

Chapter 3C: School

“I never let my schooling interfere with my education.”

Mark Twain¹

9. Early schools



The first school I went to was the Ethical Culture Society School (left) at 33 Central Park West, on the corner of 63rd Street. Ethical Culture was founded by Felix Adler in 1873 as a sort of secular religion, and it attracted a lot of Jews who rejected the Jewish religion and wanted something to substitute for it. My grandfather David Rubinstein was such a Jew, and he sent his daughter Nina, my mother, to Ethical Culture schools. He was buried in an Ethical Culture

ceremony. For more on Ethical Culture see <http://aeu.org/index.php?case=whatis>.

I went there for nursery school, probably around age 4 (1948). I remember very little of it except a nice Hawaiian teacher, a kind of inside tree-house, naps on mats on the floor, apple juice and cookies, and being driven there in my father’s pre-war LaSalle automobile with the sunshade over the windshield. The school is still (2009) going strong.

I was moved from Ethical Culture to the Emerson School for kindergarten, and stayed there through first grade. It was located in a stately limestone mansion, converted from a private house, on the south side of East 96th Street between Fifth and Madison Avenues, one block from our apartment at 1136 Fifth Avenue. Perhaps its convenience was the reason for the move. I find no trace of the Emerson School anywhere on the Internet.

I was very fond of my kindergarten teacher, whose name was Mrs. Shugg. She seemed to me, at five, to be an old lady – perhaps she was my grandmother’s age (in 1949 my grandmother would have been 59). Or perhaps she was much younger – at five everybody seems old. I remember almost nothing about it except that being in her kindergarten was a pleasant experience.

My second year at Emerson I was in the first grade. My teacher was Marjorie Nutkoff, much younger than Mrs. Shugg. I tell in Chapter 4.A the story of already knowing how to read when Miss Nutkoff (Miss or Mrs.? it was one or the other in those days) set out to teach us how to do it. I remember little else about first grade.

¹ Attributed.

But I do have two other very clear memories of Emerson School. One was the witch dream, which is almost as vivid to me now as it was 60 years ago. Emerson had a wide oval staircase built around a large open space. In my dream the witch, who was in classic Wizard-of-Oz witch drag – black robe, pointy hat and all – chased me down the stairs. I fled in terror and took refuge in the bathroom. She tried to get on my good side by giving me a piece of candy, which I carelessly dropped in the toilet. I asked for another, which was refused. Although Jung might look for an *anima* figure or some other such fancy interpretation, I have always associated the witch in that dream with my mother.

The other was the persecution of a girl in my class named Margo. This was in kindergarten, I think. Everybody in my class joined a kind of cruel conspiracy to pick on Margo. I was happy to join in, partly for the security of joining and partly for the fun of tormenting her. I have felt guilty ever since for how I treated her. Margo, I'm sorry.



For the second grade I left Emerson and went to the Dalton School (left) at 108 East 89th Street, between Park and Lexington Avenues. My mother had also gone there. Dalton was a famous progressive school with a formidable academic reputation – those two things did not always go together. In those days it was co-ed up to the eighth grade, and all girls after that. It is still open and still famous.²

I remember being told I was disruptive in Dalton. This is probably true, as I can remember once knocking down another student's wood-block structure. I started in Mrs. Rothchild's class and later moved to Mrs. Durham's (or was it the other way around?). I remember little about this school either except learning long division, which I had some trouble with and asked Mrs. Rothchild (or was it Mrs. Durham?) to explain it to me. She did, I got it, and I can still do it if I have to, although I use a calculator now.

I think my parents were asked not to re-enroll me at Dalton. This might have been when they started feeding me Benadryl, I guess for what was later called hyper-activity. One reason I was hyperactive might have been that school bored me nearly to death. Except for long division and some odd facts about Henry Hudson, I learned just about nothing in these early schools. I had already started educating myself through books (see Chapter 4) and was miles ahead of my class.

After Dalton I went to P.S. 6 Manhattan, which served the Upper East Side. New York public schools are numbered, but P.S. 6 was also known officially as the Lillie Devereaux

² Dalton is the school Mariel Hemingway went to in Woody Allen's *Manhattan*; Allen also used it in other movies (for example *Alice*).

Blake School.³ It was unusual but not unheard of for someone in my socio-economic group to go to a public school. P.S. 6 served an elite constituency (before busing, schools drew from the neighborhood, and ours was an upper-crust neighborhood). But it was still a public school, so classes were large. There were classic public school classrooms: bulletin boards on the walls; placards above the blackboards showing the letters in manuscript and cursive forms, portraits of Washington and Lincoln, an American flag. We sat at traditional desks, two students to a desk – I remember they had holes for inkwells, although by the time I got there there were no inkwells any more. We started each day with announcements over a loudspeaker mounted on the wall next to the flag. Then we said the Pledge of Allegiance, and (unconstitutionally) recited the 23d Psalm.⁴

In the third and fourth grades one teacher taught all subjects – my third grade teacher was Mrs. Hoexter, whom I remember was a decent sort, portly and grandmotherly (she reminded me of Gertrude Berg in *The Goldbergs*).⁵ But the fourth grade teacher was Mrs. Gorkin, not so nice at all. I had a conflict with her when she confiscated something of mine and I challenged her right to seize my property. I must have been something of a headache for her to the extent she even focused on one student out of a class of 40 or so. When she wasn't present I called her Mrs. Gherkin, and feared I would slip some day and call her that to her face, but never did.

What did we study in third and fourth grades in 1952-54? There was penmanship, in which the teachers tried to teach us to write a cursive hand in something approaching the traditional Palmer method. I learned the method although I was never very good at it – my penmanship is still pretty bad, which is one reason I type everything. Also I think much faster than I can write, which is bad for penmanship.

We had a spelling class, and here I excelled. I recall a famous spelling bee in the fourth grade. Only one girl and I were left standing after we finished the fourth grade speller; we moved on to the fifth and even sixth grade spellers until finally I slipped up on *pigeon* and she won. I have always been able to spell without difficulty – I will never forget my father's surprise when he asked my mother how to spell a word (he was not a great speller) and I answered correctly. He was probably a bit shocked that I knew something he didn't know.

For “English” we used a school anthology; I remember poems by the awful James Whitcomb Riley. I read so much on my own that the third and fourth grade reading

³ Lillie Devereux Blake (1835–1913) was an author, suffragist and social reformer.

⁴ This Old Testament passage was probably chosen in deference to the Jews in New York – my teachers in both third and fourth grades were Jewish. In Alabama it would probably have been the Lord's Prayer.

⁵ This was a television situation comedy based on a Jewish family in a Bronx tenement. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Goldbergs.

assignments were neither challenging nor interesting. For history we had a slender book which emphasized New York State history – I learned about Adriaan Block and Pieter Minuit and Pieter Stuyvesant and Henry Hudson from this book. I know we had math, because I learned my multiplication tables (and maybe fractions too) in the third grade – both are still useful.

I was OK in math until algebra came along. One task Mrs. Gorkin set us that I never got the hang of was calculating square roots. This not-very-useful skill is of course quite obsolete now as electronic calculators are available if you happen ever to need a square root, but there was no such thing in those days.⁶ I have never in my whole life outside of that class needed to find a square root, even with a calculator. The curriculum at P.S. 6 was not very interesting.

I did school papers on dinosaurs, of course (I used Will Cuppy's *How to Become Extinct* as a primary source – see Chapter 4.B), and one on Fifth Avenue. For this project I asked to be driven up to the top of Fifth Avenue, which ended in a gravel yard, nothing posh at all. I did one later on Woodrow Wilson as Governor of New Jersey, for which I consulted the multi-volume *Life* by Ray Stannard Baker and even went to Trenton on the train – but this must have been at Collegiate, as I would not have been allowed to go to Trenton by myself at the age of ten.

10. Collegiate

In 1954 I started the fifth grade at the Collegiate School for Boys, as it was officially called. I was in the Class of 1962. Typically, I was not consulted, just sent. I remember being told I had “gotten into” Collegiate, as if I had knowingly applied to be admitted there. I was sentenced without trial or even a hearing to an eight-year term, of which I served about five and a half years (1954-60).⁷

- Christopher went to Collegiate from 1st through 12th grades, and Adam also went there for a while. Someone who finished all 12 grades at Collegiate was called a *survivor*, which tells you something.

Collegiate had a grossly undeserved reputation as one of the finest private schools in New York. That makes me wonder how bad the others must have been. Many famous and distinguished New Yorkers, including later Jacqueline Kennedy, sent their sons there.

Collegiate was a Dutch foundation, dating from Nieuw Amsterdam days and affiliated at the start with the Dutch Reformed Church. When I went there Collegiate was traced back

⁶ I don't mean *not allowed in fourth grade* – I really do mean *no such thing*.

⁷ I got time off my sentence for bad behavior.

to Adam Roelentsen's first classes in 1633, and to the school's charter in 1638. The exact year made a difference because Harvard was founded in 1635 and Boston Latin School in 1636, so 1633 would have made it the oldest school in the country and 1638 wouldn't have. In the 1980s "research" pushed the date back to 1628 – Nieuw Amsterdam was only founded in 1625.

Much was made of the Dutch heritage. The "old" school building, at 241 West 77th Street, between Broadway and West End Avenue, was built around 1892 in a Dutch revival style, with a steep roof-line and notched gable (right). Many of the "traditional" school songs emphasized the Dutch connection – one was even sung in Dutch.



Although the affiliation with the Dutch Reformed Church was formally severed around 1890, the school was physically connected to the West End Collegiate Church next door, and its "Church Parlor", with oil portraits of Calvinist divines, was used for special occasions. Commencement services were held in the church itself.

- The school's logo was a magnificent version of the arms of the founder, Frederik Hendrik, Prince of Orange and Stadthouder of five Dutch provinces at the time of Collegiate's charter. These (simplified!) arms were displayed on a painted marble slab inside the school – that was the only thing about Collegiate that I liked. A nice version of these arms appears in the Wikipedia article on Collegiate at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Collegiate_School.



Collegiate was a stuffy place, to put it mildly – it had the pretensions of a fourth-rate English public school, down to a "Head Boy" (who unlike English head boys was not chosen until graduation). We called our teachers *sir* – there were no women teachers beyond the lower school except the fabulously incompetent music teacher. We had to wear jackets and ties – some even wore an official Collegiate blazer with the school arms on the breast pocket, and a school tie, in imitation of English practice. I never wore these despite their armorial luster because they represented identification with the school, which I was unwilling to manifest even for a heraldic blazer.

- The school had been co-educational until 1890, when girls were excluded. That was not a good idea.

Among Collegiate's many phony traditions was compulsory chapel. This included reciting the Lord's Prayer, singing the Doxology, listening to Bible readings, and singing various creaky Protestant hymns from *The Hymnal for Youth*. Grace was said at lunch. I

call this a phony tradition because in more than five years I never saw any evidence of genuine Christian belief by anyone in authority there, much less any of the Christian virtues such as charity, humility, or loving kindness.

- The Doxology: “Praise God from Whom all blessings flow. / Praise Him all creatures here below. / Praise him above, ye Heavenly Host. / Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.” It was sung to the tune called *Old Hundredth*.

Before I started at Collegiate my parents took care to teach me the Lord’s Prayer. They must have known it would be required and wanted me to be able to recite it. I would like to know now what they were thinking as they taught their son to recite this Christian prayer.⁸ The boys were required to bow their heads during the Lord’s Prayer, except Jews were exempt. I remember looking out over the bowed heads in the chapel and meeting the eyes of the other Jews – in my class there were at least three others, and some halves.

The hymns, banged out on the piano by the so-called music teacher, Mrs. Mutch, included such chestnuts as *Onward, Christian Soldiers, The Church’s One Foundation, Turn Back O Man, Faith of Our Fathers, Holy Holy Holy, From Greenland’s Icy Mountains*, and many others. I’m glad today I know these songs. At Christmastime we also had a lot of Christmas carols, and a Christmas service in the church.

There was also a compulsory Bible class, taught by an ignorant brute named Alan Hoffman, who called himself “The Boss” and also taught shop and soccer. We didn’t use the Bible – we used *Hurlbut’s Story of the Bible* and had to memorize the books of the Bible in order. Actually I’m glad I took that course – Hurlbut gave me an overview of the Bible that came in handy later. But no attempt was made to teach anything about the Bible even one millimeter below the surface.

This aggressive goyishness of Collegiate was a pale imitation of the “muscular Christianity” of the previous century. It speaks volumes that my parents sought out such an environment for me. I wish I knew what those volumes said.

A lot of this would have been forgivable if Collegiate had had the good teachers and high academic standards it was supposed to have. But in fact the level of teaching was really appalling. Few of the teachers rose even to the level of mediocrity. It seemed as if any bum with a bachelor’s degree could teach at Collegiate (as I recall, in those days no license was required to teach in a private school). Examples included:

- The gross vulgarian Charlie Cook, who taught fifth grade and arithmetic. He was known mostly for constantly chewing his tongue because his false teeth didn’t fit.

⁸ My mother also taught me the *Hail Mary* for good measure.

- The hysterical George Mitchell, who turned my desk upside down so all the papers fell out.
- The amazingly coarse Alan Hoffman, who as mentioned taught soccer, Bible and shop.
- Joe Becker, who taught mathematics with such ineptitude that I never learned any of it.
- The pathetic Marie Mutch, who conducted grotesque parodies of music classes. Christopher, who was a real musician, grew close to her, but she seemed quite incompetent to me.
- Henry Adams, a pedant with a phony English accent, who taught English. Many students loved him, though – why I’m not sure.
- Joe Gilmartin, the gym teacher and a notorious bully.
- Emilio J. Calvacca, who taught Latin. He wasn’t *quite* as bad as the others, although Lee Oestreicher loathes him to this day. I actually learned some Latin in his class, although he didn’t help the process very much.

The heavyweights included the Headmaster, Wilson Parkhill, a tall man with a vest and hair parted in the middle like Rudy Vallée, much revered in the *Rector of Justin* manner for no reason I could ever see.⁹ He was assisted by a principal, William Lavarack, a cold drink of water whose bifocals had round secondary lenses in the middle. Kenneth Komoski, whom the boys unkindly and very inaccurately called “Komo the Homo,” was a man of some intelligence who experimented with “teaching machines” and taught history in a not entirely bad way – about him, however, I remember mostly the bullying and hectoring he subjected me to in the hope that it would frighten me or browbeat me into doing better in school. And there was the slimy Hugh Silk, who was a real Englishman. Christopher has pleasant recollections of some of these people, especially Silk. I never heard a kind word or got a drop of inspiration or learning from any of them.

In the moderate camp – poor teachers but not total buffoons – were Eaton Shaw Lothrop, who tried to teach science, and John Tuttle, who tried to teach French. I was so turned off by Collegiate and in such a state of resistance by that time that I never learned much from these people either.

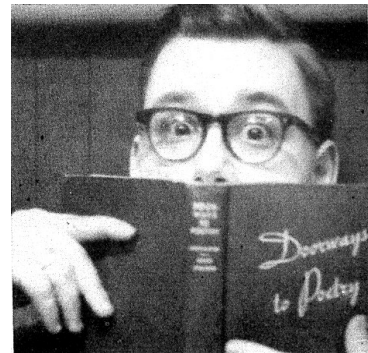
There were a few good eggs. Every year there was one decent person who was also a decent teacher. These people rarely lasted more than a single year. I remember

⁹ *The Rector of Justin* (1964) is a novel by Louis Auchincloss. It is based to some extent on the Rev. Endicott Peabody, for 56 years headmaster of Groton School, which he led in traditional muscular-Christian Rugby style. But in his memoir *A Writer’s Capital* (1974) Auchincloss, who went to Groton, denies it is specifically about Peabody, and says the principal character was modeled on Judge Learned Hand!

especially Robert Hollander (who became a Princeton professor and an authority on Dante), Perry Sturges, the brilliant Mr. Eldredge, George Stade (whom I met again teaching English at Columbia), and Robert Lyons, who taught English when I was in the fifth or sixth grade. From Lyons I learned the structure of English grammar, including the parts of speech and diagramming of sentences. I lapped this information up and use it to this day. Latin helped my understanding of English grammar, just as it was supposed to do.

I also remember some of the support staff, including jolly Mrs. Dorrian, the switchboard operator; Mr. Martiney, the superintendent of works and occasional bus driver; Mrs. Novack, the school nurse; Mrs. Mershon, the office manager; and the Headmaster's secretary Mrs. Crane. Of these I have pleasant memories only of Mrs. Dorrian.

I did very poorly at Collegiate. The responses to this were typically coercive. My father instituted a formal policy of beating me for every unsatisfactory report card, which meant every report card. The school wasn't allowed to beat me, although I'm sure they would have liked to, but instead subjected me to long harangues intended to inspire me to "buckle down." What this all amounted to is that my parents and the school were frustrated that someone obviously capable of doing the work wasn't meeting their expectations. As usual, it was all about *them* – no one ever bothered to inquire *why* a boy so obviously capable – indeed far ahead of most of his classmates, and whose reading habits (see Chapter 4) marked him as someone intensely eager to learn – was not responding to the Collegiate School for Boys. Could it be something about Collegiate's approach? Impossible – Collegiate was *known* to be a *good school*. Therefore *I* had to be the one who wasn't good – it had to be a character flaw in *me*, probably laziness (hence the demand that I "buckle down"). That this was not so was later proved by the fact that as soon as I got to Walden (see Chapter 9), where students were treated with respect, I immediately became an A student (except for math and science) with no prodding needed from anyone.



- “Boredom will always remain the greatest enemy of school disciplines. If we remember that children are bored, not only when they don't happen to be interested in the subject or when the teacher doesn't make it interesting, but also when certain working conditions are out of focus with their basic needs, then we can realize what a great contributor to discipline problems boredom really is. Research has shown that boredom is closely related to frustration and that the effect of too much frustration is invariably irritability, withdrawal, rebellious opposition or aggressive rejection of the whole show.” Fritz Redl, *When We Deal With Children* (1966).

It was a good thing that I completely distrusted my parents and the school, and didn't believe a word they said or recognize the legitimacy of their authority. Their attitudes toward me could have done me considerable damage if I had respected them – I would have internalized their conclusion that I was bad, worthless, and a lazy failure. I know people to whom that very thing happened, with disastrous results. But my self-image was protected by a stubborn self-confidence sturdy enough to resist persistent and systematic attack, and by an independent spirit that gave me the ability to reject the values of those in authority over me. (Reader, if you want to understand the youthful me, read this important paragraph again).

It shows some degree of internalization, however, that when they kept threatening me with expulsion, I feared that sanction even though I hated the school. Now I realize that I should have said: go ahead, expel me! I hate your lousy school anyway – let me out of here! In fact I could easily have forced them to expel me – all I would have had to do would have been to tell Kenneth Komoski to his face that he was full of shit, which he certainly was. Why I didn't do this is a real mystery to me. I was afraid of what my parents would do to me if I was expelled, so forcing it never occurred to me. I don't recall whether I ever asked my parents to let me leave Collegiate, but I'm quite sure that if I had I would have gotten nowhere – after all Collegiate was a *good school*.

One aspect of Collegiate I especially hated was compulsory athletics. *Mens sana in corpore sano*, don't you know.¹⁰ We had to go into the dank locker room next to the boilers and change into sweatsuits, blue shorts, and orange T-shirts which said COLLEGIATE on them. Then we had to do exercises and games in the gym, and in the afternoons go into Riverside Park (or was it Central Park?) for what was called C.R.A., which was more games. Compulsory baseball, for example. I hated every second of this. I should just have refused to do it – no doubt they would have expelled me, and I would

¹⁰ This tag is customarily translated *a sound mind in a sound body*, thus suggesting that if you keep (or are forced to make) your body sound, the soundness of your mind will necessarily follow. But the original (from Juvenal's tenth satire, line 356) reads *orandum est ut sit mens sana in corpore sano*, which means roughly *it is to be prayed that the mind be sound in a sound body*, which is not the same thing at all. The satire continues through other stoic virtues.

Ask for a brave soul that lacks the fear of death,
which places the length of life last among nature's blessings,
which is able to bear whatever kind of sufferings,
does not know anger, lusts for nothing and believes
the hardships and savage labors of Hercules better than
the satisfactions, feasts, and feather bed of an Eastern king.

It is impossible to extrapolate from this that compulsory baseball is good for your education.

have gone back to public school where they had to take me, and where they had recess but no compulsory games.

We were divided into intramural teams – orange and blue. I was an orange. Sometimes I managed to avoid having to participate in sports by being scorekeeper, for example in basketball. I think this was a concession to the other boys, who didn't want me on their team because I was not only inept but completely unmotivated to play the game.¹¹ It could hardly have been a concession to me or to my preferences, which were never given the least notice or consideration by anyone on the faculty (with the exception of the good eggs) on any occasion in more than five years.

Once a year, as a special torture, there was an event called Field Day, where the students were taken to Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx and subjected to an entire day of forced competition in events like jumping and running. Although I hated every day of Collegiate, Field Day was always the worst day of the year for me. I remember once sitting in the school bus which was going to take us to the park and thinking: some day this will all be over, and they will come and ask me for money, and I will be able to refuse. And sure enough, around 1980 my classmate Ting Pei called me up for this very purpose. I told him that this was the other shoe dropping, I had foreseen this day, and it was my great pleasure to say absolutely NO, not a penny, not ever. But it wasn't all bad, he said. The teachers... So I told him what a miserable bunch of fifth-rate losers the teachers were. But there were friendships... Yes, I said, Collegiate was not quite so totalitarian an environment that it prevented the forming of friendships. But it was an unremittingly negative experience and I would never consider supporting it under any circumstances. Thirty years later I remember vividly how very satisfying it was to fulfill my fantasy and stiff Collegiate.

As a kind of coda, I kept getting newsletters and fund-raising mailings from Collegiate until one day in the 1990s I wrote them and said yes, I went to your shitty little school when I was a child and had no choice. I hated every minute of it and never want to hear from you again, stop writing to me. They didn't stop. So I called them up and said I told you to stop. The development director said yes, we got your note and thought it was very funny. I said it was not intended to be funny, and if I ever get a single piece of mail from Collegiate ever again I will complain to the postal inspectors and move against your second-class mailing permit. That finally did it.

- After meeting again in 2009 with my Collegiate classmate Bernie Schachtel, I relented and now allow Collegiate to send me class notes. Through Bernie I have

¹¹ In Morris Panych's 1995 play *Vigil*, the character Kemp says "I couldn't catch a ball to save my life. Why would I want to? I'd only have to throw it back again." That sums up my attitude as a student athlete.

reconnected with many friends from my class, and am sorry I waited so long to do it. But I'll still never give Collegiate a dime.

Collegiate had compulsory pep rallies in the chapel, where the abominable Joe Becker wasted our time exhorting us to show school spirit and support “our” team against Allen-Stevenson or Trinity or Locust Valley or other schools in “our” league. These lame attempts at indoctrination would have increased my contempt for the place if that had been possible. Our teams were supposedly called the Peglegs, after Pieter Stuyvesant who had a wooden leg. I never heard anyone call them that outside the sports stories in the school newspaper.

Along these lines, there were lots of school songs in which we had to sing of our love for Collegiate. I remember all these songs. One went: “Here’s to thee, Collegiate! Through all our days, hearts ever loyal beat for thee always!” Much the same kind of forced adulation goes on in North Korea, with about as much justification.¹²

The traditional punishment was called Saturday detention. This required you to come in on Saturday and sit silent and motionless at a desk with your hands folded for three hours straight. It was typical of Collegiate to impose an empty waste of time as a punishment – wasting time was what they were best at. I had detention almost every week. Like athletics, that was something else I should have refused to do. If they had expelled me for it, well, so much the better.

The student newspaper was called the *Collegiate Journal*, which came out I think eight times a year on glossy paper. I wrote for the *Journal* – satirical pieces in what I imagined was the Robert Benchley manner, comic poems, and eventually a regular feature profiling a faculty member for each issue. By the 10th grade I was in the line of succession to be Editor in Chief in my senior year, except I left the school and never got to do it. Christopher has some of my *Journal* pieces – I cannot bear to read them, and ask that whoever reads this memoir in the Yale Library not read them either. If I could destroy every copy I would do so.

- We also had a yearbook called *The Dutchman*. Christopher has all these in his papers, and my picture appears in the volumes for my years there.

There were school plays, which I took part in. One was an adaptation of *Oklahoma!*, in which I was the narrator, a part not in the original. I still remember my humiliation at

¹² Here’s another one:

Hurrah for the orange and blue!
To Collegiate we’ll ever be true.
She gives us the knowledge
That sends us to college.
Hurrah for the orange and blue!

forgetting my lines. Another was called *All at Sea*, a monstrous pastiche of *Pirates of Penzance*, *H.M.S. Pinafore*, and *The Mikado*.¹³ I was the Lord Chancellor, in a costume of my own devising – a woman’s old black silk coat, a chain with a medallion (actually a brass plumbing part) around my neck, and (from a costume shop) a British judicial wig. It amused me to go home on the 79th Street crosstown bus in this costume – the bus driver called me *lady*.

There was a small narrow soda fountain/lunch counter at the southwest corner of 78th and Broadway which became a student hangout we called The Gyp Joint. The site is now occupied by a Cuban restaurant.

We had a toothless form of self-government at Collegiate – there was a Student Council (before which I was arraigned, tried and convicted for some petty offense which I now forget) and also a class meeting with officers. One year T’ing Pei, Lee Oestreicher and I used a parliamentary device to recall the class president and elect a new one. Without the teacher knowing what we were about to do, I pre-secured enough votes to get the measure through. The administration promptly annulled our maneuver, showing just how false the whole class government exercise really was. Not that it mattered who was class president, of course, but the school could not abide even the most inconsequential show of independence in thought, word or deed.

- Class government was supposed to teach us the mechanics of democracy, but when it produced a little *actual* democracy the authorities did not hesitate to suppress it. Come to think of it, maybe that was not such a bad lesson in how real-life democracy actually works.

A year or two ahead of me there was a small coterie of brilliant young intellectuals, led by Dan Hofstadter (son of Columbia professor Richard Hofstadter, and now a distinguished author) and Walter Murch (son of scientific illustrator Walter Murch, and now a distinguished film editor). They published a magazine of their own. Unfortunately I was just too young to mix with them, but I remember them with admiration.

I remember one commencement in the church especially well – it was the year Peter Bogdanovich, later a noted film director, graduated from Collegiate. The custom was for the Headmaster, as he called each graduate’s name, to say what college he was going to. When he called Bogdanovich’s name the Headmaster said he wasn’t going to college, but was going to seek his fortune (did he add “in Hollywood?”). A gasp went through the

¹³ All (except the pastiche) by Gilbert & Sullivan.

crowd. Not go to college? Had someone escaped from the treadmill? Was it possible to break free? Not for me, as it turned out – but Bogdanovich had a more successful career than I had, without another day of school.



Tailpiece: 241 West 77th Street.
This was the door I went through every day.