

Columbia

Back in college, I knew I wanted to study something that would inform me about how to change the world, but was not sure what subject I should major in. I also knew I should give up in German, so I decided to learn French. The School of General Studies had a traditional liberal arts course program, and required a year in the literature of a foreign language, as well as science, math, social science, etc. Some of my credits transferred from Oberlin, so I did not have to take a science, but I did have to repeat first year calculus, as well as the language requirement.

I was a non-matriculated student, meaning that I was not formally enrolled in a degree program, but I treated that semester there as if I was, because my course work would count towards my degree. And I was determined not to do well in school.

For some reason, foreign languages have always been a bear for me, especially as they are typically taught. It wasn't until I went to Divinity School, and learned Greek, that I learned what the problem was, more on that much later, and I did not have the wit, or the resources, to hire a tutor. I struggled with French. I flunked French that semester. I was devastated. I was sure that was the end, but the French teach was good enough to write a letter in support of me, that I was a serious student who was doing the work, and that I had a very difficult time learning a foreign language, so I was admitted as a full time student.

Now, it may have had something to do with my family. My mother had earned her library degree in the early 30s from Columbia, and my grandmother had graduated from Barnard about 1900. So, I was a legacy, and they knew that, because they asked it on the application form. Also, I was paying full tuition, something like \$3,000 a year, which does not seem much now, but was a lot then.

Both my parents were college educated, my father had grown up in the Ethical Culture school system of New York, my mother had graduated from Mt. Holyoke, and so they were both from cosmopolitan families. But I had grown up rural, and had none of that sophistication. I think that is one of the reasons New York City was so attractive to me after I left Oberlin.

My father and I had gone over my budget. Including the money I had saved from my summer job, and I had enough to survive, but not live high on the hog. I forgot to

include the cost of taking the subway, and he included that. In our family, the deal was our parents would put us through college, unless we got married, and then we were on our own. But we were also expected to work during the summer, and, as we were growing up, my brother and I participated in a couple of side business my father started, for “the college fund”.

Anyway, my father had two side jobs into which my brother and I were enlisted. One was growing pine trees, Scotch Pine in particular, from seedlings, which, with pruning each June, would be sold as Christmas trees. Now, you hardly ever see them in Christmas tree lots, because Douglas Fir makes a nicer Christmas tree, and does not have to be pruned each Spring. It also takes a few more years to grow to Christmas tree size, and my father was pretty confident in his knowledge. After all, he worked with the people who provided the seedlings. I think it also might have been that Scotch Pine seedlings were free, as part of state sponsored reforestation, whereas he would have had to pay for Douglas fir.

We planted the trees on to pieces of land, one, about 10 miles north of Warsaw, on a hilltop above the town of Wyoming, which he owned with a couple of his work buddies, and the other the back side of the farm in Millerton, about 40 acres, which was pretty useless for farming, It did, however, have, and still have, a spectacular view, looking out over the town of Pine Plains to the Hudson River Valley and the Adirondacks rising up behind Saugerties.

Planting trees was okay. It was cold, it was wet, but I did not mind, because I liked being outside. My brother Steve and I were not enlisted until I was 11 or twelve, so it was an adventure, especially Millerton, because we would drive there, and camp, which I liked, and my father would cook a really nice breakfast over the camp fire, and we could go out to dinner, where I could order anything I wanted.

Pruning the trees was something else. It was done in mid-June, when the weather had become warm to hot, and humid, and deer flies would buzz around our heads. The Scotch Pine needed to be pruned, because they would put out leaders each Spring of maybe twelve inches, and, in order to be attractive Christmas trees, not spindly, the trees needed to be trimmed back in order to fill out. I hated the work, but I had to do it.

The other business he started, when I was in high school, is putting on BBQ chicken meals for church events, or similar occasions. He had some grill structures fabricated

out of sheet steel, with heavy duty screens on top, which could be flipped. Briquettes would be lit, about 3 feet below the screens, he would mix up basically an Italian dressing, and we would put split chickens, broiler size, on the screens and paint them with the dressing, then flip the screens over, and paint the other side. As I recall, he also provide cole slaw, with his own dressing. Several years ago, visiting my friend John, I discovered a BBQ chicken place in Oneonta, NY that used the same recopies.

This job I liked. The smoke got a little much, sometimes, and we would get home covered in a fine layer of grease, from the chicken fat that had melted off the chickens, but the food was good, and we were doing something constructive.

So I did not feel guilty, or especially privileged to have my college expenses paid for, because I had earned it while I was growing up. I was a little disturbed when I learned from my brother, many years later, that what really paid for college was the timely death of a spinster aunt of ours, who had always sent us \$5 on Christmas, and to whom we had always dutifully written thank you notes. Living in New York is expensive, and there were a lot of things I would have done with a fatter wallet.

For example, the Electric Circus was a block and a half from where I was living, I walked past all the time, but never went in. I could not afford it. I was living that close to the bone. Having worked for SDS, where I essentially took a vow of poverty, I continued to live that way, frugal, frugal, frugal. Also, there were a ton of concerts, folk music, rock music, this was the 60's after all, but I could not attend them, because I could not afford it. Now maybe I was lucky, and would never have gotten through Columbia if I had been able to afford these kind of things, and partied all the time, and the parties at the Electric Circus were legendary, Lou Reed, The Velvet Underground, Andy Warhol's light shows ... I did not enter the psychedelic life until I moved to San Francisco in 1969.

Columbia, as you know, is Ivy League, but that did not mean much to me. I am not sure why. Part of it was I was not going to the highly competitive College, and partly because my brother was going to Cornell, Ivy League, and my sister was then in graduate school at the School of Education at Harvard. I think another reason was that my fellow students were all commuters, and while basically intelligent, they lacked the extraordinary sizzle of some of the people I had met at Oberlin, and, as I discovered, were at the regular undergraduate school, the College. It may also have been that the School of General Studies was treated as a poor step child of the University, where the less cultured, lower class, less adept folk were allowed to walk the hallowed halls. This was in some ways true. As I got to know some of the people from the College, and

Barnard, I discovered that they would cross register for courses in General Studies because the grading was easier.

A required course was English composition. We had to learn how to write essays. It was very difficult for me, like sweating blood. It was not until ten years later, while living in San Francisco, that something clicked, and I was able to just let the words flow, as I do now, entering citations, etc., where needed. But in that course, which was also an introduction to English literature I was introduced to the remarkably subtle sonnets of Shakespeare. I often go back to them, and admire their formal excellence and poesy. I can even, when the spirit moves me, remember the structure, and write a sonnet myself, sometimes, as I did for my son's wedding in June of 2019. The liberal arts education which my mother wanted me to have does have some advantages.

So, second semester I took first semester French again. The class was much smaller. In the class with me as a guy from western Michigan, who told me that his parents had sent him to a psychiatric hospital and that was why he had been out of school. We also argued about politics. He was very conservative, and I was very liberal. Looking back, I think what he was really doing was trying to engage me. He wanted to convert everyone to his way of life. He was gay, though I did not figure that out until later, and rather than be open about it, this was after all 1965, he tried an indirect approach. Or maybe he was attracted to me, I don't know. It was only when I learned about conversion therapy many years later that I realized his stories of the psychiatric hospital were because his parents were trying to straighten him. It did not work. His name was Dotson Rader.

I also took Introduction to Government, and European History. I needed to declare a major. I liked the way the history teacher taught, and asked him about majoring in history. His view was that history should be studied for its own sake, not to prove an ideological point, and so he was not sure it was a good fit. It seemed to him that I really belonged in the Public Law and Government department, as political science was then called at Columbia. So I declared my major as Public Law and Government.

My New Left attitude rubbed the government teacher the wrong way. He was deeply involved in Reform politics of New York, and wanted nothing to do with the perhaps communist left, which I believe he heard from my communists. He wanted tenure, and red baiting was still alive and well. Columbia had a long history of excluding radicals from faculty positions. going back to Charles Beard's ouster about 1920, and the subsequent departure of John Dewey and Thorstein Veblen to found the New School.

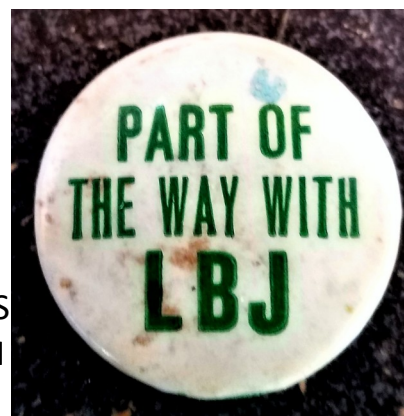
But looking back I think he taught a superb introduction to the study of government, and I still remember, and my thinking is informed by, three of the books we read in that class, one about Huey Long, another, the Last Hurrah, about Boston's Michael Curley, and a third, the exceptionally excellent Semi-Sovereign People, by E.E. Schattsneider. Do you wonder where Trump's support arose from? Read Schattsneider. Sixty years ago, he saw the future. As I write this, I realize another problem I had with this particular teacher. It was the extent which he quoted from Plunkett's Honest Graft and Dishonest Graft. Again, looking back, I can see why he taught the class as he did, but, starry eyed idealist that I was, I heard not realism, but cynicism.

I did well enough in my courses that second semester, as a matriculated student (Hooray!!!) that the terror from flunking out of Oberlin abated. I still had dreams, in fact, they continued for years, of learning that I had registered for a class, but never attended, never did any of the work, and it was too late to drop the class, and I was going to flunk it, terrible dreams. While these dreams are common, like walking down the street naked, they had a particular power for me because of my failure at Oberlin.

For the summer, I needed a job, and so went again to the NY State Employment office, where they connected me with J. Markovits, the worlds largest importer of artificial flowers. My job was to match ship manifests with warehouse stock, to find missing bales of artificial flowers. I did my work quietly, reporting to my boss every time I found a discrepancy. Mr. Markovits had his own office, and his cigar, and a quite openly gay administrative assistant. Working with me was a young man who was to that summer marry Markovits' daughter. I did my work, and I got paid, and I had another attribute I did not really understand. I was high class, a STUDENT AT COLUMBIA!!! By the end of the summer, the newly wed man had been fired, he was incompetent, the missing flowers were in the warehouse, but uncatalogued, and I was glad to go back to school.

I moved off the lower east side, into a shared apartment much closer to Columbia on the upper west side. It had a bathroom! With a shower! No more bathtub in the kitchen with a jury rigged shower assembly and shower curtain system that always fell down. Michael, whose apartment it was, had moved in to my apartment on Suffolk street when I moved to First Avenue. Michael taught me about the wonders of peaches and sour cream, and we would play bridge with his friend John, a student at Columbia College, and John's girlfriend Claire, a student at Barnard. I spent a little more on rent, but by then I had a work study job, and I saved more than hour a day on commuting time.

I remember taking Introduction to Sociology, reading up on Parsonian sociology, and agreeing with a friend whose take on the subject was that it was a subject which was “the subtle obfuscation of the obvious.” I also took political theory, with the same teacher who taught Introduction to Political Science, International Politics and Comparative Politics. This was 1965-66, and Vietnam was heating up. SDS was growing by leaps and bounds, in opposition to the war. I still had my Student Peace Union Peace Pin, and another button, “Part of the Way with LBJ”.



I was very disappointed in the approach my International Politics teacher had, basically ignoring the war, and read a tremendous amount about the history of Vietnam, and its colonial masters. The comparative politics course interested me, the lecturer was dull, dull, dull, but he liked my attitude, and my approach to politics. Part of his dullness might have been a survival tactic. He was from Czechoslovakia, having left when the Communists took over in 1948, and had a storied career both in this country, and back in Czechoslovakia after the Velvet Revolution. That year I wrote two papers I still remember, one on Kurdistan, and the other comparing trade unions in the newly free countries of the Ivory Coast from France, and Ghana, from Great Britain. Ask me to talk about either of them sometime.

Well, for some reason, John and Claire broke up. I already had a crush on Claire. She was spending the summer, house sitting an apartment of a friend of John's, and soon I was living there too. The library hired me to help distributed books between the various libraries, up to the medical school at 168th Street, across to Fifth Avenue where the School of Social Work was, and wherever else the books needed to go. When my boss, a working class Irish guy, took his vacation, I took over driving the van, and that is when I really learned how to drive, on the streets of New York, of all places. People don't believe me when I tell them that New York has excellent drivers, but it is true. Everyone obeys the same unwritten rules of the road, so there are very few accidents.

I was a senior. Columbia had transferred enough credits from my miserable Oberlin record so that I would graduate in three years. At the advice from another Oberlin friend, who was by then in graduate school at Columbia, I took Wallace Sayre's graduate level class in the politics of public administration. His delivery was as dry as his face was gray, but the course was excellent. His explication of how public policy is made effective still shapes my understanding of US politics.

I also took a graduate course in anthropology, on stateless societies. I thought it would be a good way to understand the formation of the state, sort of a contemporary take on the issues which interested Rousseau. The course was not so good, and it was not until twenty years later that I read Marvin Harris, and his theory of cultural materialism, that I found what I had wanted. And I felt really stupid then, because it turned out the Harris was teaching at Columbia when I was there.

I had a work study job for the last two years at Columbia, serving as evening receptionist for the English Department. My senior year, I did not receive my first check in a timely manner, and I needed the money. So I went over to the bursars office to see what the problem was, and waited in line with other students in a similar fix. A girl/woman behind me said, "Their ears twitch." or something like that, which was the hook for an article I wrote for the school's weekly paper, the Owl.

That caught the attention of the president of the University Student Council, David L. He had a problem that needed to be solved. The council had two vice-presidents, one who dealt with off-campus issues, like the National Student Association, civil rights, the war, ... and the other which dealt with on campus issues, such as the recognition of groups which students wanted to form, and, more to the point, the supervision, and weekly completion of time sheets for the five work study students which the council had been given. David's problem was that he had promised four slots to members of the College SDS chapter, and that particular vice president was a graduate student from Iran, who knew if he did that, he would have a most difficult, perhaps deadly, time when he returned to the Shah's Iran.

So David needed someone. My name appeared in the paper. Obviously, I would not have a problem with SDS, and, as it turned out, there were no representatives of General Studies then serving on the University Student Council. The editor of the Owl approached me about it, I said yes, and I became Executive Vice President of the Columbia University Student Council, 1966-67. Whoop-ti-doo! My political theory honors teacher suggested I give the remaining slot to a student who she knew really needed the money, and each Friday, I would take the five time slips up to the Vice President for Administration, as I recall, a man named Low, in Low Library, though apparently no relation to Seth Low, not that I knew who Seth Low was [a former President of Columbia who built Low Library with his own money, and who later became one of New York City's great reform mayors]. Whew! He would ask me how things were, I would say fine, and that was it. I did not particular want to tell him that it

was basically a no-show job, and I believe he did not care.

I got to know the guys from Columbia. Some, like John and Josh, were friendly and easy going. Others were more hard edged, and judgmental. None of them were pacifists, and as we talked politics, I presented the pacifist position, calling myself a radical liberal, which was, in fact pretty accurate. They, on the other hand, would within a year be calling themselves revolutionaries. But this was only 1967, the war was heating up, we were all on the same side. I opened to the Student Council Offices to them to meet in, and to use the paper and mimeo machine to run off whatever pamphlets or fliers they wanted to. The more they did, the better was the way I looked at it. This is what they were getting paid to do.

Come December, and grading time, the idea came to me that maybe students should grade their professors. I don't think it was my idea, but here I was with four or five students who were willing to question authority, and I conceived of a relatively simple system. Contact a quarter of the students of any undergraduate class more of more than 30 people, ask them a few simple questions about their experience of the class, and publish the results. Very much low tech, very much seat of the pants. One of my work-study students, Harvey, said he had a friend who worked in the registrars office, who had access to the class registrations. His friend printed them out, and they were given to me.

Within a week, I was asked to return them. Harvey's friend was in trouble. The registrar had found out what he had done, and wanted the print outs returned. Absolutely. Now. Immediately. I gave Harvey a long look, and then I gave him the printouts. My plan was not to be.

Of course it probably would not have gotten as far as it did if I had not been such a lone ranger. The only people who knew about it were my friend from GS, and the SDS people. Had I done it the way I should have done it, taken it up with the Student Council, have it go to a committee, have the committee issue a report, discuss it, vote on it, and maybe approve it, the whole thing would have died within months. Student council members then were not the ones to upset apple carts, especially if they wanted good recommendations and buzz for getting into prestigious graduate schools. This was Columbia after all.

In January, a student came to me with a great idea, and one recommended by the David, the Student Council President: Open an alternative drop in center in the top

floor of the Journalism building. It sounded like a good idea to me, and so I talked to my friend from GS, reminded him that he had done nothing but collect a check for three months, and transferred that slot over to this student. I never visited the drop in center. I wish I had. It was a sign of things to come, not only because of the pressure that the war was putting on the University, and especially on the students who might get drafted, but also because of the then just beginning use of psychedelic drugs by East Coast college students. The West Coast was several years ahead of us.

But I was concentrating on graduating, and I was very busy. I hoped to go to graduate school in Political Science, and knew I had to do well, get my grades up from B's to A's. I had rented an apartment on 102nd street, had a couple of roommates, and remember making weekly plans, blocking out mornings, afternoons and evenings for the various pieces of my life. I visited Professor Sayre, and made my pitch to get into the Government Department at Columbia. I did not get his blessing, but at least I tried.

I also realized that my position on the Student Council was a fluke, and it would be much better if General Studies had elected me. So, it needed a student council. So I organized one. I printed up some fliers, and called a meeting, and about ten or fifteen people showed up. I told them what I was up to, and they agreed to work with me on it. I drafted a constitution. As I was doing this, the editor of the Owl asked me to listen to a student who had a good idea. The idea had to do with how members of the student council are elected.

General Studies was founded as an evening school, an extension school, for the veterans returning from World War II. They typically had full time jobs during the day. So the classes were in the afternoon and evening, sometimes being 3 hours long, once a week, rather than three one hour classes a week. Many of the students only showed up for classes and exams, because they had busy lives. There was not the social network such as was established at the very beginning at the College, or Barnard.

But GS had changed, and a substantial number of students were in the performing arts, or had simply moved to New York for its cosmopolitan arts and culture. They, like me, were attending school full time, albeit in the evenings. We met each other in classes, got to know each other a little, but there was no general convocation. Very few of us lived in the dorms.

So we did not really know each other that well. The truly brilliant suggestion this person had was, rather than electing students in competitive elections, or simply

allowing anyone become a member who wanted to join, members would be certified by petition. If you wanted to become a member of the student council, you would get 15 fellow GS students to sign a petition saying they wanted you to serve. It would not be that hard, and, as I remember, we stipulated that people could only sign one petition a year.

At first my response was no. But, as clear as day, I remember standing there, and, light dawning on marblehead, realized this was a brilliant idea. I asked him to help me organize the student council, but he was not interested.

Once again, I was a lone ranger, forgetting that the dean might like this idea, though I am sure he was aware of it. But, anyway, we formed the student council. Our first task was to elect officers. Two people wanted to be President, TC, son of a banker from a wealthy New Jersey town, and Wayne, who had served a tour in Vietnam. Both of them wanted my support. I wanted them to get support from anyone but me. TC, as it turned out won, and the next year, when the SDS students occupied Low Library, was also the President of the University Student Council. Lewisohn Hall, the General Studies Building stayed open during the troubles, and I believe that the fact that the school had a student council helped them get through the crisis in a more healthy manner.

I had what I now know as “impostors syndrome.” I did not really belong on the University Student Council, nor certainly was not supposed to be Vice President, yet, there I was. It gave me stature. I remember visiting Washington that Spring, visiting a friend working at the Institute for Policy Studies, and progressive think tank, and being introduced to a journalist writing for Ramparts, then the very hip and left wing glossy periodical. He asked me what I would think if it turned out that the National Student Association was receiving money from the CIA. I looked at him, and, surprising even to me now, said, “Well, that could be true, because almost all the student organizations in the world are sponsored, directly or covertly, by their government, and they all presume the same thing is true here.” Remarkably blasé, I was. When the article was published, it caused quite a sensation, because the expectation was that the US was clean, and only those dirty commies would do such a thing. Part of growing up is understanding that the world is a complex place.

Creating the General Studies Student Council was in response to the sense of impostor syndrome, because I was creating a mechanism for those students who wanted to become involved in issues of the university to do so. But there was a second problem,

that is, a profound alienation which many students felt, particularly the male students, because of the pressures which the war was putting on them. They could not take off a semester without the very real possibility that they would wake up one day in Vietnam. In my short conversations every week with the Vice President for Administration, I realized he really did not care. He had bigger fish to fry. So, the last time I saw him, delivering the last batch of time sheets, I told him, bluntly, that I really did not represent any one. I told him the campus was a tinderbox. Little did I know how true were those words.

That Spring, the Selective Service Commission decided to draft students, those of us with II-S deferments. Their plan was to only draft people in the bottom quarter of the class. The time was the Spring of 1967, and the war was becoming bigger and bigger. Columbia had teach-ins, and there were many demonstrations, both in the city, and in Washington, against the war.

How should the students respond to this change in draft policy? Leaders from a large number of student organizations met in one of the College buildings, and argued back and forth about what we should do. There was a lot of heated rhetoric, especially from the more radical students, and measured responses from the more moderate students. Much of the passion was directed against the University administration, for its various modes of complicity in the war. As I remember it, and I am not sure this is entirely true, I waited to talk, which was not my style, and finally spoke. I pointed out that the University administration was certain to know everything that was said in the meeting, and who said what, and probably had multiple sources for that information, but if we stood firm, stood together, demanding a response appropriate to the problem, they would then listen to us.

Looking back, it seems almost miraculous, but someone in the administration had the right idea, and convinced the rest of the powers that be to go along with it. Grayson Kirk, the president, was tone deaf to students – we simply did not count, we were flotsam floating on the surface of the esteemed faculty, who had all the formal power. We, of course, were young, and did not understand in our short lives how effective change is made. This is true, of course, but try to tell any twenty something that today. But the country was in crisis, and the crucible of the crisis was the at the university, and Ivy League schools were the apex of that crisis. Almost any student in the bottom quarter of Columbia was a far more accomplished student than all but the top quarter of most of the other colleges and universities of the country. Furthermore, by using class rank, it only intensified the competition so detrimental to liberal arts

education, and encouraged students to adopt all sorts of academic strategies which had nothing to do with their education, and everything to do with their physical survival.

The University administration chose, brilliantly, to simply eliminate class rank. It chose to turn from being complicit with the war machine. It chose to realize its ethos as an ivory tower, above the petty, and serious, conflicts of the day. I know for me, even though I was pretty sure that I would not have to serve because of my Conscientious Objector status, it was as if a weight Had lifted from my shoulders.

That Spring, I even had the opportunity to make history. Looking back, I realize that this opportunity came to me, I did not earn it, or work for it, but, in the manner of many great things, I happened to be in the right place, and the right time, and did the right thing. Columbia, as explained below, was the first school to have an officially sanctioned organization whose stated purpose was the acceptance of homosexuality as a legitimate form of sexual behavior. This was a big step. Back then, women who came out as lesbians risked losing their children, people caught in the back seats of cars were sent to jail, even the rumor that one might be a homosexual would have serious consequences for one's social life and career. In New York, as in most major cities, but particularly in New York and a few other cities, there was a thriving closeted gay culture, and there were some people who were very openly out. But most was underground, and gay bars, such as the Stonewall, were routinely roused by the police, and people were exposed and humiliated.

On the fiftieth anniversary of this organization's founding, the Columbia Alumni magazine published a self-congratulatory story about the history of gay rights at Columbia, but the author of the story was not able to find any information from people who were there at the time. He did contact Dotson Rader, remember I mentioned him above, but he was not sure if he had anything to do with it. He did not. So I wrote a letter, which they edited and printed. The editor told me that when they first read it, people in the office cried. Here is the letter, as published:

I was the executive vice president of the University Student Council in 1966–67, when I was a senior at the School of General Studies. One day the president, David Langsam, said to me, “You probably don’t know this, but you are on the committee that recognizes student organizations. A group of students want to start something called the Student Homophile League. Usually such groups would be approved pro forma, but for this group, because of its nature, the vote is split two to two, and you will be the deciding vote.” He told me that the committee

consisted of a faculty representative, the coach, the chaplain, and a University vice president. And of course, as I had just learned, there was a student representative — as it turned out, me. We met. Two of the students organizing the group attended the meeting: a man from the College and a woman from Barnard. For the petition to be approved, there needed to be five bona fide student signatories. I asked the University vice president if the signatories were registered as students. He said yes. So I said we should approve it. Why? I saw it as basic civil rights. All we were doing was affirming that a legitimate number of bona fide students wanted to start an organization. General Studies students are different; they have been out in the world. My world was then the East Village, mostly, and a little of the West Village, where there were many gay people living as happily as any of us might be living, definitely out of the closet. Friends and neighbors, even roommates had been gay; that year, living near Columbia on the west side, my landlords, who lived in the building, were a gay couple who had met in a foxhole during WWII — or so they said. Who cared? It was their life, and it had no negative impact on mine. And while I did not appreciate getting hit on by men, sometimes even in classes at Columbia, this seemed to me to be a separate issue entirely. Soon the committee reconvened. One of the signatories was now missing from the list (the result, I imagined, of a heart-to-heart with a parent). Now there were only four. I sat there thinking. The charter of the Student Homophile League specifically stated that its purpose was to encourage openness and acceptance; there was no requirement that one be gay to be a member. That meant I could be a member. If needed, I decided, I could be the fifth name. So once again, I voted for recognition. To their credit, the other members of the committee accepted this decision. It was only later in my life, as I heard stories of attempted and successful suicides, as I learned how unaware I was of the many people who lived in closets, as I understood the story told to me by a fellow student about his incarceration by his parents in a mental hospital to straighten him, that I came to appreciate the good we had really done.

Walter Jonas '67GS Milton, MA

The story made the front page of the New York Times. There was no going back. When I lived on First Avenue in the Lower East Side, I had gone to a meeting of the League for Sexual Discovery, or something like that, at a coffee house on Second Avenue, and found a table of men in their forties passing around pictures which they would not let me see. I was interested in exploring this brave new world, at least intellectually, but they were not interested in me. Looking back, my guess is the pictures were of pre-

pubescent boys, and I certainly had no interest in that. There was also the Mattachine Society, and the Daughters of Lesbos, and maybe one or two more, but for Columbia, the Harvard of New York, to recognize such a group as legitimate was a big deal. Sure, members of the New York City Ballet were gay, as were hairdressers and florists, but just as assuredly, no religious leaders were. Not to mention college professors. Perish the thought!

I was earning the title, conferred on me decades later, as the Forest Gump of the New Left.

I was graduating. What was next? Graduate school of course. I thought I might want to teach. My honors political theory teacher suggested law school, but I had no real interest, nor any way to pay for it. I did not understand what lawyers did, and was not driven to become a “professional.” I always figured that would work out if I was doing what I wanted to do. Nor did I consider becoming an accountant, though, looking back now, that too would have been a wise choice. I have that kind of mind, as I was later to demonstrate, but I had no idea what accountants did, nor did I understand that it was a profession. I wanted to go to graduate school in political science, especially number based, as opposed to institution based analysis. The former was growing in favor; the latter was what Columbia taught.

I did not understand how radical I had become, what with grading the teachers, and recognizing gay people as human beings, and my implacable opposition to the war in Vietnam. So I took the GRE's, applied to ten or so schools, sort of a crap shoot, and asked for recommendations from two teachers.

I asked a wrong teacher. He did not like me. He had even accused me of plagiarism the year before. I had written a paper using an idea from Norman Brown, who I scarcely remembered reading, except that I did not like his ideas. Fortunately, he had another teacher, the Czech emigre, sitting in and listening, and so, after the two of them discussed it, I was cleared. But why I was so stupid, or at the least lacked the cunning, to fail to understand how this had embarrassed that professor ... Forest Gump.

Every graduate program I applied to turned me down, except for Umass Amherst, which accepted me into their Master's program, but gave me no money.

A young woman friend of mine, who knew me from Oberlin, suggested I go to Divinity School, but I had no interest in studying the Bible, at least then, and, if I had been a

little more astute, I am sure that Teachers College, at Columbia, would have liked to have gotten to know me, and admitted me. The idea I had to grade the professors was pretty revolutionary. Had traveled I that path, I would have earned a degree which would have allowed me a decent income and retirement for the rest of my life. But no, Forrest Gump ...

When the Czech professor heard about my troubles with graduate school, he contacted a colleague at CCNY, where I was quickly accepted, with a teaching assistant fellowship. Not a lot, but enough for me to get by.

Looking back, it was his intervention in my life which led to the path I took, and I am aware how that I did not effectively pursue other interventions, from friends of my grandmother, or the rising stars of the New Left. Looking back, I see how much I improvised my life.

The friend from Oberlin who recommended Wallace Sayre's class in public administration urged me to apply for a summer job in Washington. He told me I would learn a lot about government, a good way to see how the sausage is made. Writing this, I remember I had one day to get my application in, by the end of 1966, the subways were not running, and I had to walk from West 102nd Street to East 42nd Street to submit the application. Can this be true? I think so.

I wanted to work for the Office of Economic Opportunity, the War on Poverty, but I was given a job in the Immigration and Naturalization service, near the Navy Yard. To get to work on time, I had to take the first bus. We started at 6:30 in the morning, sitting in front of gigantic file card machines, which held the immigration information for everyone who had ever come into the United States, all sorted by something called the Russell Soundex system, sorted not by alphabet, but by sound of the last name. Boring, boring, boring, but I had wanted to work in Washington, I had a job, and that was my lot, so I accepted it.

Where was I to live? Somehow, I found a shared apartment near DuPont Circle that needed another roommate for the summer. John Rothschild, David Satter, and Jacques Leslie were my roommates. John and Jacques had just graduated from Yale, and were going to Oxford, I believe, on scholarships, as was David had just graduated from Chicago. Jacques and David had internships at the Washington Post, as I remember, and John was working for James Reston, at the New York Times. These guys were hot shits, and I was just recovering from being rejected by every graduate school to which I

applied, and working in a nothing job.

After several weeks, I received a call from OEO. They had a position for me, in their Accounting Systems department, the area of the agency which created the accounting systems for their many programs, and the funding mechanisms to the various regions, states and individual demonstration projects. Included in OEO at the time were Community Action Agencies, the Job Corps, Head Start, and other similar initiatives of Johnson's War on Poverty. I had expected that I would find myself in one of the programs, but at least I was close to the kind of action I wanted to be. In addition, OEO was less than a mile walk from where I was living. I learned a lot about accounting there, and the next summer, when I worked in the Accounting Operations department, reconciling the fiscal year end books.

But there were clouds on the horizon, and my life, like the country, was about to fall apart.