

Chapter 3

SCHOOLING AND EDUCATION:
WASTED DAYS AND WASTED NIGHTS

He had been eight years in a public school, and had learnt, I understood, to make Latin verses of several sorts, in the most admirable manner. But I never heard that it had been anybody's business to find out what his natural bent was, or where his failings lay, or to adapt any kind of knowledge to **him**....I did doubt whether Richard would not have profited by some one studying him a little instead of his studying them quite so much.

— Esther, describing Richard's education, in Charles Dickens' Bleak House

They wasted my time all right, and I wasted theirs, during my six years of junior high and high school in the 1960s. We all would have been better off if I'd just skipped the whole thing. Had the teachers been able to step off the assembly line and find out about me, to look at my bent rather than try to bend me to the system, to educate me rather than school me, they might have seen that my rebellion was a desperate and hence legitimate one, a pathway to be explored and not a barrier to be crushed.

I was driven by the need to declare and seize independence that all teenagers have in some measure, but which becomes a singular mission — to borrow a concept from Franz Fanon, psychologist of revolution — for those who feel colonized. Accepting the little rules of daily life was self-hatred; breaking them was self-assertion. Some of my earliest memories from childhood are of secretly resenting and resisting my parents' control. I recall sitting on the stairs at four or five, just outside my parent's line of vision, sticking out my tongue and mouthing the words "Shut up!" in a tearful rage at their words and their power. By beating me unconscious, my father threw down a gauntlet that I had to take up openly and loudly, so my terrified resistance became surly rebellion.

My personal drama was compounded by my growing awareness of the ugly side of the American dream, the war and poverty created by the very system we were being schooled to join and perhaps lead. This gave my innate resistance a hazy political logic: I was fighting schools that sustained privilege both within America and between America and the Third World, that separated the draftable working class kids who would fight and die in Vietnam from the draft-exempt, college-bound kids who would become the custodians of privilege. Brutal reality had turned the fine words of both my family and my teachers to ashes in my mouth, and obedience would have been collaboration with the enemy. I spent those years as an irreverent powderkeg, a rebel with a dimly known cause, sensing that to cooperate with any authority figure who coerced, threatened, or condescended would be to acquiesce in my own degradation.

The debility of the schools and my personal distress were both so immense that each could have killed my education on its own. Desperate for acceptance and affection but ashamed by that need, my alienation from family and community was complete and confusing. Even in grade school I had felt a bit like a midnight girl in a sunset town, wanting to do and feel more than calm Ithaca could offer. By junior high, the inchoate dreams of adult greatness surging inside me became dreams of great rebellion, which were transformed into a hatred of my parents' apparently complacent household and my school's orderly march.

During the year after my father's attack, a playful wrestling match with a visiting cousin triggered an instinct for survival that became my trademark of scared aggressiveness. He was slightly older and stronger, and was able to pin me down and inflict various teenage tortures. It was simple rough and tumble, so at first he thought I was faking when I began to scream and struggle wildly. Being held down had brought on the same feeling of helplessness that I'd experienced at my father's hands. As I felt my power to resist weaken, something inside told me not to count on my cousin's judgment to make him stop. Elemental fear for my life overcame the social fear of looking silly, causing me to shriek and fight rather than suffer in silence. When my cousin realized that I was really in terror, he was unnerved and let me up.

Not more than a few weeks after this incident, my father called me angrily from the top of the basement stairs to come do some chore or other. I refused, and in a rage he banged down the stairs towards me, yelling. The abandon I had experienced with my cousin seized me, and rather than let my father set the terms of combat, I rushed at him with a burst of raw courage as he came off the stairs and started across the landing toward me. He hadn't at all expected the force that met him as my hands grabbed his biceps, and he halted momentarily, and then I shoved him back violently, as hard as I could. He was absolutely stunned! I was absolutely unafraid! The strength he had felt me press into his arms announced both to him and to me that any fight would be a tough one, and that he would no longer have the psychological initiative he had in the previous mauling. He was 150 pounds to my 100, and he could beat me if he really wanted to, but I was going to make him work for it, force him to go all out and hurt me badly if he was going to hurt me at all. If I was going down, I was sure going to leave some marks on him too.

We stared at each other from two feet away, these truths reflecting off each other's eyes. I couldn't risk waiting, so I leaned forward to grab him again, to get it on if we had to, but at least to block his ability to swing freely. And at that instant, at 14, my childhood was over, my family was dead and my father was gone, and we both knew it. With a look that portrayed horror at what he had almost done, awareness that I would always regard him as a threat, and fear that I detested him, he turned and went up the stairs. He was no longer my hero, a big, god-like being, but a small, embarrassed old man.

My father never again even threatened to use physical force to work his will on me. When he got angry he would stomp off to his room and slam the door, or make some bitter remark, or rush off in the car swearing, but he wouldn't advance on me. If the showdown solved the problem of abuse, it created another problem by embedding in me the habit of pushing belligerently rather than bargaining my way through any confrontation, physical or verbal, with anyone. I took all challenges as bullying, shoving people back the second they got loud and close. Teachers and other adults were shocked at the vehemence with which I would sass them the instant they tried to assert some authority over me. I bashed my way through my teenage years, unable to stop look-

ing for trouble, posing a continuous challenge to the rules as if my life depended on it, which in some ways it did.

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I tried to fill my emptiness as a teenager with the usual coins of the realm: athletic achievement and girls. In elementary school, sports were us: we played for countless hours on decidedly non-regulation fields, like my friend Dougy Pritchard's sloping front lawn for football, or our driveway with its listing backboard for basketball. The only organized sport my gang took part in was Pee-Wee hockey, in which everybody got equal ice-time. When we reached junior high and had to compete for spots on school teams, sports became status, and I occupied a lowly rung. It was embarrassing to have played so hard at being an athlete, and then turn out not to be one when it counted.

I wasn't good enough to make school teams in real sports, like basketball and soccer, or big enough for what I thought then was the ultimate sport, football, or dedicated enough to stick with what I now think is the ultimate sport, track, where there was a spot for anybody who would do the training. So I went out for tennis, which I'd been the champion in at summer camp, and became a starter on the junior varsity as a freshman. I happily surrendered my crisp white outfit and paltry status in this effeminate sport the day I looked over at an adjoining practice field and saw the lacrosse players in their full combat regalia of sticks, helmets, and shoulder pads as they slashed, crashed, and swaggered about like a boarding party of pirates. By the next spring I had spent enough hours flipping a lacrosse ball against the garage door to be able to join them.

The three most regulars faces from the Pritchard's front lawn — Dougy, Scott Anderson and I — all made the lacrosse team in tenth grade, but Dougy and Scott improved rapidly and were soon in the starting lineup, while I was only brought in when the outcome had been decided. Dougy and Scott both played better than I did, but they were also growing. We'd been three identically tiny beans at 12 or 13, but then they started sprouting without me. Dougy became a burly young man, almost impossible to dislodge from around the goal; I was still so slight that a gargantuan defenseman for the Onondaga Indian team was assessed a double penalty after he tapped me in the back with his hand, much to his surprise sending me cartwheeling down the field like a tum-

bleweed. Scott just kept growing up and out until I barely recognized in the young giant who was dominating games for Dartmouth the skinny little buddy I used to dump to the ground in the back of our ninth-grade English class while our near-sighted teacher peered toward us, trying to figure out what all that noise and laughter was. Scott became the Harvard lacrosse coach — a long way from Dougy's front lawn in substance, but not in spirit!

I was a bigger fish in the far smaller pool at prep school during my last two years of high school, starting on the lacrosse team and captaining the second basketball squad, but that did little to assuage my growing feelings of inadequacy. Just being able to "start" wasn't enough: I would criticize myself brutally if I wasn't the star, in every game, on every play. When I did play well, after a burst of bragging to friends and my parents I would feel as empty as before.

Girls were even more painful a disappointment for me than sports. We all share that breathless pang of seeing, as T. S. Eliot says, "Arms that are braceleted and white and bare (But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)." But I also had a uniquely frantic need to be loved, and an equally frantic need to break the romance off once I was. I latched onto each girl who sparked me simply by her looks, because I didn't need to go past her looks to her personality: it was a concept rather than a person that was driving me, a hope that loving and being loved would fill my pit of loneliness.

If my love was unrequited (and my fear of being a coward always made me declare my love once I identified its object), there would be an obsessed courtship that was embarrassing to both of us; if it was requited, I would lie and leave. My dread of the shame that gripped me when someone got close enough to see my neediness was compounded by the none too subtle encouragement of my father to move on to the next conquest. Each new girlfriend would bring wolf-whistles, off-color remarks and nudges, and a leering rendition of the "Sheik of Araby" on the piano. The culture around me also said that there was something wimpy about keeping the same girlfriend. James Bond certainly didn't, and surfboys Jan and Dean sang me to sleep at summer camp with the claim that heaven was, "Two girls for every boy." And just what were you supposed to do with two of them, or for that matter one, besides brag or lie to your friends about what parts of her

body you had gotten to touch? Like the red rose in the dark, how cool are you if nobody sees you make out?

There was one sure way to handle my loneliness. I began to drink heavily and badly, sometimes with friends, but more often alone. Most of my weekends in ninth and tenth grades were spent in a haze of whiskey, vodka, and gin. I preferred the taste of beer, but it didn't do the job quickly enough. I wanted a blast, not a buzz, amnesia, not mellowness, and I could only get that by disguising the hard stuff in mixtures, like dropping a "depth charge" of whiskey into a mug of beer and sucking up the resulting explosion of foam. In the summers I extended my drinking to the weeknights, since I could get up late before going to work at noon as a waiter at the Maxwell vacation school for rich New York teenagers on the Cornell campus.

It was easy to get booze. I'd either siphon it off from my parents' stocks, have an older friend buy it, or buy it myself with an "alien identification card." Even though I looked about ten years old at 14, stores and bars let me be 18-year old French exchange student Jean-Jacques Tussaud (Jean, because I vaguely remembered the name of the hero from *Les Misérables*, and Tussaud, because I'd been to Madame's wax museum). The ID cards became quite a racket for me: for \$10 each, I would laminate the vacation school kids' pictures onto the cards, which were handed out by the post office. I had made a few hundred dollars before one of my transactions was observed by an administrator at the school, and the empire crumbled.

My parents didn't grasp the extent of my drinking, despite a number of incidents when the problem surfaced because I simply couldn't hold the hard stuff. I needed the blinding stupor that made each night special, but I had a hard time knowing when enough had gone in to produce that effect. Once I was brought home barely conscious by an enraged father, a Mr. O'Connell, who had laid a trap for his wayward daughter Mary, suspecting accurately that she threw parties whenever her parents would leave town. When he burst in the front door of his house on a weekend he and his wife were supposed to be spending in another city, my two riding buddies, Jack McGory and Eric Cleaveland, were coherent enough to run right through the screened back door without stopping to open it, but there I was, lying immobile in a pool of vomit on his living room rug. That's what happens when you

mix a quart of some God-awful screwdriver mix called Old Mr. Boston with the agitation of the amorous attentions of that highly-desired nymphet, Darlene Turk.

Eroll McKibbon, the Cornell hockey goalie, and his wife were staying with me and my younger brother while my parents were away in the Soviet Union on a lecture trip. They welcomed me home not with reprimands, but with advice on how to avoid getting sick next time. I was simply one of the boys now, since some of Eroll's teammates, those Canadian men who had been brought in to beat up the Ivy League boys, drank to excess so regularly that my brother and I would rush downstairs in the morning to see which of our heroes we might find passed out in the basement bedroom. My parents convinced themselves when they returned that the debacle at the O'Connells' was just an isolated incident.

Even when my parents would catch me lying about which friend's house I was spending the night at, or discover me sneaking out of my room late at night, they had no reason to think that what I was doing was going out to buy booze and then sleep up on the golf course under a blanket, so that if I threw up I wouldn't have to try to explain it away as the flu. Perhaps my father didn't want to confront me because, unbeknownst to me, he was also an alcoholic and drinking secretly. I was wobbling through the campus late one summer night and literally bumped into him as he was walking home from the office down the same path I was going up. I was surprised that he accommodated my strange behavior as we talked briefly from opposite sides of the path, and that he didn't ask where I was going and why I was keeping such an unnatural distance between us. Maybe we were trying to keep the same secret from each other.

Drinking provided all sorts of strange scenes, and put some purpose into my misery. I remember throwing up in a locker during a summer school class and wandering over to a liquor store for a quick pint of gin on my way back up the hill to work, being carried out of parties by my friends, and writing a threatening letter to my lacrosse coach when I didn't get awarded a letter for my meager minutes on the field. All I could say when this decent man called me up was, "I was drinking...Please forget it." Each time I'd be disappointed in sports or with a girl, I would think how great it was going to be to get drunk. I can recall the

many uncomfortable places I passed out in romantic despair, even though I can't remember who caused the heartaches.

What stopped me was my stomach, and not my willpower. I had gotten sick so many times by the summer after tenth grade that the fear of that pain outweighed the wonderful deadening that alcohol gave me. Every few years of my life after that — and the intervals got longer until they finally stopped in my thirties — I would forget the effect of hard liquor on my constitution, and just keep drinking, unaware until it was too late, and I would wake up sick in exotic places, like the New Haven drunk tank in my senior year of high school or a snow bank outside my house after a nearly lethal drive home when I was 23.

My urge to destroy things as a teenager extended beyond myself. It was almost as if I woke up each morning asking myself what I could wreck that day. From junior high on, with the stakes and the possible penalties steadily rising, I felt drawn to theft and damage like a moth to a flame. Preferably with friends, but often without them, I roamed nearby neighborhoods in the early morning hours, stealing bicycles, sometimes just to throw them off bridges. What I couldn't steal, I'd ruin, like lawn equipment at homes or clubs, or bread that had been delivered by a night truck outside a supermarket. At the vacation school, I would beg the director to let me take her rented car out for errands, just so I could drive down to the abandoned airport and burn out the tires and engine on the runways.

By tenth grade, I had graduated from nearly daily shoplifting of clothes, records, and food to robbing fraternities in the summer when most of their members would be gone, sneaking in with a flashlight to snatch the stereo sets from common rooms and attics, and then slashing furnishings on the way out, just for the hell of it. They say that kids who do this sort of thing mostly want to get caught so that someone will pay attention to them. I'm not sure if that was true in my case, but I know that I couldn't stop myself. My parents had taught me right from wrong, and I felt an overwhelming drive to show myself, if not others, that I wouldn't play by their rules. Whenever I did get caught, my parents wouldn't know quite what to do. Each time I'd be found out for having lied and sneaked out of the house, there would be re-primations but not penalties, probably because I would have ignored them. When the vacation school informed my father about

my racket in fake ID cards, he sternly warned me about the federal laws I may have broken, according to a friend of his who was an FBI agent, but then let me go right back to work without punishment.

The threat of being caught by the police couldn't restrain me either, because I belonged to the upper social class in Ithaca. One summer a group of us boys were apprehended on a late-night foray by Officer McEwen, our nemesis in the police force in the exclusive suburb of Cayuga Heights we all lived in or near. It was pretty mild stuff: getting drunk, disrupting a dance at a country club, trashing the piles of bread outside a supermarket, smashing all the bubble-gum machines with shopping carts, hurling a barrage of cherry bombs into the fire station, and spooking motorists by pretending to stretch a chain across the road.

My father unwittingly compounded our pleasure by walking into the police station and starting his discussion by calling the officer by what he assumed was his name, since that was the only thing he'd ever heard us call him. "Hello, Officer McCool," he said, as we dissolved into laughter. There were no penalties, of course, for this or any of our anti-social outings: you don't send professors' kids to youth camp. God help us if we'd been townies. It would have been probation for this one and then reform school the next time. In Cayuga Heights, we were never even booked. Some sense of the rules of this game was probably what made Jack and Eric get the hell out of Mr. O'Connell's house and escape down the hill to their homes on the flats in such a hurry.

My behavior in school or any other organized setting like the Boy Scouts was similar to my behavior in the community. I looked for trouble, looked for things to damage, and treated adults as if they were Nazis and I was a French freedom fighter. By ninth grade, my parents, in some desperation, asked me to apply to prep schools, but I delayed their efforts by conveniently losing the forms I had to fill out. They had to write to the schools for more, since I refused to do so. They may even have filled some out for me. The moment of truth came toward the end of tenth grade, when the vice-principal at Ithaca High explained to me that it just wasn't working out, and that since I was already on probation for a number of incidents like forging excuses from my mother (these were for the days I would be too hung over to come to school), this latest incident meant that he would have to expel me.

“This latest incident” was me standing up on a table in the giant study hall in front of a few hundred stunned and then amused students and ripping up school-books while encouraging everyone else to do the same, all the while yelling expletives about school in general and Ithaca High in particular. My friend Rob Lowe and I had just been fooling around, daring each other to rip a page or two from the other’s books, when I decided to be a little bolder. I didn’t want to be expelled, because then my father would remove the last element of choice from the tentative ultimatum of prep school or military school he had given me, and just pack me off to military school as some of my wayward friends had been. So I bargained, telling the vice-principal a little truth, which was that I had been accepted at a prep school, and a little lie, which was that I was planning on going. He let me finish the year, contingent on my not returning, and within five minutes I was back in the study hall, surprising Rob and the other students all over again. I doubt my parents ever found out why I suddenly agreed to go away.

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The all-male school, attended by 200 wealthy whites and a few token scholarship blacks, was called Westminster, and it was located in a little town 20 miles outside Hartford, Connecticut. My father and his brother Bill had both graduated from it with tremendous distinction in the 1930s: my father was the brain, ranked number one, president of the senior class, editor of the newspaper and God knows what all; his brother was the brawn, the best athlete and captain of various teams. Both had gone on to Cornell, where they had achieved similar distinction with their dissimilar talents. I was admitted, despite my grades being a bizarre mixture of As and Fs, because my father had kept up his association with Westminster, speaking at its commencement and receiving various awards for being one of the few alumni who had done anything more socially meaningful than go to tailgate parties at football games. The school used his books proudly: in one letter home I noted I had chosen to read The American Presidency over The Confessions of Nat Turner, which shows I was still capable of putting family pride over politics.

Westminster’s practice of having every boy play on a sports team every season improved my conduct for a while. I immersed myself in the practice sessions and games, and starting on the la-

crosse team gave me an incentive to behave myself so I could come back the next year. But it wasn't quite enough, and I still sassed the teachers and looked for trouble. It was just a little harder to find it stuck up on a hill with so many teachers watching. At first, my academic efforts were still feeble, rousing only for the few teachers I thought were interested in me, but after a few marking periods of seeing my name in the middle of the prominently-displayed class rankings, I decided to prove to my father and the school I could be not just as good as the other students, but be the best. I threw myself into my studies, and careened toward the top of the class, not really learning anything but scoring well on tests and papers.

My English teacher, Don Werner, was the assistant headmaster, and for some reason — perhaps because I had taken advantage of the equality inherent in a faculty-student basketball game to shove him back forcefully when he came up to upbraid me for a foul — he took it upon himself to bring me down to size. He gave me a lower grade than I thought my papers and tests merited, sending me into the number two slot in the class and a tearful rage. In retrospect, of course, number one wouldn't have been enough, either for my parents or for my own highly-developed sense of emptiness, since to have any lasting impact that accolade would have to be repeated each marking period and be matched with athletic awards and extra-curricular distinctions and articles published in newspapers...and on and on and on.

I wouldn't have made it through the first year if my parents had not been spending the year in England. The school approached my aunt about taking me in for the rest of the year when I was caught on an off-campus expedition, but she wisely told the school she couldn't do it. And I wouldn't have made it through the second year and graduated if headmaster Pete Keyes, a friend of my father's, hadn't taken the rare step of overruling the faculty and giving me a series of last chances, even after I landed in the New Haven drunk tank, arrested on the train back to school from a group weekend in New York while leading what we thought was a charming effort to encourage the other passengers to stand up and sing with us.

In my senior year I started to break rules openly as a matter of principle, but Mr. Keyes did everything he could to stay one step ahead of me, and defuse issues before they could box me in.

He always came up with an unexpected and undeniable compromise: I wouldn't attend breakfast? He made breakfast voluntary. I wouldn't wear a tie to meals and classes? Turtlenecks now qualified as formal wear for meals, which he demonstrated to everyone's amazement by himself showing up in one at dinner. I wouldn't attend the required daily chapel services, because a teacher had used one of them to fulminate against the student radicals at Harvard and I had been only permitted to give one of a series of responses I planned in the same forum? He decided to limit chapel services to silent prayer for the remainder of the year. I shouldn't have made it three months at that school, let alone two years, but Mr. Keyes kept me in, perhaps out of loyalty to my father, perhaps out of a belief that I had something good in there somewhere, as he said in a letter he wrote to my father after the charges in "incident railroad" had been nullified, contingent on no more arrests until I was 18:

Readily do I understand your comments about Caleb's independence. I am sure that you also share with me the awareness of his nimble mind, and, in his way, a rather profound concern for people who are at least, as he sees it, working for improvements in our society. It would be fatuous of me to predict the way in which I believe Caleb will find unusual accomplishment in his life, but I also share with you that there is a real possibility that whatever he does will be exceptional. I hope that he will come to feel that at least in some ways there were elements of his career here that were worthwhile.

I am grateful to Mr. Keyes for his insight, which held out the possibility that I would try in my private life and career to find "unusual accomplishment" in being one of those people "working for improvements in our society." And I'm grateful to him for keeping me from being expelled: Lord knows what my parents would have thought of next, or what trouble I would have gotten into while they pondered the problem. However, I just can't fulfill Mr. Keyes' last hope. All I got out of Westminster was a diploma, a ticket to college, which despite all the self-congratula-

tory speeches about excellence, is precisely what prep schools are there for.

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The only really good thing about my secondary school years was rock n' roll. I had a natural bent for playing (although unfortunately not for singing) and applied myself fully. In eighth and ninth grades I spent countless hours learning words and practicing guitar licks for the sacrilegiously-named J. C. and the Waterwalker, a hot little Rolling Stones cover band with Jack also on guitar, Eric on bass, and Billy Selman on drums.

Rock n' roll became the center of my life when at 13 I stood in my brother David's room and first heard the sensuous, demanding, life-giving wall of sound of the Beatles' "I Wanna Hold Your Hand." The urgent, booming beat coursed through me, overwhelming my system, making me physically dizzy as I tried to absorb the sound and its implications. The throbbing pulse was so revolutionary, so anti-authority, so anti-regularity, so anti-going along and getting along, so insistent on RIGHT NOW rather than the future being the reward. Adults whose first instinct was to burn and ban rock records as subversive were closer to the truth than those who laughed it off as another fad. The words were secondary, almost irrelevant. What mattered was that the whiny pleadings of the Four Seasons and Jan and Dean had been ratcheted up about 50 notches to an insistent power grab. The Rolling Stones came along soon after and gave the boom some bite, and we Waterwalkers played the Stones, the nasty boys, rather than the Beatles, the cute mop-heads. But give credit where it is due: it was the Beatles who blasted the hole in the wall of conformity that let the Stones and all the rest of us through.

The day after hearing the Beatles, I cashed in my savings from my morning and afternoon newspaper routes and bought my first electric guitar, a clunker that I replaced with a sunburst Fender Jaguar when we formed the Waterwalkers. My parents had told me I couldn't have an electric guitar; I think they were still hoping I would return to the violin, and had decided that rock n' roll would end that fantasy forever. I had to leave my amplifier down at Eric's house for our band practices, and play the guitar in secret in my room, my ear pressed against the wood to hear the resonance of the music.

On that most essential musical accouterment, the band's business card, I took the pseudonym Jerome McGurk, a tribute both to my friendship with Jack McGory and to a brief but close dance at a party with the diminutive Betsy McGurk, whose white-blond hair fell all the way down around a precocious posterior that she insisted on pouring into the second-tightest blue jeans in junior high. (There was no dispute over who had the tightest: top jock Kevin Filley, whose jeans were so narrowly pegged at the ankle that we assumed he had to cut out the stitches each time he took them off, and then re-sew them after he put them back on. There was, however, some question as to whether he stuffed socks into his crotch, like Mick Jagger, to accentuate the positive.) When the Waterwalkers played at garage parties and church dances, I was always introduced to organizers and audiences by my pseudonym, to reduce the chances that somebody's parents would hear about my presence in the band and casually mention it to my parents. This was an unlikely dodge, since the kids from the hill whose parents knew mine already knew who I was, and the kids from the flats who didn't know me had parents who wouldn't know mine anyway. Still, we enjoyed acting out the myth of the mysterious rock star.

In ninth grade, the Waterwalkers finally got the big break, when we were asked to audition to be the band for our graduation dance from junior high. We set up the equipment one afternoon in the gym to play for Morgan Kelts, the vice-principal who would make the decision, and the student coordinators, the two or three girls who had already said that they wanted us to play. We were not exactly Mr. Kelts' favorite people — I in particular had spent many a boring hour sitting outside his office, having done something bad enough to be evicted from class but not bad enough to be suspended — so we were not too surprised when we tore into the Stones' "King Bee" ("I'm a King Bee, baby, buzzin' 'round your hive; I can make honey, baby, let me come inside!") and he stood up and started waving his hands frantically: "No, No, they're too loud." Rock n' roll, too loud? The girls convinced him that we could play a lot quieter, even as we insisted we couldn't, and he gave in.

This coup presented us with a problem: this was going to be much harder to keep from my parents than a garage dance. The three hundred kids of the graduating class would include

many whose parents would know mine, and there was no telling how my parents would react if they heard in advance about the coming dance. Certainly, my father would order me to stay home for having disobeyed him in buying the electric guitar, and if I went ahead anyway, he was likely to charge into the dance and yank me off stage, ruining everything for everybody. We decided it would be better for me to tell my parents rather than risk having them find out themselves.

Much to my surprise, my parents loved the idea that our band was good enough to be hired for the prom. My father forgot his opposition to rock n' roll, forgave me my sneakiness, and came to the dance and cheered us on with great pride and volume as we played and (because we had finally faced reality about our voices and added singer Marc Silag) sang our way pretty creditably through the hits of the era: the Kingsmen's "Louie, Louie," the Shadows of Night's "Gloria," Bobby Comstock and the Counts' "I Wanna Do it," James Brown's "I Feel Good," the Byrds' version of Bob Dylan's "Mr. Tambourine Man," Wilson Pickett's "Midnight Hour," the McCoys' "Hang on Sloopy," the Animals' "We Gotta Get Out of this Place," the Standell's "Dirty Water," the Outsiders' "Time Won't Let Me," a smattering of Beatles and Chuck Berry, just about everything by the Stones, and absolutely nothing by the Monkees except a disgusted stare at anyone who asked.

True to my brutal self-criticism, though, I always remembered that night with shame, as a disaster rather than an achievement, because during one song a drummer with an established band sat in, and we just couldn't get the beat right on Bob Dylan's "Rainy Day Women #12 and 35 (Everybody Must Get Stoned)." I couldn't look people in the face for days, and whenever someone said that we had sounded good, I angrily suspected a hidden put-down. To compound my problems that night, I was sure that my girlfriend, skinny-legged Donna Pirko, was also thinking we were losers for blowing the song, and I didn't want her to see me in the depression I settled into after we packed up the equipment. I broke our long-standing date to walk the few blocks overtown to the College Spa, the youth hangout where she thought we would be received in triumph and I now thought we would be received in jest. Off she went down the street to her home, crying and muttering, her world dashed to pieces inexplicably, and off I went

with the guys to Billy's father's A&W Root Beer stand to commiserate, although none of them thought there was anything to commiserate about.

The best music I recall from the Waterwalkers also involved taking a chance with an experienced drummer, in this case Sonny Coleman from the famed Mojos. The Mojos were the Rolling Stones of the town, most of the band being art students at Cornell who looked and acted degenerate, and Eric knew Sonny Coleman, the one townie in the group. When we had a gig to play at a lake party that summer and Billy was going to be out of town, we went as a delegation to see Sonny, who agreed to help us. The one time we practiced, his girlfriend took a friend who had come to listen into the next room and, we assumed with Sonny's knowledge if not concurrence, seduced him while we played. This was great stuff! Who knew who would be next? Then, on the way home, Sonny sarcastically told a pump jockey who had replied "with what?" to Sonny's order to "fill it up," that he could fill it with "tires, Leroy, tires," and we practiced his sneering tone for the rest of the summer. And the music was hot: with this absolute star playing behind us, we pounded out a seemingly endless version of the Rolling Stones tribute to Chess records, "2120 S. Michigan Avenue," as the bonfires lit the lakeside.

I drifted away from the Waterwalkers during the next year over town-gown tension after Eric and Jack began to ride me about being from the hill. We got testy with each other, and I left the group, to be replaced by Stan Podufalski, who had more working class in him than the rest of the band put together. Eric's father was an executive with the power company, his mother a nurse at the high school. Jack's father was a trainer for Cornell's teams during the school year and painted houses in the summer. Both Eric and Jack lived in Fall Creek, a white-collar neighborhood with a strong blue-collar contingent, and Billy's father had run his A&W so well that he was able to move from an old farmhouse to a stunning new house on a hill outside of town. Stan, in contrast, lived in the tidy but tough Polish and Italian neighborhood by the railroad tracks and the bus station in the West End of town, where most people worked in diners and garages or on the floor of the Morse Chain factory. With his gentle and sensitive personality, he was an unlikely "greaser," but class pressures prevailed, and he was forced into bicep-bashing contests after school with the

legendary James Ruff, our junior high's most fearsome outlaw, and tracked by the guidance counselors into "shop" courses.

So in tenth grade I bought a Farfisa keyboard and brought my decidedly rudimentary style on the organ into a band called the Laymen, which was composed of Cayuga Heights kids and the son of the president of Morse Chain. For the last two years of high school, though, I played only for thievery in the summers, mesmerizing the kitchen staff in the basement of Noyes Lodge, one of the Cornell dining halls, by banging out Motown hits for them on an old piano while my confederates Fritz Kiersch and Matt Cleary lifted provisions for our afternoon feasts.

The reason I didn't play at all at prep school was because now I was the one who wasn't comfortable with the rich set that dominated the campus rock band. And I do mean rich, as in beyond comparison with any of us in Ithaca, wherever we lived; rich, as in people talking casually about having houses in the "city" (Manhattan), the "country" (East Hampton), and the "islands" (St. Croix); rich, as in new Z-28 Camaros and Olds 442s passed out like gum drops at graduation day so that we could prowl the east coast in style, going from party to party at mansion after mansion, from Boston to Darien to Greenville, Delaware. I say "we" because by that point, I had made some good friends among the poor little rich kids, like Jim "Wrigley" Offield and Richie "Dupont" Trapnell, and I tried to emulate their carefree approach to money. My parents showed sound judgment and humor in their response to my requests for spiffy vehicles as graduation presents: they solemnly presented me with beautifully-wrapped match-box models of a car and a motorcycle.

Music was my savior in secondary school, a perfect friend who knew the pain, the anger and sometimes even the joy I was feeling. However, it was also my romantic downfall, since popular tunes always heightened my yearning for girls and my melancholy in the disasters that would ensue. How could I listen to "Can't Buy Me Love" and all those other lush, urgent early Beatles songs and not spend my seventh-grade school day aching for the afternoon I'd be spending reading *Lady Chatterly's Lover* with Jane Bryant? How could I exchange nicotine-laden kisses with Sue Hauff in eighth-grade as the record player repeated the despairing trust of Carole King's "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?" and not believe I really would? How could I watch the

long hair of the interchangeable McConnell sisters flicker around their waists as their all-girl garage band sang the Yardbirds's "For Your Love" and not spend ninth-grade trying to figure out which one pained me the most sweetly? How could I listen to Aretha Franklin blast out "Since You've Been Gone" on our stolen stereo at prep school and not be ignited by the thought of being called "baby, baby, sweet baby" by the alluring daughter of the school laundress?

From Mary Crass in seventh grade, who would flip back her flaming red hair and flirt in her fake British accent as we sang along to "Ferry 'Cross the Mersey," to Betty Lou Fitzpatrick in ninth grade, who would call me up from her shotgun shack in the country so we could listen together to our dream of going to San Francisco and being some of the "gentle people, with flowers in their hair," to Vanessa Berrabeano in twelfth grade, who would cuddle up close when we did the bump-and-grind to the soft grip of "Cowboys to Girls" at a prep school dance, every day of my teenage years I had a recent song pumping through my veins that somehow made me fall helplessly, longingly, in love with someone new. And for all my superficial disappointments in daily life and my deeper disappointment with myself, that was what kept me barely on the front end of Dylan's observation that: "He not busy being born is busy dying."

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