoms (abbrev. to PS)

**Post-doc**: A post-doctoral fellow, who already has a PhD degree and is learning how to do research supported by a fellowship.

**RNA**: ribonucleic acid, a nucleic acid that contains the sugar component ribose.

**Sense**: The sequence of bases in DNA and its messenger RNA that code for a protein product.

**Sugar**: a substance, also named a carbohydrate, with atoms of carbon, oxygen and hydrogen.

Postscript: In writing this account of an actual research project and the human interactions involved, I have been forced to leave out many complications that arose during the process. Notably, the interactions with many other colleagues, both cooperative and hostile and I have had to simplify certain events. However, in doing so, I have endeavored to retain the essence of any event that I personally experienced. Names have been changed to protect the innocent. Only by trying to write these events down is one forced to confront the complexity of human behavior.

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# **Moving to Israel**

### Meningioma

I was talking to Andy at the reception after my inaugural lecture on antisense to the Pharmacology Department at Georgetown that I had recently joined. Towards the end of the lecture I had the recurrence of a terrible stabbing headache in the left frontal region of my brain. I was still quite excited, I felt I had given a good lecture and Andy was congratulating me, when he suddenly disappeared!

I continued to talk to him, but I was really shocked, I shook my head. Suddenly he reappeared. What was happening? I was not sure, was it real? Then momentarily it happened again. I said to him “you just disappeared as I was speaking to you and you just came back.” Since he knew me and he was a physician he reacted in a sober way, he asked me “where exactly did I disappear?”

“From the left-hand side of my vision, it was as if there was a strip that I could not see.”

“I think you should go and see a doctor as soon as possible. There could be several causes for something like that. I think it may be because you are excited by the lecture, that may have triggered it.”

The next day I went to see my GP, an older man who I greatly respected. He tested my eyes and said he could find nothing wrong and then said that I should go to see a brain surgeon! I was shocked. He said that such incidents were often an indication of something wrong in the optic nerve or the brain. He looked in his reference book and found a specialist locally who had a great deal of experience in this area.

The following week I went to see the specialist at the George Washington Hospital Center. He was the Head of the Department of Neurosurgery and he was highly recommended. He had practiced previously at the Mayo Clinic, so he must be good. After hearing my story and examining me, I said to him that I could not understand why I was seeing a brain surgeon after one such incident. He said I was lucky, usually these incidents are warnings of something amiss, and I should heed the warning and take his advice. He sent me to have an MRI the following day.

My wife accompanied me in the middle of the night, because it was cheaper then. We went down in the elevator underground to where the MRI machine was located. Since I had some expertise in the MRI area I knew about the machine and its technology, although I suppose for someone not knowledgeable it might have been a rather frightening experience to be slid into the middle of the huge metal cylinder and then when the machine was working it sounded like a machine gun going off in your head. But, I knew that was the sound of the switching of the pulsed magnetic field gradients.

Three days later I went to see the surgeon with the results. He informed me that from the analysis of the radiologist and from his own experience it was clear that I had a small growth on my optic nerve between the optic chiasma, where the two optic nerves crossed, and the brain. He showed it to me, a faint areola glowing in the dark recesses of my head that normally should not be there. It was highly likely, about 90%, he said that the growth was benign, and it was very likely that it was a meningioma. The meninges, he went on to explain, is the envelope that encloses the brain, and it is quite common for small benign growths to develop on it. These usually grow very slowly and give no symptoms and are often found only after death. But, rarely, they grow in places where they cause problems, such as on the optic nerve. He had operated on about 40 such cases. Before he made a definitive decision, he wanted me to have another MRI with contrast agent.

The contrast agent, as in X-rays, highlights certain regions and provides a more definitive picture. I was injected with the agent prior to having another MRI series. In my case it worked brilliantly, the slight glow lighted up like a bright star. Later the surgeon explained that it was because the growth had its own blood vessels and the contrast agent goes through them and lights it up, whereas the rest of the surrounding space in the inferior fossa shows no increased intensity. He explained that this result was highly diagnostic of a meningioma since it usually had a good blood supply compared to most other possible growths (I felt on several occasions that he was on the point of calling it a tumor, but he avoided that). He advised me that I should have it removed surgically. This was elective surgery in that it was not imminently dangerous. But if not removed it could permanently damage my sight.

I asked if he minded if I got a second opinion and he said of course not, I should get one, since it was major surgery and I should be certain before I made a decision. So I went to another brain surgeon (probably a friend of his). But the story was the same. He told me of the case of a young woman some 10 years before who had exactly the same symptoms as me, but then they did not have MRI to definitively show the presence of the growth, and she did not have surgery. After about two years she began to go blind and there was nothing they could do about it. So I was “lucky” that it had been caught early in my case and they knew exactly where it was.

He explained that because the growth was on the right optic nerve before the chiasma that the symptoms would be felt on the left side. He told me that the growth of the meningioma would cause it to press on the optic nerve causing blindness. Also, during periods of high blood pressure (such as giving a lecture!) it would swell, hence producing the symptoms I had experienced. If it should burst then it would irretrievably damage the optic nerve and I would become blind, hence he recommended that I should have it removed as soon as possible.

On a model of the cranium he showed me how they would have to enter the skull by removing a small piece (that they would put back afterwards). I remember distinctly that he said the brain would then “flop to one side” and then they would be able to get underneath it to remove the growth on the optic nerve. I sat there in what seemed a normal world contemplating having my skull opened up and having what amounted to “brain surgery.” He emphasized that it was not brain surgery, they would not touch my brain, but that it would have to be done intra-cranially. However, he stated that such operations, although major surgery, were essentially routine, and my surgeon was one of the best in the world for that particular operation.

So it was that barely three weeks after suffering a single incident of partial blindness I found myself entering the Hospital to have intra-cranial surgery on a meningioma on my right optic nerve. I knew that I had to do this, but I was scared.

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I remember nothing about the operation itself. From the time I was given the first injection to the time a few days later that I became fully conscious no memory remains. Apparently, the operation took 4 hours and went very well. The removal of the meningioma was done by micro-surgery. I was told a few days later that during the process it was found that the growth had extended to the base of the pituitary gland and that in removing it the tiny stalk of the gland had been damaged. This had been mentioned previously as a possible side effect of the surgery since the pituitary was very close and the stalk very fine. Apart from this the operation had been fully successful. But it would mean that I would have to take some steroid hormones for the rest of my life.

Naomi was wonderful. She sat and held my hand and showed her evident relief that I was alive and vital after the traumatic experience. There was a wonderful black assistant doctor who helped me a lot, and altogether it looked as if I would recover completely. One day my daughter was visiting me and we decided to call my wife, as I was on the phone, and once again I have no recollection of this at all, I suddenly stopped talking and dropped the phone. My daughter immediately called the nurse who called the doctor, and she also spoke to my wife and told her to come immediately.

I don’t know what they did, but I came around and within a short while I was back to normal. Apparently, these seizures are quite common after cranial surgery. But it was a shocking experience for us. Luckily, I had an endocrinologist who came to see me, he looked at what they were giving me in the constant drip and realized that it was deficient in potassium. The nerve system requires potassium and somehow after such an operation it requires more than usual. So, he told them, and after they upped the potassium, I never had a recurrence. I also started eating bananas that are rich in potassium.

Once I was able to get up, I went to look at myself in the bathroom mirror. Of course, it was difficult to see anything because of the copious bandages. I looked like a mummy. But, when they took the bandages off I saw that I had a vicious red scar from the hair line above my right eye to above the ear. Of course, this would have been covered by hair if I had any. My hair been completely shaved off. My right face was all bruised and my right eye was bloodshot. I looked hideous, I hardly recognized myself. Perhaps I was someone else, a discontinuity, or like one of those movies where the villain has plastic surgery and changes his identity.

In a few days I was home, gradually shuffling around relearning how to do simple things. Since I found it tiresome to speak, I took to pointing and grunting. I usually got what I wanted. Gradually I recovered and in two weeks I was almost back to normal. My job was safe, and they were incredibly helpful, especially given that I was new there. They said take a vacation, and since there was a meeting in Florida only two weeks later that I had previously signed up for, I decided to go. So, four weeks after the operation, with my face returning to normal and my hair growing, I was in Clearwater and gave my lecture. It was a short one and I was quite careful, sitting on the beach, walking around, nothing too strenuous. My colleagues were generally very nice about it, and I joked around with them about the surgeon having found no brain, etc. But I discovered later that this was a mistake, because everyone thought that I had had brain surgery, and the word got around, spread by certain malicious rivals, that indeed my mental processes had been impaired, whereas actually my brain had not been touched and I was quite normal in that respect.

However, I was taking many pills, including high levels of steroid. This was gradually reduced, but I was told that given the damage to my pituitary gland, I would have to take a low maintenance level every day for the rest of my life. Not a bad outcome. Also, since all my hormonal system was affected, as the pituitary is a master gland that stimulates many others, I would have to take a thyroid replacement, and I would have to have shots (later gel) of testosterone. Suddenly it hit me I would be functionally impotent unless I kept taking the male hormone. I had never envisaged this as an outcome of the surgery. Still, it was a lot better than becoming blind.

The surgery had a more profound effect on my personality than we had expected. I became less aggressive, more laid-back. I felt that I had a new lease on life. I enjoyed the sunsets and the simple things, eating an ice cream, lying in bed with my wife and seeing if I could perform. It was like being re-born.

I began questioning my whole life. What was I doing, why was I there? This was an inconvenient time to do that since I had just started a new job as a full Professor, but I was distracted by things that previously I would have glossed over or not even noticed. In re-thinking my life I came to two conclusions, the first and obvious one was never to take things for granted, and the second was that although I was very lucky I was not in the ideal place for me.

I had always harbored an idea of moving to Israel. I had always been a Zionist in principle but had never managed to get around to it in practice. Now with no kids at home I began to consider this possibility.

I had lived in Israel before. When I had been a student studying biochemistry in London, I had applied for a NATO post-doctoral Fellowship to go abroad. On impulse where it asked for the country you wished to study in, I had written “Israel.” Later when I went for an interview, one of the Professors had asked me why I had selected Israel, and I said that as a Jew I wanted an opportunity to visit and work there, and also I had found a lab in the Weizmann Institute in Rehovot that did high level work in exactly the area I was interested in. Furthermore, I had written to the head of the lab and had received a positive reply from him. The interviewer pointed out that Israel is not a NATO country, and no-one had previously gone to work there on a NATO Fellowship. But nevertheless, they seemed to be impressed by my forthright reply.

I was ecstatic when I received the Fellowship, I ran around the room kissing the letter. This was the first big adventure of my life. I found myself remembering it with happiness when lying in bed recovering from my operation. What did it represent? There I am sitting in the passenger seat of the minibus with the sun dappling through the trees, and a sense of infinite possibilities, of release, of freedom.

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### The National Science Foundation

In the last few years at Georgetown, as I was beginning to close things down in order to move to Israel, I had the opportunity to work for two years at the National Science Foundation (NSF) , that is located just over the river in Virginia. The NSF gives grants to basic research (not directly health related, NIH does that). They take scientists from around the country for 1-3 years and pay their normal salary through the university. I became a co-director of the Molecular Biochemistry Program, with a lovely lady who was a permanent employee who helped me enormously.

My colleagues there included an Indian man and a Palestinian woman. We all got along very well, and I suppose we deliberately avoided politics. I had the unusual opportunity of working part-time, 4 days a week and officially had one day off per work to continue my research work at Georgetown. Of course, I could not do much in that time, but it helped me also to run things down.

At the NSF we processed about 800 grant applications twice a year. This involved reading and assessing each application, organizing them into groups, using the computer data system to find appropriate external reviewers and then sending them out all over the world. Usually we sent to about 5-6 reviewers in the hope of getting a minimum of three. Then we organized a Review Committee to consider that season’s intake and each reviewer was given a number of applications in which they would be the primary reviewer. At the meeting they would take the responsibility of presenting the pros and cons of each application, with the external reviewer’s comments, and then there would be a vote on its relative merits. Finally, when all the applications had been reviewed, the whole committee would go over all the applications and list them in order of merit, knowing that there was a limited amount of funds that could be spent. Then, the program directors would allot funds until all the available funds had been spent. Then it was our responsibility to write to the applicant and tell them if they had been funded, for how much, or if they had not been funded. The rate of funding was about 10-15% of those who had submitted. I must say that it was a very rigorous and serious process.

One reason why I’m telling you this is because there was always a question of bias against minorities, and that well-known or famous researchers were more likely to get funded than young unknown researchers. I can confidently dismiss this claim, the reviews were both very objective, and by having at least 3 reviews for each application and a presentation before the Committee, such claims of bias were unfounded. In fact the opposite was true, we were tasked with finding applications by minority groups (defined as Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, American Indians, and Pacific Islander) and if possible, giving them priority.

A notable aspect of working at NSF was that all the scientific staff were white while almost all the administrative staff were black. That was because the NSF was located in the Virginia side of Washington DC, and there was affirmative action in hiring. Also noteworthy is that relations between the two groups was very friendly. We had an annual picnic together and shared many celebrations of family events.

An important event occurred while I was at NSF. The Director of the Biology Program decided to take a year off, and her temporary replacement was a black professor from the University of Michigan. This was very important for the administrative staff, at last they had a black member of the scientific staff, and he was the Head of the Department.

Dr. Lawrence was a very nice man and a good scientist. He had one major aim during his term at NSF and that was to increase minority (black) funding. Then a kind of tussle resulted between him and the rest of the staff because we were sure we were trying as hard as possible to be inclusive and to fund minority applications, as long as they came up to the same rigorous standards of scientific scrutiny. In effect, Lawrence was asking us to reduce the standards for black applicants. We said that’s not fair, but he of course saw it in the light of hundreds of years of prior discrimination.

We had a special weekend retreat in Virginia at a very nice mansion, to discuss this important issue. Some of us came with statistical analysis, and what became clear was that the problem was not the level of the black applications, but the lack of them. There were simply too few applications from minorities to make a difference. The net conclusion, that Lawrence accepted, was that the pipeline of scientists needed to be increased at the high school level, it was a cultural problem.

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### Aliyah,[[3]](#footnote-4) 1996

Some might think that the reason we decided to go back to live in Israel was Zionism, others might think it was to join our family, after all we were the missing generation, my wife’s parents had moved there in 1985 and our daughter, Miriam and her husband Jeff, in 1991. But, to tell the truth the real reason that we decided to move there was an incident that occurred in 1994, when the Washington DC-Maryland area had its worst winter on record.

The snow came in droves and formed ice and it was almost impossible to drive, let alone walk. One Sunday morning I was lazing in bed half asleep, and I heard my name being called as if from a distance. I thought in my half-conscious state that maybe God was calling me home, but then I woke up and realized that someone, somewhere was calling my name and it sounded like Naomi’s voice. I called out to her but could not find her. I ran down the stairs to the basement, but she wasn’t there. As I returned upstairs, I glanced out of the kitchen window, and there she was, lying on the snow in the front yard, calling my name.

I opened the front door while still in my pajamas and called out to her,

“Naomi, why are you lying on the snow, why don’t you get up?”

Her reply was surprising, she said “I can’t, I can’t get up!”

I quickly ran into the bedroom to get some shoes on and picked up a jacket and then ran outside into the freezing cold. When I reached her she showed me her wrist, her left hand was hanging lifelessly from her arm. She said, “I’ve broken my wrist!”

Evidently, she had gone out to get the Sunday morning newspaper and had slipped on the ice beneath the snowy surface. I helped her up and supported her inside. We didn’t know what to do so we called our medical service, and they recommended not to go to the emergency room, because it would be overflowing with accident cases, but rather to call an orthopedist, and they recommended one who might be open. We called, and indeed he was open, and he was nearby, so we went over. There was another guy in the waiting room who had broken both his legs in a fall while trying to clean snow off his car. The doctor ordered Naomi to have an x-ray on his premises, and then he saw us.

He told us that she had a clean break and he could either put it together right now, but it might not be perfect, or we could go the hospital and have an operation that would take time, but would fix it perfectly. We chose to do it sooner rather than later, so he gave her a local anesthetic and then twisted her hand back into position. She winced in pain, even though it was anesthetized, and then the nurse put a cast on it. With a sling, we were on our way back home, carefully, in our car. Naomi turned to me and said, “I’m not going through another winter in this place!” And that was what decided us to leave.

We considered California, where my son, Simon, and his wife Sharon, were living in the Bay area in Pleasanton. We went out and looked at apartments, and I even interviewed at the Livermore Labs where Simon worked. But my daughter gave birth to her first child in 1994, Raphael (Rafi), and when we went for the brit (the circumcision) we decided to look at apartments in Netanya, where her parents lived. Netanya is a beautiful seaside resort right on the Mediterranean, with palm trees lining the cliff top. We found an ideal apartment only 5 mins from the beach and we decided to buy it. The die was cast, in a matter of hours, though extraneous circumstances, we had fulfilled our destiny.

I found a job as the Chief Scientist at the Tel Hashomer Hospital-Sheba Medical Center, just north of Tel Aviv. At first, I had negotiated with the Head of the Advanced Technology Center (ATC) there, but then it turned out that it was still to be built. Also, I had to be appointed by the Head of the Hospital and this was a government-run Ministry of Health hospital.

Knowing the ways of things in Israel I insisted on getting a written commitment of what I wanted minimally, I insisted on an office, a lab, and a secretary. The Head of the Hospital replied and committed to these in writing. The salary was small by US standards, but adequate by Israeli standards.

One problem was that I would have to drive about 1.5-2 hrs each way every day form Netanya to Tel Hashomer. I didn’t like this and I was glad when after 5 years I retired form this job. When I arrived, I was surprised to find that the new wing of the hospital for the ATC was almost finished building. I asked what my job description was, and they told me, there is none. You decide what the job includes. This was so different from the US, where each job comes with an exact description, with a major aim and 3 or more secondary aims. And I was the first Chief Scientist at a medical center in Israel, although there were others in several Ministries, including of course the Ministry of Science and Culture.

In Israel people worked mainly starting early but leaving around 3-4 pm. This was primarily the women workers, who went home to look after their children. But, they were so essential that little could be done without them. I had an excellent secretary, who spoke fluent English and if I had a phone call from a Hebrew speaker, she would stay on the line and translate, and she would translate all documents and letters I received. She was also good at telling me all the latest scuttlebutt about what was going on in the center, who was having an affair with whom.

Another problem was that my degree had to be approved by the Ministry of Education before I could even be paid. I took the originals of my degrees to the local office of the Ministry and they made certified copies, but I had to wait about a month before the relevant office in Jerusalem approved them.

One day I got a call from this office and they said that I had written that I had a PhD in Chemistry, but the degree from Cambridge did not specify chemistry, and I had not given any course results. I pointed out that they didn’t require such course results in Cambridge, and anyway all PhD degrees were doctor of philosophy. She said she could classify my degree as being in philosophy. So, I quickly called the personnel department and asked it that would satisfy them, and they said yes. So, I told her OK, and so I was certified to teach philosophy in Israel.

Everything went very well for a year. I got my lab up and running, I started to collaborate with an expert on drug delivery at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. I started a listing of all the research projects being carried out at the Medical Center and I published an annual listing of these projects and all scientific papers published at the Center. And I started an annual poster session for all young researchers at the Center with a small prize for the best one chosen by a Committee.

When it came time for me to start buying the equipment which I needed for my research, I received a curt reply from the Hospital Director, that the money I had requested had been spent on building the ATC. I sent a strong reply, but I was advised not to go to see him, but to see his deputy. He was a much more reasonable man. I told him that if I didn’t get the funds I needed that had been committed, I would resign. He said that I should not contact the Head of the Hospital about this, but he would ensure that I would get what I wanted. Just make a list of equipment in order of priority and give it to the purchasing manager and he would make sure that I got the items over time. It turned out very well and I got everything in a year.

My main problem at the Center was my inability to speak Hebrew. Of course, they all spoke fluent English, but when we were in meetings, I could not follow what was going on when several people were talking at once. I was surprised that they put up with me for so long. But I was like their token Anglo scientific expert, respected, but with no power.

After 5 years I had had enough of the infighting and tried to become independent of the Head of the ATC, but this was impossible, so I reigned. Instead I became a Visiting Professor at the Pharmacology Department in Hebrew University on the Hadassah hospital campus. I used to drive the 2-3 hours a week to Jerusalem, stay over one night in the Faculty House, that had a small boutique hotel, and go back the next afternoon. My friend, who was Head of the Department was promoted to be Head of the School of Pharmacy and I helped look after his research students and write papers etc. After another 5 years I retired form there too, partly to look after my wife.

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# **Life on Planet Alz**

### Planet Alz

We live on Planet Alz, which is a different planet to earth. You may think when you see us walking down the street that we look normal, but we are not, we are actually on a different planet. On our planet the normal rules do not apply. Everything is *unpredictable*, anything can happen at any moment. Naomi can sometimes be cooperative, but often not. She can sometimes be pleasant, but often not. She can suddenly refuse to do something, like go out or go home and she can suddenly become angry and abusive and even violent.

She will strike out and hit whoever gets in her way. These violent outbursts are a feature of the disease eating away at her brain, destroying the synapses that once brought order and memory to her mind. Many people explain these violent outbursts due to the frustration that people suffering from AD feel, they cannot express themselves any longer, they cannot ask for things or explain themselves and they cannot do anything. They are lost, existing only in the moment and not understanding that.

If I ask Naomi to bring me her glasses that are on her bedside cabinet, she may bring me a box of tissues or a hair brush. If I tell her to put on her bra she may pick up her skirt or her blouse. If I tell her that she has her shoes on her feet she will absolutely deny that, even though I plainly see them there. She can’t see things because she can’t understand them and cannot name them.

Of course, it is like dealing with a child. A small child also has no memory and does things irrationally. They may shout out or suddenly run away or suddenly burst into tears. Sometimes Naomi cries and asks me “what is happening to me?” but usually she is blissfully unaware of her condition.

She is like a child in her need to attach herself to me, every time we have to part she pulls a long face and wants to know why and she is reluctant to trust and go with anybody else. This is “separation anxiety” like a child going to school every time for the *first* time.

She thinks I am her father and needs me to protect her all the time. I have to hold her hand usually when we are out, especially when we cross roads, since she thinks cars, even far in the distance, are aiming for her. It can be oppressive, even to the point of my heaving a sigh of relief every time she goes out of the door with the carer or someone else.

So if you see us coming down the street, me leading her by the hand, don’t rush over to the other side of the road, the likelihood is you won’t even notice any difference. She will greet you in her usual friendly manner and say things like “How are you? Haven’t seen you for a long time.” She still has retained good social skills, but she has no idea who you are and remember that we are existing on another planet.

Naomi’s loss of short-term memory is total and profound. She has taken an item out of a kitchen cabinet and put it on the counter, then turned around and turned back and exclaimed “who put that there?” The loss of short-term memory is as short as 20 seconds. Also her long-term memory is mostly destroyed, although she can remember isolated things, such as the words of poems and songs that she learned at school or in her years singing in a choir.

Naomi loves music and she will sing along with and conduct music in her own way, totally in the moment. Since she is unable to follow plots of any story on TV and cannot assimilate the news (every incident is new to her, she was shocked to hear that President Kennedy had been assassinated) she tends to get bored and walk away in the middle. Her favorite videos are old musicals and especially Danny Kaye with the NY Philharmonic that she watches over and over again. I keep my iPod permanently set up (with small loudspeakers) next to her bed because she really loves going to bed and listening to music (classical or popular) and she falls asleep to it.

How to describe memory? It’s like a landscape where snow has fallen. At first the surface is white and pristine. But as time goes by people trudge across the field and leave footprints. Then a cart goes by leaving parallel tracks, and then a car drives along the lane, leaving tire marks. Then the scene gets busier, children on bikes on the way to school or to play leave their tire tracks and women going shopping and so on, until the surface is criss-crossed with memories of what had happened. The analogy for Alzheimer’s disease is that all the tracks get inter-twined and mixed up and confusing, and then it all starts to melt!

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### What is Love?

My beloved wife is missing! She has been replaced by a hollow facsimile of herself. It is exact in verisimilitude, yet she is absent. We are still affectionate, we love each other; she is extravagant in her love for me, enhanced by her dependency. Yet, it is not the love of conscious will.

When I was young and a self-confessed intellectual, I made the serious mistake of telling my girlfriend Naomi that I did not know what love was and so I could not honestly say that I loved her. I suppose this was a reaction to the over-powering influence of Hollywood in our lives and its obsession with romantic love. Perhaps part of my tendency to avoid the emotional gushing aspects of love was that I was rarely shown overt affection by my father. I have written about this in my autobiographical novel “*Amanuensis*,” where I describe why he had good reason to be detached, and this has tended to make me also dispassionate.

Nevertheless, Naomi accepted my proposal and we were married, and I came to love her and to tell her so, even if I still did not really know what the word meant.

Now, after 56 years of marriage, Naomi has developed Alzheimer’s disease and she is no longer the woman I married. Finally, I have come to know the *real* meaning of the word, love. Why else would I stay with her and look after her and protect her and cherish her if I did not love her? When friends have complimented me on being brave or admire my patience (when I was always such an impatient man) in dealing with her now, I brush-off their compliments. As far as I am concerned I am only doing what I have to do, what I want to do and what I need to do. I think this is love.

What attracted me to Naomi? Certainly, she was attractive, and she had a lovely slim figure. But, it was her personality that really caught me. She was different from all the other girls, it was a sense that she was vulnerable, sensitive and perhaps somewhat other-worldly. We had a friend in Cambridge (long ago) named Andrew Read, a very brilliant young man, who described her as having a “butterfly mind.” This was not intended as an insult, on the contrary, he was comparing her with our serious scientific masculine brains that analyze each point in depth. She flitted from subject to subject, with no logical sequence. It may have been the first signs.

Now I think about it, it was this (among other things) that attracted me to her. She was not like the others, she was unpredictable, she would change the subject and keep me amused, so different, not seemingly trying to impress or control. I instinctively wanted to protect her because I realized that she was not really able to deal with the real world. Often, I was too critical and unsympathetic, like when she nearly burned the kitchen down or when she was unable to learn how to drive. But, I did not know then what I know now.

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### Commitment and Duty

When I was a child my mother used to take me in my stroller to where my father worked, and I remember waving up to him. The company name stuck with me, it was “Kloss and Trusher,” such a lovely redolent name. My father left that company in the depth of the depression because of a matter of principle. The owners of the company and the labor union had been negotiating and agreed that the workers would be paid according to the “piece-work” system. In other words, paid according to how much work they did, not a basic wage irrespective of the amount of work they did.

My father disagreed with this system, he felt that it cheapened the work and made people work harder to earn less and be less concerned with doing a good job, in other words to put out a greater volume of work with less quality. So my Dad said he would leave the company. Both the manager and the union foreman came to my father and pleaded with him to stay, they both respected him, but he said no he would not stay when both the management and the union were exploiting the workers.

He left on a matter of principle and under very difficult circumstances set up independently to do his own high-quality work. My father was certainly not left-wing, he believed in fairness, in a good day’s work for a good day’s pay. Fortunately, even during the great depression, he was mostly able to find enough work to keep us clothed and fed, although sometimes we went hungry. Maybe it was this early lesson that influenced me, for I and my family value our word and the fairness of others in treating people correctly.

During my career I have had problems with people who were dishonest and were mistreating me and others. I have described such an incident in my book “*Antisense*” that caused me to leave my position at the National Institutes of Health after 22 years. I have encountered such over-ambitious careerists on several occasions and in each case, I have not accepted the situation, to the detriment of my career.

Once I got a call to come to my daughter’s school and take her home, because she had been suspended. Why had she been suspended? Because she had seen a teacher berating a boy for doing something wrong that my daughter knew he did not do. So she spoke up and told the teacher she was wrong and for this she was suspended. Needless to say, I was proud of her. Recently my son did a similar thing, he was disgusted by the bullying and belittling behavior of his boss towards him and others where he works in a large quasi-Governmental agency. Where others were afraid to speak up, he complained.

I look to this history of “doing the right thing,” of opposing those who would exploit others, of sticking up for the less fortunate, even under circumstances where it results in personal loss, as the touchstone for my sense of moral duty. There is no question that I will stand by my wife whatever happens.

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### Onset and Diagnosis, 2011

For many years Naomi would forget things and announce that she was probably getting Alzheimer’s disease. I and our children would pooh-pooh that, we would pronounce that everybody forgets things and we would laugh it off. But, when it began getting serious, Naomi never mentioned Alzheimers anymore. Now it was no joking matter.

Because of her complaints we went to see our doctor and he gave her a referral to a gerontologist. The lady doctor tested her and proclaimed that she was fine, no AD. Good news. But, six months later we were there again. She went to the same gerontologist, but this time the lady was very rude to her (I was not there) and said to her “what, you here again!” and essentially ignored her and would not even see her. We went back to our GP and complained, he said he could not refer us to another gerontologist within the system, but he thought we should get a private consultation, and he recommended a particular gerontologist who had an office very close to where we lived.

So, I made an appointment, the cost was $125, and we went to see him and he was very nice and he tested Naomi and said she does not have AD yet, but she has the beginnings. He had worked at the Psychogeriatric Center at Ichilov Hospital in Tel Aviv and recommended that we go there to receive more detailed testing, and it is free. So he gave us a referral letter and I made an appointment and we went there and they tested Naomi in detail, and the psychiatrist told us that she had a condition called “Partial Cognitive Impairment” that is not yet AD, but that is a somewhat less severe condition and if we are lucky she might remain in that condition for some time. They said come back in 6 months, which we did, and then they tested her again and said “sorry, but now she has full AD.” That was in February, 2013. One of the main tests was asking her to draw a complex geometric pattern of overlapping circle, square and pentagon. The deterioration of her ability to do this was clear.

What made it clear to me that she had a serious memory and cognitive problem was her shopping and cooking. She would go out to shop and even if she would write a list beforehand, she would forget about it or lose the list. Then she would buy whatever was on her mind, and often would return with the same thing. Eventually we had about a dozen packets of toilet rolls filling our balcony and I begged her not to buy any more. I found that we had 8 jars of jam open in our fridge and dozens of cereal boxes and tens of tea bag boxes. At that point I realized that I could not let her go shopping by herself anymore.

Also, she began to serve up inedible meals, chicken steaks as hard as leather and potatoes burnt to a crisp. She was using the microwave and I asked her how long she was putting things in there and it was 10 or 12 minutes, when it should have been 1-4 mins. Actually, I checked and found it was random, she didn’t remember how many mins to heat anything to cook it or re-heat it. It was at this point that I realized it was no good getting angry with her, she simply did not remember, and the awful realization dawned that I would have to do the cooking. Horror!

We went back to the GP and showed him the result of the PG Center and he wanted to send us to a gerontologist to get some medication since he was not allowed to prescribe it himself, so we went back to the private gerontologist and he gave us a prescription that the doc could then co-sign and Naomi started taking the usual anti-AD meds, namely Excelon patches and Ebixa tabs.

Around this time Naomi stopped driving. One morning she went down to drive our new car to her mother’s nursing home, about 5 mins away, and after about 20 mins she called me and she was crying and said she couldn’t remember how to start the car. So I drove her there, but that was the end of her driving. Also, she got lost, this happened twice. Once she vanished and reappeared later in a taxi with some girls who she had approached at a school and they had brought her home. It was at this point that I gave her an address bracelet with her information on it.

Since she was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease in **2011** and her memory was almost completely gone, our life style had to change to accommodate these facts. Most notably I had to do the shopping, cooking and clearing up essentially by myself. Naomi helped, but it was only token. My daughter helped, especially by giving cooking advice and she began her weekly visit to go out with her mother. We also started ordering our groceries on-line, and since everything was in Hebrew our daughter did this. I supplied her with a list for each week.

Part of the fundamental change in our lifestyle was the realization that we needed, or more correctly, I needed help. It was at this point that I entered the bureaucratic process of finding a foreign live-in worker, or carer (*metapelet*).

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### The Bureaucracy of AD

There is much that one must learn about the bureaucracy of Alzheimer’s disease. There are advisors in many organizations, material on-line and Carer’s Groups that meet regularly. I was lucky enough to find such a group that meets every two-weeks for a morning at our English-speaking club, the Association of Americans and Canadians in Israel (AACI). It also attracts all kind of English-speaking immigrants, from Britain, Ireland, South Africa and Australia. A major feature of this group is that everything is confidential, and people speak freely of their circumstances. This allows people to both cry and laugh without feeling self-conscious, we are all in the same boat. The people attending this group gave me valuable advice and I gradually began to learn the ropes.[[4]](#footnote-5)

If you receive the golden number of 18 hours (as we did eventually) from the National Insurance for a carer, then you can apply for a license to employ a foreign worker and then an Agency that deals with foreign workers will usually import one for you, for an annual fee. This is often a risky business, but most of them do receive some training and most of them are very caring. Alternately, they may have someone on their books or know of foreign workers looking for a post. The foreign workers are allowed to work in Israel for a max of 5 years, but they can continue longer if they stay with the same family. If their patient dies after 5 years, they are supposed to return home.

Once you employ a foreign worker as a carer (they are only licensed for this one kind of job) then they are actually employed thru another agency that deals with them internally in Israel. BL then pays part of their salary, usually up to ca. 40%, and usually they pay this directly to the carer and the employer is required to pay the rest. Everything is very tightly controlled and the total salary, payment for food, number of free hours per day, one evening a week off, vacation days, etc. is all clearly specified.

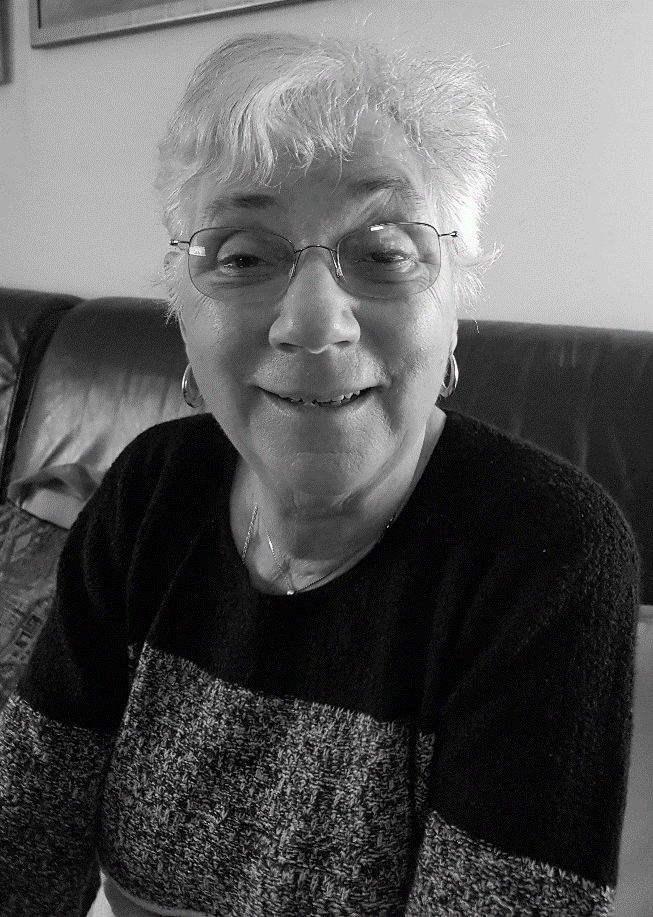
But note that the employer is specified as the person who has AD. In order to be able to act for the patient and to take charge of his/her financial situation and/or medical decisions, someone is required to apply for a legal guardianship, called in Israel an *Apotropus*. There is a special family court in each region that deals with this and you need a lawyer to apply, with of course the medical letters from a qualified gerontologist, etc. I became the *Apotropus* (guardian) for both my mother-in-law when she became senile and for my wife once she developed AD. This allows me to sign for her in the bank etc. and to make medical decisions for her, given that she is no longer competent. Note that this guardianship is different from a power-of-attorney, which one person grants to another when both are competent, while the *Apotropus* is allotted by the court when the person is no longer *compus mentis*.

Note that this business of foreign carers (of which there are at least 50,000 in Israel) is a very big business in Israel. It includes BL, lawyers, agencies, and other government offices, such as the Ministry of the Interior that grants the foreign workers their work visas and entry visas.

Once we found our Filippina carer, she is a lovely girl named Sahlee, she took over all our local shopping, cooking and clothes washing, relieving me of a lot of work. She does not do house cleaning, but she does do most of the housework. She is supposed to help my wife wash and dress herself, but my wife rejects Sahlee’s help with anything intimate and so I have to help my wife shower and dress, but Sahlee puts out her clothes every morning. Naomi can no longer remember the names of items of clothes, and so mixes them up and has no idea how to put them on and in what order. It is totally confusing to her, why for example is underwear put on before outerwear? She depends on me entirely for that.

Sahlee is also in charge of setting out Naomi’s medications, but I have to see that she takes the pills. Sahlee also goes out with her most mornings and they walk around, shopping, visiting her mother, and having coffee out. Then either I meet them or see them back again at home. This gives me most mornings free to do my own chores, visit banks, the post office, tax accountants, and also paint, read and work on the computer.

Each morning of the week we have some activity planned for Naomi, be it going to lectures and/or entertainment with me, concerts every Monday noon, visiting her mother and so on. In this way we keep her occupied in the moment. She especially loves musicals and we have a series of them that my son set up on a hard drive attached to the TV that I can open in a moment and then she is happy to watch and sing along, for a time. Naomi goes to bed early and she often goes to sleep listening to music, including classical music that she loves.



**Fig. 5**. Naomi, 2017

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### What are you doing in California?

Naomi recognizes our daughter Miriam and loves her, but does not realize that she is her grown daughter. She thinks Miriam is some kind of friend and her daughter is still a small child, and she often asks about her children, although she does not remember how many she has. Our son Simon lives in California in the SF Bay area. He calls us almost every day, usually when he is driving to work. Every day when he mentions that he is driving to work in the morning, Naomi says “How can it be morning, it’s dark,” and he says, “But, I live in California,” and she always asks, “What are you doing in California?”

In September, 2016, I was lucky enough to be able to go to the US for a visit, including Miami for a conference, to DC to see some friends and to the SF Bay area to see Simon and his family. Before I left I made arrangements for Miriam (who lives in Beersheva, Israel) to stay with Naomi for 10 days and of course our Filippina carer was also still there. Miriam assured me, and I believed her, that she could handle this responsibility,

Everything went well for a few days, but then Miriam decided to drive Naomi down to her home in Beersheva (a two-hour drive) for Shabbat. When she got there, even though she has been there hundreds of times, Naomi said she did not want to stay there and wanted to go home. Miriam and her husband Jeff tried to persuade her to lie down for her afternoon nap, but she refused and she started to get abusive and violent. So Jeff took her out to the car, drove her around town for a while, then drove back to his home, and Naomi accepted that this was alright and went to bed. But, realizing that they had bitten off more than they could chew, they decided when she woke up to drive her back to Netanya where we live. When she was back in her familiar home she relaxed and accepted it, even though she often says to me “I want to go home,” she is thinking of her girlhood home where she grew up. When I spoke to Miriam that day, she sounded desperate and I was ready to interrupt my trip in the middle (I was then in DC) and fly home. But, Miriam said let’s give it a few hours and later she told me it was OK, they could handle it and I should continue with my trip. I spoke to Naomi and reassured her that I would be back in a few days.

The point is that even though Miriam is highly responsible, knew the situation and is very familiar with her mother, she was almost unable to deal with the situation. Even though as a loving daughter she comes up for the day every Tuesday to be with her mother, this did not prepare her for the constant 24/7 pressure and the unpredictability of the situation. By the way, the constant stream of advice I was getting both from Miriam and Simon has been reduced to a trickle now that Miriam has experienced the real situation for herself.

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### Daily life on Planet Alz

The door problem

I have a problem with our bedroom door, I need to have it open, even during the night, not all the way open, but just a bit ajar, wide enough so I can go through it during the night without opening it. Why I need this is unclear, maybe I am claustrophobic, but my excuse is that it gets too stuffy in our small bedroom with the door closed. But, on the contrary Naomi needs to close the door, she always does, and she removes the doorstop and puts it somewhere randomly, although it seems to me she deliberately hides it. She says, “It’s my room and I want the door closed!” and that’s it. I wrote in large letters on the door, “Please keep open” but it makes no difference, she ignores such notes, she doesn’t see them. So we continue to have a tussle over the door.

Showering

I take Naomi into the bathroom every morning and she knows to get undressed. But, I have to steer her to the shower, otherwise she might have a “quick wash” at the sink as she probably did when she was small (they had no showers in England at that time). Then I have to make sure she takes her clothes off before actually going into the shower. She has no idea how to turn the handle to make the water warmer or colder, so every morning I have to do this for her, and get my arm wet. When it is warm enough she goes in, but refuses to wash her hair and also sometimes is out in a few minutes.

Dressing

If you think about it, dressing (and undressing) are mechanical processes which we all do almost without thinking. But, for someone with no memory nothing can be so mechanical. When I take Naomi into our bedroom after showering, she is often wet in some places where she forgets to wipe herself, her back for example, so I have to remind her to wipe herself and this often makes her upset. I have to put out her clothes on the bed (they are selected the prior evening by the carer) before she comes in. In fact there are some 6 pieces of clothing that we all know how to put on in sequence, but for Naomi it is completely unclear why underwear has to be put on before outerwear.

She usually finds her panties (1), but other pieces of clothing are confusing to her, especially her bra (2). We have bought front clip-up bras since the back bras that have to be done up in front and then turned around the waist are impossible for her. I have to put the bra over her arms in order for her to see how to fix it, otherwise she just ignores it or more likely just throws it across the room.

Then there is the slip (3), the top (over her head) (4), the skirt (5), and the knee-high stockings (6). Sometimes Naomi mixes the name of the stockings with her shoes, and this can be very confusing. But, finally she puts on her shoes, which have velcro straps that she can just press across (I always have to check that they are tight). And then I have to clean her glasses and make her put them on and finally she brushes her hair. Sometimes she is nice and thanks me for helping her to dress. She could not do it herself.

I have found her with up to 6 pairs of panties on at the same time. Also no bra or bras around her waist and even put on like panties with her legs through the loops, not to mention tops back to front and inside out, and two skirts. It all adds to the surprises.

Cleaning teeth

Every morning when I tell Naomi that we need to clean our teeth she tells me without fail “I’ve already cleaned my teeth.” Whether or not she is somehow remembering having cleaned her teeth before, which is highly unlikely, or whether this is some kind of conditioned response I don’t know. But, she also always tells me that her teeth are clean, so I suppose it’s an avoidance mechanism. Nevertheless, I show her that her brush is dry, so she could not have cleaned her teeth. But, then I have to show her to wet her brush and then I put the toothpaste on it, and then tell her to wet it again, and then she knows to put it to her mouth and brush her teeth. But, she only does the outside of her teeth, and if I tell her to open her mouth to do the inside, she can’t do that unless I show her with my mouth and explain to her what to do “open up your mouth.” Strange!

Undressing

Going to bed at night is always a ritual. If I don’t stop her Naomi will immediately get into bed fully dressed, although she does take off her shoes (one of our friend’s husband who has AD insists on wearing his shoes in bed). But, if I manage to stop her then I have to explain that she shouldn’t go to bed wearing her outdoor clothes, but she has to change into a nightdress. She insists that she is already wearing her nightdress. Nevertheless, I help her to unbutton her cardigan, then take off her glasses (she doesn’t know what they are) and then help pull her top over her head. She complains of being cold and I tell her that her nightdress will keep her warm and then I give it to her, and she slips into it and is warmer. Then I have to get her to pull off her skirt and slip and then take off her stockings, and then if her feet are cold she might put on bed-socks.

Finally she slips into bed, and if it is early and she is not too tired I put on music for her, from the iPod and speakers that I have set up next to her bed. Then she listens to a music concert for hours.

Going out

Naomi will suddenly decides that she needs to go out, to see her friends, to go to work, to see her mother or to go shopping. I have tried on occasions to persuade her not to go, but this can be futile because it is an idea fixe. I cannot let her go out by herself, she would certainly get lost as she has no idea where she is and where she is going. On one occasion when I tried to prevent her from going out by force I pushed her away from the door (she is strong) and she fell over backwards and hit her head on the corner of a cupboard and had a cut about an inch long. It was bleeding and so we ended up in the emergency room at the hospital, where we were for four hours (for the complete story see the entry in the The Journal for 7/27/16 below). Luckily it was no more than skin deep and there was no permanent injury. But, it taught me a huge lesson, never use force, so now if I can’t dissuade her, I simply go along and walk with her, either for a while to the sea-front or if necessary just around the block.

The need to go “Home”

Naomi from time to time suddenly declares that she wants to go “home.” Where is this “home”? It could be her early childhood home in London, or it could be the home where we lived in Bethesda, MD, where we brought up our children. She often asks, “where are the kids, are they out playing?” and she cannot understand when I tell her that we don’t have young children anymore, that they are grown up. Anyway, wherever this “home” is, it is somewhere else and no amount of explaining or persuasion will convince her that she is already home.

Usually at about 5.30 pm Naomi suddenly announces, “I’m going home.” She says she needs to go home, and she puts on her coat. I argue with her and try to explain that this is her home, but she insists that I am either her father or someone else and she needs to go home to her husband Jack. I tell her that I am her husband Jack, but it doesn’t register. I tell her it is cold outside and take her to the balcony, but it makes no difference. I also try to show her a musical, but to no avail. So having learnt from experience I quickly change and we go out and walk around the block and return in a few minutes and she accepts that this is her home.

When this happens it is so surreal, you want to take her and shake her and say “Goddamn it, you are home, don’t you realize it,” but you know that there is no point in doing that. It’s as if she is acting like a robot, “I must go home.” You feel as if there should be a reset button that you could press and she would suddenly become nice and manageable again and accept that you are right, that this is indeed her home. But, that isn’t the way it works in this skewed version of reality.

Taking tablets

The Carer is responsible for making up Naomi’s daily medicine doses that amounts to three tablets twice a day after meals, after breakfast and dinner. But, I am responsible for making sure that she takes them. Sometimes this is straightforward, I give her the tablets from a small container (we use a small tea-bag container). She doesn’t recognize them as tablets and each day I have to point them out to her. Then I put them in her hand and tell her to “pop them” in her mouth. If I didn’t she would probably put them in her drink, or sometimes she simply puts them back in the container. But if she puts them in her mouth, then I have to give her a drink and ask her to drink it, and as she is doing so I have to tell her to swallow. She usually does, but sometimes, no matter who much she drinks she can’t or won’t swallow them, and she ends up spitting them out and putting them on the plate and refusing to take them. But, this only happens about one time in ten. Not bad under the circumstances.

Sometimes she insists that I tell her what each tablet is for: “this one is lithium, this one is for cholesterol and this one is for your memory.“ “But, I don’t have any memory.” “Well then, this tablet will help you.” And so it goes over and over again.

Cooking and Eating

Until now, thank goodness, since AD is random, Naomi eats by herself and eats well. One of the common symptoms of AD is difficulty in swallowing. Other patients cannot hold a knife and fork or cannot feed themselves. But, so far this has not happened to Naomi. She and I have the same food usually and the cooking is done by the Carer that lets me off the hook.

Naomi does not like eating sandwiches, so we usually cut them into small “baby” sandwiches for her. But, even these she tends to take apart and eat the inside before the bread. I try to persuade her by showing that I am holding a sandwich or roll in my hand, but often she will just ignore me and shrug and simply carry on eating. Then after eating the filling she will eat the bread.

Often Naomi acts strangely when eating, she will divide the food on her plate into sections and declare that part of it is for someone else, for some unknown women or even for me. When I tell her that I have my own she seems surprised. One day she started to spoon her oatmeal cereal with banana into her coffee, and when I stopped her she was indignant, “Why not?” she wanted to know.

Often Naomi wants to help the Carer, in cooking and in clearing up and doing the dishes. But, I have to intervene to prevent this because she cannot really do these things and it only interferes. A few years ago Naomi used to make us tea at tea-time (we come from the UK), but once as I was in the bedroom I smelt burning and I rushed into the kitchen only to find the electric kettle sitting on the gas burner being well and truly melted. Luckily, I was able to quickly turn it off. Since then we keep the gas turned off under the stove unless the Carer or I are using it, and I make the tea. Of course, we had to buy a new electric kettle.

Walking

We are relatively lucky in that Naomi loves to walk, in fact she needs to walk. She is usually up early and ready to go. I have to keep asking her to be patient until I or the Carer are ready, usually around 9 am. When she walks she tends to shuffle, scraping her shoes along the ground. As AD gets worse usually the gait worsens until patients can no longer walk. We noticed when we gave Naomi a sedative that her gait very soon became worse, so we stopped giving it to her and her gait improved again, very clearly related. We decided that it’s better to put up with her occasional angry outbursts than worsen her walking ability.

Speech, reading and movies

Naomi’s speech is incoherent. She pronounces words well, but they have no meaning in the context. She will often come to me and anxiously ask me a question and I have no idea what she is talking about. I have to find a way to deflect her by telling her not to worry. She also often cannot think of a word or even the subject she wants to ask me about and then gets frustrated, and finally gives up.

Naomi has not read books for several years. She can read, but she only reads the headlines in newspapers. They have no meaning for her. She watches TV, but the news is merely another subject to watch, without fully understanding the significance of it. She is sometimes astonished by historical news items, that she of course does not remember, the classic one being when she exclaimed, “What, President Kennedy was shot!”

My son set up an external disk drive so I can down-load movies and we can watch them on the large screen TV. Naomi loves musicals, and she sings along with them and we have nearly all of them recorded, from *Oklahoma* to *Evita*. But, her favorite is “*An Evening with Danny Kaye at the NY Philharmonic*.” She has watched this dozens of times, and it never fails to entrance her, she loves the music and she loves Danny Kaye’s antics. I never knew how grateful I would be to him.

Many years ago we went to a “cops and robbers” film, I think it was entitled “*Star Chamber*” It was very intense and quite complex, and it was a question of where does one draw the line between good and evil. When we came out of the movie theater I remember Naomi asked me “which ones were the good guys and which ones were the bad guys.” At the time I laughed, but I should have realized that this was an early sign of her confusion in dealing with reality.

Delusions

Naomi does not (yet) suffer from serious delusions that affect her life. But, she is constantly asking me, “where are the children?” and when I assure her there are no children living with us, she assures me that she saw them just before. Of course, she is living in her past when she says this. She also claims that she saw Miriam or Simon, when they live a long way from here. It is impossible for her to realize that they are our grown adult children.

On several occasions Naomi has assured me that someone has been here, a woman, a friend, who has asked her to go out and meet her. This may be just an excuse to do what she wants to do, but I have no doubt that in her mind she believes she met with such a person. Whether she actually “saw” a delusional person as a figment of her imagination is unclear.

Danger

There is danger in dealing with an AD patient. For example, the time she put an electric kettle on the gas stove and melted it. After that we always kept the gas turned off under the stove. The time she cut the electric cord to a light and fused the whole system. After that we hid all the scissors. The time she fell over and hit her head and we were in the emergency room for hours. You have to be on your toes and imagine what could happen.

### Conversations with myself

I have had conversations with myself since I was a child. I suppose most people do. This is not schizophrenia, it is natural. What is the self, what is the other? It is merely a way of thinking, of talking silently. Now I find myself doing this more often since Naomi has developed Alzheimer’s disease.

I have lost a talking partner, I have lost a sounding board, I have lost her conversation. I have lost so much. So I converse with myself. If I think of something to say I first filter it. What is the point of speaking if she will not understand?

So much is lost, So much left unsaid except in my head. We marry in order to communicate our feelings, our needs and innermost thoughts. Who else will care how we feel, what bothers us, what trivial matters occupy us? Who else will care about our pains and fears? But, without this I converse with myself.

Many of the members of our Carer’s Group have different and sometimes worse situations to deal with. One AD sufferer jokes all the time, he rhymes and doesn’t seem to be able to do anything else; one is violent, one is totally passive, another is paralyzed, while yet another is totally silent. It all depends on which parts of the brain are affected and that seems to be random. Perhaps I am lucky that so far Naomi can still walk and talk, even if incoherently.

Our life together has been amazing. We have traveled, seen the world, gone places, and done things that we never dreamt of when we started out. I have had a wonderful career as a scientist and am now able to indulge my interests in painting and writing. Above all we have two wonderful children who have grown up to be responsible adults with good jobs and families of their own. We now have a great-grandson, Ro’i, in Israel.

I regret nothing!

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### We hold hands

In the darkness of the night

I stretch out my hand

And your hand is there

We hold hands

Long ago this might have been

The prelude to some touching

Some stroking and then

A passionate interlude

But, not anymore,

Now we hold hands to signify

I am here,

We are each not alone.

Gently we hold hands

And each thinks what if,

A time will come

When no hand answers.

But, in the meantime

We hold hands

In the darkness of the night

Until the dawn.

At 3.30 am on July 30, 2015

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### Visiting Naomi

My wife, Naomi, is living in a Home in a closed Alzheimer’s ward. She was diagnosed in 2011 with Alzheimer’s disease (AD) and we lived together for a further 7 years until I could no longer deal with her, even with a live-in 24/7 carer, and so I was forced to put her in a Home. The tipping point was when she hit me around the face with a urine-soaked diaper and then ran screaming naked into the living room shouting “call the police,” that I realized I had reached my limit. She has been in there for two years now and I have visited her nearly every day since until the coronavirus epidemic stopped all visits.

It helps a lot that the Home is only 2 km from our house (I still use the plural even though I now live alone) and they allow visitors any time. Many people have told me that I don’t have to visit her every day and that I need to think of myself and to live my life. I do that, but part of living my life is seeing her every day. We spent 57 years married living together and I saw her almost every day then, and I can’t stop now.

Why do I do it? I know that after a visit she has forgotten that I was there, but I know that she is the same person who I married, although she is, of course, very different. She talks a lot, but what she says makes no sense, the Israelis call it “word salad”, a meaningless string of words. I try to communicate with her, but most of the time I simply agree with her or say “I don’t know.” Perhaps the main reason I go every day is because I know for a certainty that she would do the same for me if our situations were reversed. Also, because I love her.

My daughter Miriam has helped me enormously in this situation, and we visited the main Alzheimer’s Homes in the city, but were disappointed with them. We then found a large modern Home outside the city (45 mins drive) and in order to qualify for this we had to have forms filled out by the doctor and the nurse. When we were with the nurse she mentioned that she had put her father in a small home nearby that she highly recommended, so we immediately went there and liked it. It is called Orpaz and is run by the Matav social service organization.

It is a very open and bright place, with lots of light. It is in the shape of an 8 with two open rotundas and the bedrooms around the outside. The ratio of attendants to patients seemed quite high. Every day the patients mostly sit at tables in a common area and they have activities organized by the Activities Coordinator, such as coloring or sticking shapes or playing with colored plastic blocks or magnetic toys. The walls are covered with colored posters mostly made by the inmates. The Manageress and the Social Worker both spoke English and were very pleasant. Luckily Naomi was accepted there.

At first Naomi had trouble settling in, and they advised us not to visit for a week. This was hard. But, I knew we had no choice. At first in the Home they had to sedate her, because they told us later she was running from room to room at night disrupting the other patients. But when we started visiting I complained, and they reduced the dose so that she is now more or less normal.

They made several changes at the Home that we were not ready or able to make at our home. For example, they only allow inmates to wear trousers (wide legged, ankle-length trousers), not skirts or dresses. This makes their jobs easier changing them. Also, instead of using pull–ups they use diapers that are easier to put on and pull off. Finally, they do not allow the inmates to wear bras, but men’s ribbed vests instead. They also have an in-house hairdresser that cuts the women’s hair short and keeps their nails short (they tend to scratch).

Naomi has become very rude, she swears a lot, which is so different from her previous sweet and pleasant disposition before AD when she never swore. Anything she gets to eat or drink is automatically called “shit.” “I’m not eating that shit!” is her usual response. But, often then she does eat it without any problem, although usually it takes some persuasion and help.

For a few months, at the suggestion of one of the chief nurses I went every day at noon to feed her lunch. As usual in Israel the main meal is served at lunch time, and I was told she was not eating. Nevertheless, she was not losing weight because she is given a supplement (Ensure) twice a day during the morning and afternoon breaks. But, I went every day anyway. It was a routine. First, she would reject the soup with her usual statement, then she would begin to eat it using the spoon, but sometimes I had to remind her how to use the spoon. Often she would let me spoon feed her. They only give them a table spoon to eat with (no knife and fork for obvious reasons) so I would then have to break up the food on her plate with the spoon, often it would be chicken and potatoes, but she would usually reject that. She would perhaps eat about 10 small spoons of food, and then refuse to eat anymore. She would usually eat the dessert (a cooked apple) that I had to cut up with the spoon. But often she would reject that too.

While I was feeding her for perhaps a half-hour, the other 24 residents of the ward plus the 35 or so day patients would also be eating in the large dining room. It was chaotic, lots of noise (often TV’s on) people shouting and nurses feeding some of the permanent residents. These could be separated into three groups, those who could feed themselves without a problem (and a few who refused to eat), those like Naomi who could eat somewhat themselves, but needed some help, and those who were incapable of feeding themselves and needed to be fed. I must say that with some residents occasionally shouting out or spilling soup or throwing food it was not always a pleasant experience.

After a few months doing this I decided to stop. First of all I found that I was not able to get Naomi to eat much more than she was doing herself anyway, second, it was an unpleasant experience, and third I was of course doing the work that the nurses and attendants should be doing. I realize that there are only about 5 of them to deal with about 10-15 of the patients that need help eating, and some do not get enough attention, but they were much more effective at feeding the patients than I was. They are trained that if the patient refuses food they are not allowed to force feed them, but they are more persistent when it is necessary to get them to eat something.

So, after this experience I reverted to my usual practice of going at the time of their morning (10 am) or afternoon (4 pm) break. I ensure that Naomi drinks her enriched coffee and also eats her applesauce (or ice cream/ biscuits/cake). Recently when the applesauce was served with a long-handled spoon she has taken to trying to suck it up through the spoon. I try gently to persuade her that is not the right way to use the spoon. Sometimes she rejects it angrily, but usually she will eventually get the message and start eating it properly.

Then I take her for a walk out of the confines of the closed (locked) ward, thru the main entrance lobby and around the back where there is a small area, very bright and comfortable, where I hug her and she tells me that she loves me (although she does not remember that we were married and once suggested we should get married). And then we sit and I put music that we both like on my smart phone and that she still remembers. Music is the last thing that goes from the memory. She mostly likes songs she can sing along with, such as 1940-1970’s ballads and favorite musicals, such as “My Fair Lady,” “Oklahoma,” and “West Side Story.”

Naomi had a lovely soprano voice and sang in a choir for many years in the US. Once I remember that at a Christmas Party at the Institute where I worked, where there were hundreds of people gathered, they asked for any talented people to perform and I urged Naomi to sing, and she sang “*All I want is a room somewhere…*” from “My fair Lady” with an authentic cockney accent, and it brought the house down. But she doesn’t remember any of this. So sad!

What makes a life, memories, what you did, what you were, what you achieved? All the many journeys we went on, to Alaska, Florence, London, Mexico, Japan, and many more. Our son lives near San Francisco, we grew up in London and now live in Israel, so we saw those areas very often. But, unfortunately, Naomi remembers none of that, nothing at all, this disease has robbed her of her life, even though she still lives, but only in the moment.

Most of the residents and most of the nurses/carers are from the former Soviet Union, Jews who immigrated to Israel. So the lingua franca at the Home is Russian. Of course, there are Israeli inmates and attendants, so Hebrew is also spoken. Most of the inmates sit quietly, some sleeping, some staring. No-one else speaks English, even though they often know several words. Naomi is the only person there who seems to speak all the time, she carries on a conversation with herself, commenting on what is going on around her, but it is hard to follow. She may say “look at that fat cow,” but she may also say words that make no sense, here are some examples: nanta-body after twelve; risticis with a nome, what a wham; relupdup; hiluptim and his beat; oplication; sibbeling; she felt “crungy” and many, many more. She probably makes these words up because she cannot remember or formulate actual sentences from real words. One should also mention that she was a good linguist, she spoke Yiddish with her grandmother and was fluent in German as a child and spoke Hebrew and French as well.

She is now at the level of a child, she likes nursery rhyme books. Although she can still read them, her understanding is probably that of a three- or four-year old. Even though we buy her hard page books, they still get torn and mutilated. That’s about all we can do, read nursery rhyme books to her or listen to music and make sure she exercises some, by taking her for walks, although her walking has deteriorated. We bought earphones for her with a solid-state memory card in it with 500 songs. So when I leave, I put that on her, and she sits there listening to the music and singing along loudly in her soprano voice and often conducting. I leave her then, blissfully unaware, singing at the top of her voice and conducting, an indelible image that will live with me forever. And every time I leave a part of me wants to stay.

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Since March 2020, due to the coronavirus pandemic, all visits to the Home were cancelled. This is understandable since they have a very vulnerable population. Very close by ther is another larger open residential home for seniors, where the Covid-19 hit hard, and 10 people died. The authorities moved all the residents to hospitals and disinfected the place.

It was hard not being able to visit Naomi. For a few weeks in May they allowed us to visit, but only outside and wearing masks and keeping 2 meters away, at the ends of a long table. Naomi could not understand why we could not be together and |I think this annoyed her. These visits were not so good because it was very hot outside, even with a shade over us, and Naomi tended to doze off. They stopped even these visitors after a few weeks.

Now we only “visit” by videophone. Unfortunately, Naomi doesn’t really understand the small images on the screen as us, real people. She stares at it with a look of disdain, as if to say who are you trying to kid. But sometimes she does say hello and remembers our names. And when we sing, she rarely sings along anymore, but she does smile, and she mouths some words. At least it’s good to see her, to see that she still looks like Naomi, even if her mind has wandered off somewhere.

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# **In a Time of Plague**

On March 8, 2020, I travelled from Beer Sheva to Netanya by train. I was the only person wearing a mask in a crowded train. At that point I knew the virus would spread. Also, I was shocked to hear Anthony Fauci, the leading US infectious disease guru, say that masks were not really effective. That makes no sense to me, since it’s the only thing to prevent drops of moisture form infected people form infecting others. Only later did countries wake up to their mistake and make masks mandatory, In Israel in May, in various US States in June, the UK in July and France in August!

Meanwhile I am “sheltering” at home. But, I am not alone and isolated. By coincidence, my daughter and her husband decided to make major renovations to their house down the street at the same time, starting in March. They put all their possessions in storage and moved into my house. This also includes their daughter who returned from Florida, and their younger son who is int eh IDF, but comes home occasionally. So, I have a full house. Miriam does all the cooking and Hebrew translations for me, that’s how they pay their way. I am well looked after.

Since I have no need to go to work (being a part-time volunteer Visiting Professor at BGU), I decided to do some writing. I wrote an article on the history of research on my subject: “A history of research on antisense oligonucleotide analogs.” I could not have done this without the computer connection to BGU library search capabilities, and the EndNote program, that automatically renumbers the citations every time you insert one. The article ended up with 160 references and notes. It took a few weeks to prepare, and the article was accepted for publication in Substantia, The Intl. Journal of the History of Chemistry.

This was important for me, since it allowed me to look back over 30 years of research in a field in which I did some of the important initial studies.

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### Be Creative!

When I was young, I thought that I would die early and not leave any impression on the world. I took an oath to myself when I was a young teenager to always try to be creative. I gave up art to become a scientist (although I returned to it later). There is a story told about Albert Einstein, a lady came to see him and said her son was very talented, he was good at both art and science, could he advise her which profession he should choose. He asked her “Is he very creative?” “Yes,” she replied. Then Einstein said “well, he might be able to be a scientist.”

One of my mentors told me once that “You have to be successful in the career you have chosen,” which is good advice. But, I felt that I needed to be creative in other fields too. I needed to write and to paint, and to persevere at these pursuits as well as my chosen profession. I wanted to contribute to my society, particularly as a Jew, as well as making scientific discoveries.

If that is my epilogue, so be it - be creative!

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1. This section is reproduced from “Doreinu,” the newspaper of the BWUJS which I edited. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. This work was described in a Scientific American article, Jack S. Cohen, Michael E. Hogan, The New Genetic Medicines, *Scientific American,* *271*, 77-82, **1994.** [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Aliyah is the Hebrew word meaning “ascending” that is used to mean going to live in Israel. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Much of this advice is very specific to Israel. First, there is the National Insurance Institute or *Bituach Leumi* (BL)*.* Their role is crucial, they give the license that allows a person with AD to employ a foreign worker, usually a Filippino or Indian. They also send a social worker who investigates the situation and recommends how many hours the worker can work. Hours are the main currency of this whole process. Usually the BL turns down every application the first time. But, then after the second or third application they give at first some 5 or 6 hours. This is not enough for a foreign worker and sometimes people employ local workers. But, as AD progresses the range of things a person can do lessens, and the more hours are needed for a carer. Then the applicant applies for more hours and eventually may receive the maximum allotment of 22 hours, but this is only for a local (but no Israeli will work for those low wages), but for a foreign worker this is reduced to 18 hours. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)