

## **Chapter 9: Walden (1961-1963)**

Treat people as if they were what they ought to be and  
you help them to become what they are capable of being.

Goethe

Nine tenths of education is encouragement.

Anatole France

When in 1961, after the interlude related in Chapter 8, I finally returned to school, I did not re-enter Collegiate, the unpleasant school described in Chapter 3C.10, and where I had been failing anyway. Either my parents finally recognized Collegiate's unsuitability for me, or possibly, because I had been a problem for them, and failing, Collegiate did not want me back. I don't know whether my parents would have sent me back to Collegiate if they had been able to – as usual I was not consulted.

However, this time a good choice was made, to send me to Walden for the 11th grade. Toby Garson, a friend of my parents and mother of my Collegiate friend Lee Oestreicher, had sent her daughter Laurie (a few years younger than I) to Walden. Also there was a family connection. My cousin Nate Levine, a teacher and the son of my Aunt Sarah Levine, *née* Rubinstein, had gone there himself as a child and was about to start work as head of the high school. Walden was a progressive school, which made a welcome change from the snooty regressive *faux*-English authoritarian style of Collegiate. It was probably thought that as I had done so poorly with that kind of school, it was worth trying something different. And, for once, that was the right decision.

Walden occupied a large and imposing building at 1 West 88th Street on the corner of Central Park West. The building has since been torn down for a huge apartment house, and I can find no image of it on the Internet. Walden went from kindergarten through 12th grade; the high school was sort of separate and we didn't have much to do with the younger kids. It was a venerable institution among the lefty Jewish population of Manhattan's Upper West Side. This is from [www.webster.edu/~woolfm/naumburgcane.html](http://www.webster.edu/~woolfm/naumburgcane.html):

In 1914 Margaret Naumburg started what she called the "Children's School." She later renamed it the Walden School. She wanted to practice her belief that "the emotional development of children, fostered through encouragement of spontaneous creative expression and self-motivated learning, should take precedence over the traditional intellectual approach to the teaching of a standardized curriculum."

This approach was still followed at Walden in my day (1961-63), and it proved just the right approach, for me anyway. My parents and I had an interview with the Director, Dr.



Milton Akers, and he admitted me despite the events of Chapter 8. Whether this was because of IQ scores or Nate's intervention or Toby Garson or just what, I'm not sure – my record at Collegiate and my recent background did not seem to make me an attractive candidate. But I was in, and I turned up on opening day in the big lobby off West 88th Street, ready for school. I met Nate there – it was his first day too. He was 42; I was 17. Here he is at left.

Walden was something of a culture shock for me. Students called teachers by their first names at Walden – at Collegiate we called them *sir*. Also startling: girls! Collegiate had no girls, and of course there were no girls in Chapter 8. To have all these girls around on a casual basis was revolutionary to me. I liked that very, very much indeed.

Another change: Walden students dressed as they liked. Naturally for everyone but me, this meant T-shirts and blue jeans and normal kid clothing. But I had grown up wearing a jacket and tie, as required at Collegiate, and I showed up on my first day as usual, wearing a Brooks Brothers jacket and a conservative tie, carrying a copy of the *New York Times*. I was ribbed a bit about this but I stood my ground – the rule was to wear what felt comfortable, and this was how I felt comfortable.

- I still do wear tweed jackets of the same kind I have worn for more than 50 years, although it is hard to find any that fit me nowadays. But I haven't worn a tie more than a couple of times a year since my office stopped expecting them in the late 1990s (see Chapter 31.K).



The left-wing, civil-rights-friendly, predominantly Jewish atmosphere was also new to me. My parents were liberals but not left-wingers. Unlike Collegiate, there were black students in our class (called Negroes in those days, the word carefully capitalized). Andrew Goodman, not black but one of the civil rights workers killed during Mississippi Freedom Summer in 1964, had gone to Walden. Indeed Dick Crosscup, the English teacher, was married to a Negro (I later learned she was the poet Gwendolyn Brooks), and according to Walden folklore had lost a teaching position at Harvard for this reason. He would have been a hero at Walden for that even if he hadn't been such a good teacher.

The Class of 1963 had 28 students, which was unusually large – most Walden classes had only a little over 20. Most of the class was Jewish. I remember that when the new students stood to identify themselves, there was a groan when I said my name was David

– there were already three Davids, and I was the fourth out of 12 boys. (There was even a David Rubinstein, but no relation.)

Even with a jacket and tie, I was readily accepted by my classmates and made a lot of friends, among the girls as well as the boys. Carl Ebert could whistle entire Bach cantatas. Tim Murphy, like me a year behind, knew a lot about the sea. Wendy Cadden lived near me, on East 73rd Street, and we hung around a lot together. She later became a distinguished Lesbian artist. Also I still had friends from my circle at Collegiate. They were mostly Jewish too.

We had an outstanding faculty. I remember especially Dick Crosscup and Cathy Bing, who also taught English; France Berton (a woman of exceptional intelligence, grace and beauty) and Stanley Bosworth, who both taught French (in 12th grade: Proust); and Bette, whose last name I forget, who taught history and was my home room teacher in 11th grade. Could we have read *Moby-Dick* in 11th grade English? It seems such a long and ambitious book for high school, and yet I think I remember that we did. The English assignments were interesting and challenging, quite unlike Collegiate where they would flog us, half asleep, through old chestnuts like *Silas Marner*. I remember also Sylvia Weil, the art teacher, a classic Bohemian artist type with silver and turquoise jewellery, and the secretary and administrator of the high school, a middle-aged gray-haired Jewish lady named Rose Leinwand, but whom everyone called Spike. Spike held the place together not only with efficiency but with kindness and courtesy and genuine interest in the students.

The star of the faculty was Stanley Bosworth, who went on to a distinguished headmastership at St. Ann's School in Brooklyn. In the 12th grade everyone had a special class called a seminar, and I was lucky enough to be assigned to Stanley's. The subject of Stanley's seminar was how we know we know something. That this *was even a question* was news to me, and I learned a great deal in this class. The following is from a 2004 newspaper article.

Stanley was a “proselytizer” who’d taught at NYU and at the Walden School on 88th Street. “He was flat-out the best teacher I’ve ever had,” says Marc Landy, one of Bosworth’s early Walden students, now a professor of political science at Boston College. “He didn’t teach subjects as if they were just subjects, he taught it like, *These ideas are really important, so you better come to grips with them, you’d better bring intellectual courage*. I liked his show of toughness. It made it so I could think about the life of the mind as something I could do, something manly enough. He didn’t treat us like teenagers, he taught us like we were important people.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Emphasis in original. The quotation is from “The Devil & St. Ann’s,” by Ariel Levy, in *New York Magazine*, May 10, 2004, [http://nymag.com/nymetro/news/people/features/n\\_10337/](http://nymag.com/nymetro/news/people/features/n_10337/) .

I could not have said it better. He was one of the best teachers I've ever had, too, right up there with the famously brilliant faculty at the University of Pennsylvania Law School. And although he was the best at it, the attitude Landy describes was the prevailing attitude among the Walden teachers. What a change from Collegiate!

I did especially well in history. Our textbook was *A Short History of the United States*, by Allen Nevins and Henry Steele Commager (1943). As noted in Chapter 5, I read it several times, tutored other students from it, got a foundation in American history from it, and still recommend it as a terrific introduction to the subject. An A+ paper I wrote in my first term at Walden, on Machiavelli's *The Prince*, full of historical illustrations of points he made, won me the respect of the faculty and even occasional admission to the faculty lounge.

I did not do well in math or science. I dragged my way through science – I don't think I was resisting, as I was in Collegiate and sometimes later at Columbia, but I just could not get it and the science teacher, although good-natured, was not particularly effective. Math was a disaster – I absolutely could not understand anything beyond simple algebra. I got lost at quadratic equations and never found my way out. When it came to trigonometry my scores on tests were around 27 (out of 100). But shockingly, instead of responding with Collegiate-style bashings and bawlings-out and long diatribes on how indolent I must be, Nate Levine said OK, this isn't working, you are doing well in other subjects, forget about math. Astounding! I am still grateful to him for that.



He did the same thing in physical education. Everyone had to go to PE, and I loathed it as I always had, so Carl Ebert and I formed a cell which we called COPE (Conscientious Objectors to Physical Education). We would spend our time in the showers, imitating works of classical sculpture (our favorite was Laocoön and his sons in the grip of the serpents, left). Finally Nate said OK, it is pointless to insist on this, you don't have to do PE either. What a man! What a school!

I was happy in school and applied myself willingly, which was a novelty for me. The main reason for this was that, true to the tradition of its founder and the progressive school approach, Walden treated its students with respect. That was all I needed, and it is unfortunate that I had to wait until the 11th grade to get it. But I was a hardy plant who just needed water. At Walden they watered me liberally, and I responded with blossoms and fruit. If it had not been for Walden I could never have been admitted to Columbia – I might not even have finished high school.



They treated me with respect, so I treated them with respect. If my teachers asked me to read something I read it, because I trusted them that it would be interesting and helpful, and because I didn't want to disappoint them, and wanted to do well in their eyes. That was all it took.

We took a class trip to Washington DC and stayed in the Hotel Pennsylvania near Union Station. One of my female classmates took the initiative and sat on my lap and encouraged me to make out with her. I had never touched a girl in any of those places before, and I enjoyed it extremely much. Reader, are you old enough to remember the 2000-year-old man sketch, with Mel Brooks in the title role, interviewed by Carl Reiner?

Reiner:	Do you remember who discovered sex?
Brooks:	Oh, yeah, that was Bernie.
Reiner:	Bernie? Could you elaborate on that?
Brooks:	Yeah, Bernie said, he woke up one morning and he said, "I think there are ladies here."
Reiner:	Why did he think that?
Brooks:	He said "In the middle of the night, I was thrilled and delighted."

That's pretty much how I felt. Now that I knew it could be done, I tried this out with some other girls, and was thrilled and delighted each time. Neither the thrill nor the delight has faded for me one little bit almost 50 years later.

Tim Murphy was also a year behind, so we both turned 18 early in our senior years. As 18 was the drinking age in New York in those days, Tim and I would go out sometimes at lunch or after school and hoist a few at a bar on Columbus Avenue, a block west of Walden. During the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962, Tim and I got all patriotic and decided to join the Navy, which very dangerously we were old enough to do. Fortunately we didn't join up right away, and the crisis ended before we rallied to the colors. How President Kennedy faced down the Russians without us I'll never know.

Other things I remember from Walden.

- Working on the Literary Magazine. It had the not-all-that-ingenuous title Gamtil (*Litmag* backwards). There was a lot of adolescent writing in it – I may even have contributed some of my own. If I did I can't remember it now.
- I was elected class president in the second half of 11th grade. This was not as much fun as I'd expected it to be. As the class meeting had no real purpose, and as there was a lefty anarchic spirit in the school anyway, I was unable to keep order in the meeting. People threw things at me as I was standing up at front of

the class. It was nothing personal against me – they were just rebelling.<sup>2</sup> Finally I decided there was no point in trying to shape chaos and resigned.

- Our yearbook pictures were taken, not at the school in the usual identical way, but in true progressive school spirit one at a time, in a place and attitude of our choosing, by a photographer engaged for this purpose. Mine was taken on a bench on Fifth Avenue in front of the wall of Central Park. I wore a jacket and tie, as usual. In my pocket was a paperback copy of Dostoyevsky's *The Grand Inquisitor*. And I was smoking a cigarette. This seemed a natural thing as I was always smoking a cigarette except when I was actually inside the school building, but it was kind of daring to be photographed for a school publication openly smoking. I wish I still had that yearbook. What could have happened to it? I would never have thrown it away, but it is gone.
- Graduation was held, on June 6, 1963, not at Walden but in the Dalton School auditorium at 108 East 89th Street. Our diplomas were hand-drawn – or at least the pattern was – by Sylvia Weil, the art teacher. Where is my high school diploma now?

*The Senior Class of the Walden School  
requests your presence at its  
Commencement Exercises  
June sixth, nineteen hundred and sixty-three  
seven-thirty p.m.  
at The Dalton School  
108 East Eighty-ninth Street  
New York*

Walden expanded a few years after I left, and bought another building further west on 88th Street. The idea as I heard it was more space for the school on lower floors, and income property above. But it didn't work, and the cost contributed to Walden's going under and closing down not long afterwards. I forget the exact date it folded, but it was quite a loss to a lot of people.

School wasn't the only thing happening during my Walden years 1961-63. I taught myself about classical music by listening to WNCN and WQXR, two New York FM radio stations. Up in my room on the top floor of the 70th Street house, where no one else went, I kept it on a lot, listening and noting the name of the composer after a piece was played. I had been exposed to classical music before, but knew almost nothing about it. I learned what I liked (I liked Mozart and Bach and Vivaldi) and even got some records, although the only record player was downstairs in the living room. I had a sort of out-of-body experience sitting in front of my father's huge copper speaker listening to Bach's Brandenburg Concertos. I still didn't know all that much – I didn't learn classical music in any real depth until my own radio career in 1983-88, described in Chapter 26.A – but I learned something about it and sort of broke the code.

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<sup>2</sup> As a result of this episode no one was sent to a psychologist for being disruptive and diagnosed as a mental deviant – it was just put down to high spirits. Imagine that!

I spoke on the phone to one of my favorite classical announcers on WNCN and he invited me down to the station. I took a few records with me, he played them on the air, and we talked. I was thrilled to have penetrated this sanctuary. After broadcasting on WOMR I now know it was not such a high citadel as I thought – unlike popular music DJs, who have much shorter cuts, classical DJs have long periods with nothing to do. I was amazed that such a rich baritone voice belonged to such a small man. Later I too would develop the famous FM baritone.

Another station I listened to a lot was WOR. This was an old-style AM station specializing in talk rather than music. The great monologist Jean Shepherd was on this station, and so were many other personalities of the day. One of my favorites was an all-night talk show, with guests, hosted by Long John Nebel. I usually stayed up very late, often all night long, and Long John kept me company. Many nights I remember hearing the birds starting to sing, and that's when I knew night was over and morning was here.

My parents left me pretty much alone after the events of Chapter 8. As recounted at the end of that chapter, they had shot their bolt and after I turned 18 there was not a lot left they could do to me. I stayed out of their way as much as I could, and they stayed out of mine. That was the best result either of us could have hoped for.

I had two summer jobs during this period. One was at Grey Advertising, in a large modern office building on Park Avenue in the low 50s. I think my father got me this job through Phillips Van Heusen (see Chapter 2). I was a messenger. I reported to the mailroom, and when packages needed to be delivered – usually papers or advertising artwork or mysterious tubes – they were given to me to deliver, usually by public transportation. I was paid a flat hourly wage, and sometimes when I was late for work I would blow it all getting down Park Avenue in a taxi. Anyway it was kind of fun, and I got a view of New York I had not had before. The job did not last long, but then it wasn't intended to. I think that was in the early summer of 1962, because I went to the Seattle World's Fair later that summer – see Chapter 30.A.

The other job was as a process server. My friend Joan Hamburg's father Morris was a lawyer and he engaged me to serve papers – summonses and deposition notices and so on – I never looked inside the papers, which were folded vertically in the old-fashioned style. This had to have been in 1963, the summer after senior year, before I went to Europe, because you had to be 18 to sign a return of service and I didn't turn 18 until September 1962, after the summer was over. If Grey Advertising gave me a different view of New York, this did so even more.

I developed many canny ruses. Certain papers – trial subpoenas probably – had to be delivered with \$2 in cash. I would get a \$2 bill and go to the front desk of a sleazy hotel and ask to see Mr. So and So – I said I had money for him. When Mr. So and So turned up I gave him the \$2 bill and the subpoena at the same time. I was modestly successful as a process server and enjoyed it for the short time I did it.

After working for Mr. Hamburg I went to Europe (and Morocco), for the first time on my own, in the summer of 1963 (see Chapter 30.D). Then I came back and prepared to move up to Columbia to start college – see Chapters 11 and 12.



Tailpiece: Moby-Dick, by Rockwell Kent (1930)