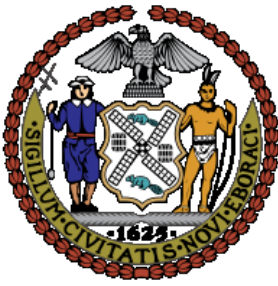
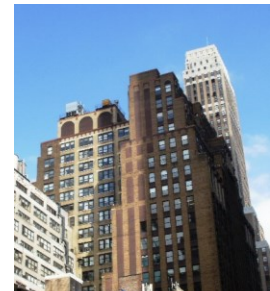
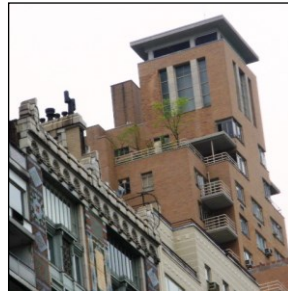


Dear Friends,



On April 29 I went to New York City (seal at left) mainly to attend two high school reunions – the 50th Reunion of the Collegiate School Class of 1962, and the more informal first-ever reunion of the likewise more informal Walden School Class of 1963. I was a member of both classes – I went to Collegiate from the fifth through tenth grades, and then (after a year with the Spanish Foreign Legion, fighting the rebels in Morocco) finished up my last two years at Walden.¹

New York in the Spring was as lovely as always. The flowers were mostly gone from the trees, but in their place stood masses of green. There was bright new growth on the freshly-trimmed hedges of the fancy apartment buildings on the Upper East Side. Riverside Drive in the mist was as lush and elegant as ever. Hot dogs and whitefish salad and shish kebab and genuine onion bagels and matzo ball soup and Dr. Brown's Cel-Ray Tonic were available everywhere. An upward glance revealed a fantastic skyline of intricate towers and parapets much like the imaginary stylized towers Roman and medieval artists put into their urban scenes. Compare the cityscapes on the Byzantine ivories shown on pages 7 and 8 below.

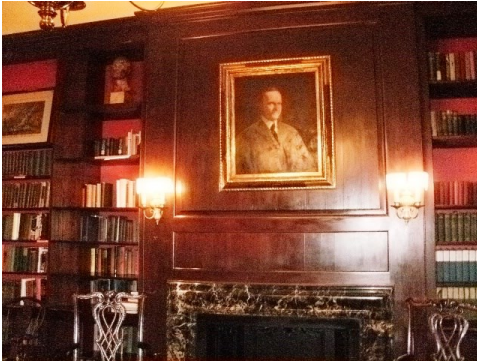


I stayed in my brother Christopher's apartment on East 74th Street, and he was there for the first few days of my stay. He invited me to the Nederland Club's annual Queen's Day (*Koninginnedag*) birthday party for the Queen of the Netherlands (right) – the tradition is to wear a touch of orange to show loyalty to the dynasty.² The Nederland Club uses the facilities of the Women's National



¹ In my autobiography, see <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/1fs2rd2xo7zyoxu/IqO9boQ7ts>. I discuss my Collegiate experience in Chapter 3C, Walden in Chapter 9.

² The House of Orange-Nassau – the name *Orange* comes originally from a principality built around the city of Orange in what is now southern France. April 30 is not Queen Beatrix' actual birthday (it's January 31), but the anniversary of her accession to the throne on her mother Queen Juliana's abdication in 1980.



Republican Club on 51st Street, just west of Fifth Avenue. The party was very jolly and full of orange, but (maybe because of the free drinks) unbearably loud, so I retreated upstairs. The staircases at the WNRC are lined with portraits of Republican clubwomen, each looking meaner than the one before. The library had only a few books, but a portrait of President Coolidge hung over the mantel for inspiration (left). The neighboring parlor –

like the library completely deserted – had a portrait of Hoover so dark it was hard to recognize him. Indeed the whole room was so dark, and so gloomy and depressing with its threadbare chintz sofas and tiny wall sconces, that it seemed like the perfect place to write a suicide note.

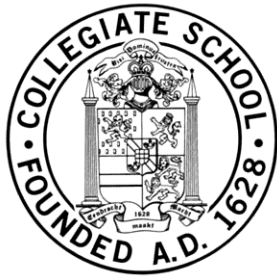
The Collegiate Reunion began with a dinner at the Yale Club (right), a suitably imposing fortress of the ruling class for which Collegiate was intended to prepare us. Most of us had not seen each other for at least 50 years (52 for me), and did not recognize our much-changed friends until we checked the name tags. Only then could we discern the long-remembered features in unfamiliar faces, once we knew who we were looking for. Without the name tags it would have been a mess.³



Still, once we knew who we were talking to, it was terrific to see these people again. Why did we lose touch? There were major disruptions in eighth and ninth grades, when the herd was culled and half of us were sent away to boarding schools, and again when we left, either for college or in my case for another school. We *could* have kept up our relationships, but mostly we didn't – in part it was because we were looking only forward, to what seemed like unlimited time and experience, and partly in my case anyway because of self-absorption, and

³ I had lunch earlier in the week with a close friend from Walden who came in from New Jersey to meet me at the train station. We did not recognize each other, despite checking each other out like blind dates, until we called on our cell phones from 30 feet apart.

because we didn't know to value what we had.⁴ And in part it was because keeping up was harder in those days. There was no e-mail, and long-distance phone calls were expensive and sometimes difficult to arrange. Writing letters was deliberate and cumbersome and carried the weighty subtext of formalizing friendship and demanding a response. If we had known back then how much we were losing by thoughtless neglect, we would have done better. But of course we didn't know much of anything at 13 or 15 or 17. Even now we don't know as much as we think we do.



The second day of the reunion began with an early breakfast and a formal convocation in the Collegiate (Dutch Reform) Church next to the school, with which it was formally affiliated for centuries and where solemn school ceremonies are still held. The grizzled alumni of the class of 1962 were supposed to process up the aisle to demonstrate to current students the imperishable ties of loyalty that bind us to the dear old school. I felt no such ties or loyalty, and indeed my experience at Collegiate was almost uniformly negative. I was attending the reunion only to see my classmates, and I could not bring myself to simulate loyalty and allegiance even for the chance to march in a procession. So I didn't turn up until lunch, held in the old gym that was the scene of so much suffering in my student days, and even then I had to sit through painfully boring speeches by earnest upperclassmen telling how, with true grit and the famous Collegiate spirit, they won their basketball games and debate matches, or worked hard inside the political system (through the Student Council) to have a favored snack added to the vending machines.

After lunch there was supposed to be an oral history session, where the veterans from our class were to reminisce into microphones manned by film students from the Theatre Arts Department. I was of two minds about this: should I say what I really thought about how awful the school was, or should I behave myself? But only two people showed up for the event, so it was cancelled, and I never did have to choose. Instead a Theatre Arts instructor invited us upstairs to see a rehearsal of a student performance of Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge*, a very serious and difficult play and a surprisingly ambitious choice for a high school production. As I knew the play well the teacher was kind enough to let me offer some notes to the actors (the girls came from other fancy private schools as Collegiate is for boys only, yet another reason why going there was a suboptimal experience). The students and their teacher all did very well. In my day the best we could do for a

⁴ "It is the privilege of early youth to live in advance of its days in all the beautiful continuity of hope which knows no pauses and no introspection." Joseph Conrad, *The Shadow Line* (1916).

school play was a highly abridged one-act version of *Oklahoma!* scored for a single untuned piano.

That evening there was another ceremony in the new auditorium, after which we ate canapés and drank screwdrivers (open bar) and exchanged condensed life histories (what have you been doing for the past 52 years?) and recollections of the flamingly incompetent teachers of yesteryear. One classmate identified the three ages of man as Youth, Middle Age, and You Look Great.⁵ The young Alumni Liaison Officer who coordinated the reunion told me I had won the prize for coming the longest distance to attend (beating out a colleague who came from Panama), but it turned out there was no prize. After soaking up as many free drinks as we could, we moved on to another class dinner in a restaurant on Amsterdam Avenue.⁶

Walden was a very different kind of school from Collegiate. Where Collegiate was a preppy ruling-class training academy, trying hard if unsuccessfully to be a day-school version of Groton complete with a *Rector of Justin*-style headmaster who looked like Rudy Vallée, Walden was a lefty Jewish progressive school very big on art and civil rights, where the students called the teachers by their first names (instead of *sir*) and we read *Moby Dick* instead of *Silas Marner*. Night and day! Also Walden had girls – after 260 years of coeducation, more or less, Collegiate decided in 1890 that excluding girls would make their school better. They were stupendously wrong about that, as about so much else.



The reunions were superficially very different too. There was no Yale Club dinner. There was no Alumni Liaison Officer and no luncheon in the old gym, because the school doesn't exist any more. I can't show a school seal for Walden – here instead is the cake from our class dinner.⁷ Rather than an Alumni Office function, our reunion was a spontaneous project begun by two especially enterprising

⁵ And a few of us *did* look great – one classmate in particular reminded me of Toscanini with his silver hair, trimmed moustache, and immaculate blazer. The rest of us looked more like Bruno Walter on a bad day.

⁶ The reunion invitations specified that “spouses” would be welcome at all events. Although as noted Collegiate was for boys only, I assume the word *spouses* was chosen instead of *wives* in case one of us wanted to bring a husband instead, which did not happen. I wrote back to the school and asked, since I didn't have a spouse, if the school would provide one for me, just for the weekend. That didn't happen either.

⁷ It was actually only our 49th anniversary reunion, not our 50th, but who's counting?

members of the class, and developed as we found each other on the Internet. In the end we found 93% of the senior class – 26 of 28 – and many more who had left before senior year.⁸

My Walden class reunited at three parties, each at a differently fabulous New York apartment (one in lower Broadway, one on the Upper East Side, and one in Chelsea), plus a reunion dinner in a restaurant. We had been a very close group and were highly delighted to see each other again – no ceremonies or speeches about school spirit were required. We clumped into groups and then moved from group to group, renewing old friendships. The Collegiate reunion was much like that too, stripped of its fripperies. There was a dreamlike quality to both of them, as if we were all tripping in 1960 and had a sudden psychedelic group vision of what we would look like 50+ years into the future. I felt like Rip Van Winkle in Irving's story, who awoke one day feeling just the same, but found years had passed and everyone else had changed.

It was a real question: *had* we changed? On the outside, of course we had, from young to old, from teenagers into grandparents, from people who could not imagine what they would do with their lives to people who had already done whatever it was and had retired. But on the inside many of us were noticeably the same; even *on the outside of the inside* people had the same voices and mannerisms as before, and seemed to display the same essence. I looked inside: had *I* changed, fundamentally? I thought I had, that LSD had reconfigured me and made me very different from the man I was shaping up to be back then. But people who knew me in 1963 didn't seem to think so. This question of essential change is a deep mystery, and we will not get to the bottom of it here.

What else happened? I visited with friends and relatives. I attended the film seminar my sister-in-law Christina taught at Columbia, where she kindly allowed me to participate; it was held in Dodge Hall, where appropriately enough my draft counseling office was located in 1967. While at Columbia I prowled the haunts of my youth, and checked out the heraldry section of the library hoping to find a flag book suitable for translating, and dozed in a library nook where I had dozed as an undergraduate and later as a graduate student. Still sleepy! The white marquees were out for commencement, which as my Columbia classmate Joel Solkoff points out is not a beginning but an end.

I didn't walk the streets of New York as much as I would have liked to on this trip – time was short, and I ended up going almost everywhere in a taxi. But I did walk some, and it was as much of a pleasure as it always is when the weather is

⁸ There were a few who died before we found them, but we found them anyway, and remembered them. *Requiescant in pace.*

good. If you keep your eyes open, and above street level, Manhattan is crammed with exuberant decoration. It isn't quite Paris, but it's close. Below are a few samples snapped with my pocket point-and-shoot camera.



All this did not leave much time for theatre, but I did manage to see an electrifying modern staging of *Macbeth*. Often innovative staging is intrusive in Shakespeare, serving no purpose but to draw attention to the director's whimsy, but not here. "Where the place?" asks the first witch; for example. "Upon the heath," answers the second. The third witch, played by a tall thin middle-aged black man in spectacles and a raincoat, begins his line "There to meet with ..." but cannot quite remember the name, so he reaches for a clipboard and flips through papers until he finds the work order: "... Macbeth." At the end, the same witch closes the action by putting a card into a time clock. He punches the card, and then blackout. The whole tragedy of ambition and treachery and murder and revenge is revealed as just another routine day's work for the witches. The actors were good too – I cannot imagine ever forgetting Ty Jones' terrified screams as he saw the ghost of Banquo.⁹

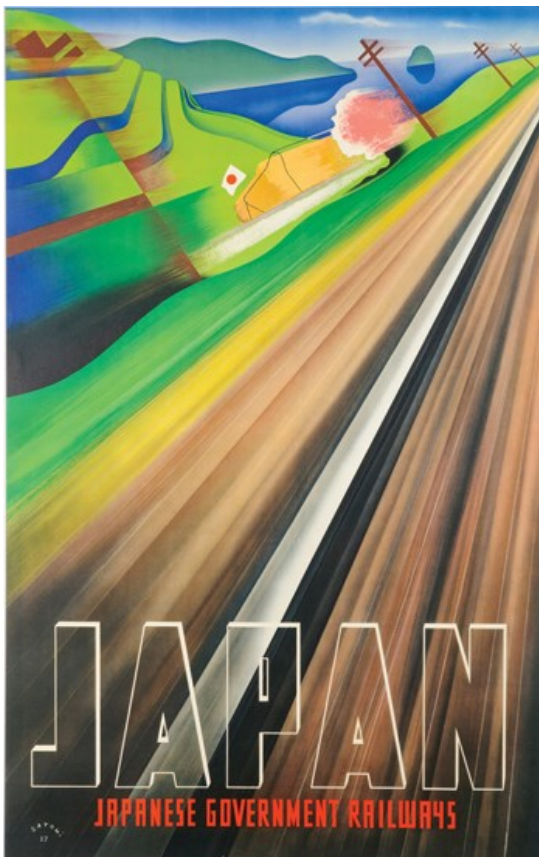
I was lucky also in choosing two superb museum exhibitions. The Japan Society's "Deco Japan: Shaping Art and Culture 1920-1945" showed dazzling Japanese Art Deco material we hardly ever get to see. Below left is a Government Railway

⁹ Playing "Two Sleepy People" as the lights went down for intermission was a nice touch too.

Poster from 1937 (by Satomi Munetsugu) – there was lots more of similar quality in many different media. Also fun at the Japan Society: a control panel in the men’s room stall that offered Rear Cleansing, Rear Cleansing (Soft), Front Cleansing (I wasn’t quite the demographic for that one), Drying, and Stop. You could also select Oscillating and Pulsating. I tried Rear Cleansing (Soft) and felt the gentlest whispery kiss of warm water right where it was needed. What an aim! It was soft indeed. Hooked, I tried the Regular next. After adding Oscillation, I looked past the Stop button for one that said *Don’t Stop*. Don’t Stop Ever.

I also made time to see “Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition” at the Metropolitan Museum. My second favorite among many beautiful objects was a sixth century ivory of an apostle (below right).

There was so much else to see there – on the next page I show my favorite item, a scene of St. Mark preaching in Alexandria (an ivory plate from the so-called Grado Chair, borrowed from the Louvre).



And I cannot help including an Egyptian ivory portrait of myself. The label says it's Silenus, the god of wine and tutor of Dionysios. But really it's me – I often



danced under that name in Alexandria in those days. Everybody knew me.

Finally, just as a hint of steaminess and impending summer spiced the air in New York, I went to Newark Airport and flew to London. What happened next will be told in my next letter.

David

May 2012

