

Lower East Side

When I left my home and my family
I was no more than a boy
In the company of strangers
In the quiet of the railway station
Running scared
Laying low, seeking out the poorer quarters
Where the ragged people go
Looking for the places only they would know - Paul Simon,
"The Boxer"

I gave the cab driver the address, on Henry Street in the Lower East side. He told me that I did not want to live there, but dropped me off. I climbed to three flights up the smelly, dirty stairs and knocked on the door, No answer. So I sat there. Wondering ...

Maybe half an hour later, or maybe an hour later, I heard the sound of feet coming up the stairs. I worried that it was hoodlums, who would discover me, rob me, kill me, who knows what. Instead, it was Tamar, who lived across the street, who came over for a visit. She, and her roommates, were students at Antioch, on a co-op in New York. She was coming over to visit Larry, or Dossie, I don't remember, but, after I explained myself, she invited me over to her place to wait until Larry, whose apartment it was, came home.

Through them, I met Bob and Mary. But more to the point, I learned how warm the cold city could be. Larry appeared, claimed he had never received the letter, but said I could sleep on his kitchen floor until I got things sorted out. A couple of days later, my letter appeared on the kitchen table, About the same time, he had a huge fight with John, John moved out, and I had a room to sleep in. It was January of 1962, and I was living on my own, in the lower east side of New York.

The first thing I had to do, having gotten a place to sleep, was to get some income. I went to the NY State Employment office, and was sent to a market research company in mid-town Manhattan, They hired me as an office boy. I had a place to live, and an income. I needed a bank account. I took the bank check that had been issued to me from the Rochester bank to a branch of Chemical Trust, and used it to open account. They took the check, but would not give me any money. As I remember, it took three

weeks to clear, they said they wanted to make sure it was good, but they were gaslighting me. It was a chasers check. Maybe they did not believe that it was really mine. The banker's heart lives in New York. Maybe it was only two weeks, but still ...

Looking back, I am surprised that I did connect with my grandmother, for a place to live, or her friends, to find work. I never did that when I was in New York. I guess, even by then, nineteen years old, I was a lone ranger.

John had found a place on Houston street. He befriended me, showing me around. He was a native New Yorker, no college, but told me that if I read the New York Times every day, that was as good as any college education. He was almost right. He taught me about muenster cheese, and he showed me the shops on Orchard Street, with huge hunks of sweet butter, and halva, and barrels of pickles, he showed me Katz's delicatessen, and pastrami and corned beef, and the boccie courts on Houston Street. He was generous with his time and information to me, a simple boy from the sticks. Thank you John.

If you want to know all this was like, the closest representation to what was going on then is the movie, "Across the Universe", by Julie Taymor. Her story starts a few years after mine, but she gets it right, Or listen to Paul Simon's "[The Boxer](#)", though, in fact, I never took that comfort there.

One of Larry's roommates was Dossie, who had left Swarthmore much like I had left Oberlin, I think, so we had a lot in common, and when she moved out, I was feeling lonely. I next heard of Dossie when I saw a copy of [The Ethical Slut](#) a couple of years ago. I also had come to understand that Larry was living rent free off all of us, which was an affront to my proto-hippie morality. I began to look for another place to live.

The best place to find apartments to share then was the classified section of the Village Voice, though the joke was most of the ads should have mentioned semi-private bed. The village, then far more than now, was a haven for gay people. I answered an ad. It was for a day bed in a loft on Sullivan, or maybe Thompson, just a block above Canal street. I remember climbing the stairs, and seeing, just out side the door, netting holding two very large glass spheres. "Odd," I thought to myself. But the man whose floor this was greeted me with no particular edge, showed me the day bed. A friend of his was there, everything was pleasant, and we agreed that it would work for me. He was a sculptor, who had a studio elsewhere.

I moved me and my suitcase into the common area, was careful to keep it neat, and

everything was fine. On the third morning, my host and his friend came out of his bedroom. I was startled. They looked at me to see my judgment. I looked at them to show my surprise, but it was not like they were hitting on me, and they had both been, up to that time, and after, decent people.

A couple of weeks later, he told me that he was having a party, and I was welcome to come, or, more precisely, stay for it. I did. One of the people there, a man, started hitting on me, and my host came over to him, told him to knock it off. I was impressed. As I accepted them, they accepted me. But I sensed I really did not belong there, and when Mary, whom I had met through Tamara, who I had met that first night in the city, when she told me that an apartment had opened in her building, for what I was paying to sleep on a day bed, I moved.

They said they were sorry to see me go. I was sorry to say goodbye.

The apartment was on the corner of Suffolk and Rivington. The landlord ran a shoe store on the first floor. The apartment was so cheap because, first of all, it was in the lower east side, and second of all, the toilet was shared with whomever it was who lived on the same floor, though I never met her, and third of all, like many such apartments, the bathtub was in the kitchen, and most of all, because there was only DC current in the apartments, which meant finding a gas refrigerator, not easy, and not having a radio, or any electric appliance that needed a transformer.

Except for the hall lights, fluorescent, and, tinkerer that I am, soon had zip cord going from the hall lights into my apartment, and Mary's, up one flight.

It was a one bedroom, (I had my own room!), and to save money, I got a roommate, Chuck, who slept on a day bed in the living room. Bad judge of character am I. He was a hustler from Brooklyn. We were not a good match. But, a friend of mine from Oberlin who had stories to tell of his sojourn in Brazil was going to go to NYU, relatively close by, needed a place to live, and took the day bed. Chuck was not pleased, but did leave.

In the meantime, a friend of Mary's visited, needed a place to stay for a couple of weeks, it was he who actually got Chuck to leave, and he had a woman friend who volunteered to help me through my sexual maturation. It was fumbling, and incomplete but I thought I should mention it.

That October, my roommate was sitting on his day bed, reading a letter, when he looked up and said to me, "Here's a surprise. I just inherited eighteen million dollars." I looked at him, and thought to myself, "Hmph, that is not going to happen to me, but maybe I should live my life as it had happened." As you will learn, by then I had already chosen to work on changing the world, no matter what the pay, or, more precisely, instead of the pay. A motto which came later, but which certainly applied to me then, was "Live simply, so that others might simply live."

Another friend of Mary's had visited in the Spring, and had met my upstairs neighbor, and moved in with her. His name is Bob. We were all very liberal, committed to the civil rights movement and the peace movement. Where are Mary and Bob today? I have no idea. I google their names, and look for them on Facebook, but it has been over fifty years, and even if I find them, I am not sure I will know them.

Anyway, I remember going on a peace march in New York, taking the Staten Island Ferry and camping that night on the Catholic Worker Farm in the center of Staten Island. It is long gone. I am pretty sure Bob was on that march. And because of my friendship with Bob, I was nominated to be on the board of a social democratic peace organization, but then it turned out they did not need me. Later I asked what my role would have been, and was told as long as I voted as I was instructed, I would have been fine. Perhaps they sensed my ornery streak.

Emotionally, I was devastated by flunking out of Oberlin. My brains had been my identity, and I had failed. I remember thinking, well, let's see if I can become a success in business, but honestly, looking back, I had no idea what that meant. I was not hungry for money, or power. I just wanted to live an honest life, and have my material needs covered.

My mother gave me the name of a therapist she wanted me to see, so I did it. We talked about what was going on in my life. He asked me why I thought my mother wanted me to see him. I told him that she was probably concerned, and wanted to hear how I was doing. Could he share his impressions with her? I agreed. Later, I heard from her that he had communicated to her, that I was doing fine, and needed time to sort things out, but she really did not need to worry. I was doing the kind of life work that was realistic and needed.

So, I was delivering copies of market research reports to Pepsi-Cola, and others, getting sandwiches for the people in my office, trying to figure out what they were doing, and

trying to figure out what I should be doing. After five or six months, I asked my boss what the next step was for me. He was a little put off by the question, because I was doing a great job as office boy, and he did not want to replace me. A step up on the food chain at the office, I was told I needed a college degree if I wanted to get a better job. Another person, secretary to the in house psychologist, Arthur Boudin,(recognize the last name?), told me that social work was one way to change society, but I needed college for that.



Bob was planning to go to some major march for civil rights in Washington. I wasn't. He convinced me to go. It was August of 1963. King's speech was like an altar call to me. I committed my life, not to Jesus, but to transforming our country towards the promise it always had presented to me. And, for the first time in my life, I was at a civil rights demonstration which had many people of color. To the left is a pin I still have from those times. This was while the Civil Rights Movement was still interacial.

When I got back to New York, I went looking around. I knew I did not want to go south and work with SNCC. I was too much a boy from northern farm country to think that I could tell white farmers in the south how they might better lead their lives, and I knew I was way far removed from the lives of barely literate black sharecroppers denied voting rights, denied public accommodations, denied life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

I went to the office of the Northern Friends of SNCC, and talked with its director, Jim Monsonis. He had nothing in his organization for me, but he did know that this new group, Students for a Democratic Society, was looking for, essentially, an office boy. I had heard of them. I had wanted to go to Port Huron at the end of my freshman year at Oberlin, but the deal in my family was we had to work during the summer, and, anyway, I needed to get my German back on track. So I missed the Port Huron conference.

The September bombing of the Baptist Church in Birmingham only strengthened my resolve. Four young girls were killed that Sunday. Once again, Bob told me of a major demonstration, in Harlem, at the corner of 125th Street and 6th Avenue, as I remember. He said it might get rowdy, because Malcolm X's supporters would be there, and were unhappy that he had been excluded. But we went uptown, on the 3rd Avenue IRT, and

joined a very large crowd, largely brown, and peaceful.

But when the rally ended, no Malcolm X, as promised, as we were walking along 125th, some kids started running down the street, smashing window. I was puzzled by the senseless destruction, but the crowd seemed to flow around us. Then Bob stopped talking, looked around, and I looked around, and a circle of about twelve or fifteen relatively young people were gathered around us, talking at us, gesticulating. "What should we do?" Bob asked, so I walked through the circle back towards the subway station. I did not even have time to be afraid, because I scarcely understood what was going on. Anyway, few blocks later, a little old brown skinned lady, literally, looked at me, scolded me, and whacked me on the legs with her umbrella. "Whoa!", we both said, and walked more quickly towards the subway. Looking back, I think she was trying to protect us from harm, by convincing us to get out of Harlem.

So I went over to their office, talked to the National Secretary, Lee Webb, who hired me. My ethos told me then to work for subsistence. Wasn't that what the SNCC workers were doing? I asked for \$20 a week. I am sure Lee was pleased with my request. The market research company had been paying me \$70, I was taking a pay cut, but I figured I could make it on \$20. My material needs would be satisfied.

After several months, when they figured out that I did not have a private source of income, they gave me a \$5 raise. Me, it took me almost ten years, to understand that many of my almost all white compatriots in progressive politics had financial support from their family, or raised money for themselves. But I know that year, when I heard of people flying from city to city, I was a little puzzled, because the best I might do was the bus, or hitch a ride with a friend, or simply hitchhike.

This was early September of 1963. In June of 1963, Medgar Evers had been assassinated. After I left Oberlin, my draft status was 1-A, meaning I was first in line to be drafted. I had given a lot of thought to the pacifist arguments, and so sent a letter to my draft board, asking that my classification become 1-AO, draft-able into the army, but in a non-combatant role, most likely a medic. They granted my request. The raw courage of the non-violent civil rights workers in the South then was an immense inspiration to many of us in those days. It was not just a tactic, but a life style, and they, as I learned when Evers was killed, were indeed risking their lives. Looking back, I am certain that it was this kind of commitment that has led to such profound changes in our society. Let me suggest, if you want a first hand account of those times, written by a white son of the South, do read Bob Zellner's memoir, The Wrong Side of Murder

Creek.

After working at SDS for about a month, running the mimeo machine, stapling the monthly newsletter and the remarkable number of policy papers being written by some very gifted young people, sorting the bulk mailings, I was asked to set up the books. SDS had no book-keeping system. The League for Industrial Democracy, our parent organization need to have books for its non-profit status, and also saw that soon SDS would be independent of them, and would need its own books then. Mickey Flacks, Dick Flacks wife, sent a letter detailing how one sets up a double entry system, and I put it together. People were surprised. In fact, I believe the father of one of the red diaper babies members of SDS, and accountant, was so surprised, and grateful, that he donated some old, electric typewriters to SDS, which meant that the mimeo stencils were cut far more cleanly. Spell check just told me mimeo was not recognized, but, back before Xerox, mimeo, by A.B. Dick, an ink-based system, and ditto, a spirit based system, were the low cost ways of duplication. Ditto maxed out at maybe 100 copies, while mimeo could make up to perhaps a thousand, before the stencil wore out. When I discovered some undeposited checks from a fund raising call at the previous Spring's national Council meeting, I received a \$5 raise.

Working at SDS was an education. I was unaware of the factionalism of the left. SDS's parent was the social democratic League for Industrial Democracy, Norman Thomas/Michael Harrington socialism, Second International Socialism, for those who know what this means. But SDS itself had opened itself to children of Third International Socialism, i.e., communists, red diaper babies is what they are called. Of course, this was well after Stalin's death, and Khrushchev's speech condemning Stalin's excesses.

The field secretary of SDS was the son of the editor of the then still published Daily Worker, well, maybe Weekly Worker. I don't know. He told me that he had a political 4-F from his draft board. Also in the office was a young man who had worked for the Student Peace Union, more an anarchist than anything else, and it was he to whom I gravitated. After I decided to return to school, and needed a job, it was he, Don, who through his sister, got me a job for the summer at the American Friends Service Committee.

But I did not understand the language these people were talking. One day, shortly after Kennedy had been assassinated, and I was in the office alone, Danny Kalb, whose cousin Nancy, had started a chapter at Vassar, brought in Phil Ochs. I recognized his

name. He asked me a question couched in the language of contradictions and historical materialism. I told him I did not understand his question. He asked another, equally theoretical. So I explained to him that I did not understand that language, but that six months ago, I had been doing essentially the same kind of work for a market research company, making more money, and now, at least, I was trying to make a difference. Whether I was going to be effective, I had no idea, but at least I was making some sacrifices and trying. I think he liked that answer.

I got to know several other people who were to become quite famous in the later sixties. One of the oddest interactions was with Bayard Rustin. I did not know who he was. He was the person who coordinated the March on Washington that previous summer, but kept out of the limelight because he had been arrested and convicted on a morals charge, years before. In other words, he was gay, and the word intersectionality had not yet been invented. [Spell check does not recognize the word either.] One day Steve, the field secretary, told me that Rustin had asked to see me, and maybe I should give him a call. All I knew about him was that he was a senior staffer at the Workers Defense League, an affiliate organization of the League for Industrial Democracy.

I called him up, and set up a time and walked over to the building where his office was. He stood up to greet me, and I said hello, and he said hello, and we looked at each other, and I noticed that his fly was unzipped, but I was just a little over twenty and he was in his forties, so I was not sure if I should mention it, because of my respect for professional people, I mean, would you mention it to your teacher the first time you were in his class, and the conversation stumbled along, and I went back to the SDS office. Steve asked me how it went. He always had a sort of sardonic look on his face, and maybe, it was just a little more sardonic that time, but I just gave him a puzzled look and went on with whatever it was I was doing.

On the fiftieth anniversary of JFK's assassination, November 2013, I wrote of my time at SDS, and think it useful to insert it here:

I remember the day. I was twenty years old, living on the Lower East Side of New York City, and working as the office manager in the national office of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).

Well, perhaps office manager is overblown. I kept the books, answered the phone, mimeographed the newsletter, maintained the mailing list, and would have gone out to get coffee for the senior staff, if that was what they wanted.

SDS was still technically the “Student League for Industrial Democracy”(SLID), [I have since learned from Al Haber that this was not technically true.] a left over from the heyday of Democratic Socialism. Our phones were part of their office system upstairs. This may have been part of their fear that some of us, for example, the field secretary, were too close to the Stalinist Third International, as opposed to the Eugene Debs, and LID, Second International. It may have also simplified the surveillance by the FBI of all such organizations.

Shortly after noon, the phones went dead, but not the intercom Vera, from upstairs, LID, buzzed us, and told me that Kennedy had been shot in Dallas. I was very new to left wing politics, and fascinated by the complexity of New York's sectarian ideologies. I could not make sense of most of the disputes, but I did know that Union Square, a few blocks away, was populated by soap box orators, always eager to promote their own analysis. What they might say about this event?

I headed over. Usually by noon time, there were at least two or three orators, with about as many people listening. I expected, given the unsettling events, and it being lunch hour, there would be many more. There were none. Empty. Nada. An event so major that it is imprinted on all of our minds, and these amateur analysts were literally speechless.

I went back to the office. The field secretary, a few years older than me, and, as indicated above, well versed in the sectarian factionalism of left wing politics, told me to look in the membership files, to see if Lee Harvey Oswald was a member. I did what he told me.

The lesson here is that history triumphs ideology. Much ideology is mere posturing. We learn this again and again, and we seem to forget it about as quickly. For example, in 2008, as the stock market was imploding, as the credit markets froze, as gigantic business collapsed, capitalist business, almost every economist became a Keynesian, and the only supply-siders were a rump part of the Republican Party. Bailouts, stimulus, interest rates were so low that banks could not lose by borrowing at almost zero, and lending at seemingly incredibly low rates.

History trumps ideology. The planes crashed through the World Trade Center,

and many of our civil rights were buried in those buildings collapse. We are only now understanding how deeply into our lives the government, and business, have delved.

Or, most recently, we experienced another government shutdown, and then another, the first about money already appropriated by Congress, and the second about border security already passed by both houses of Congress. For reasons beyond rational, the Republican right wing has determined that the Affordable Care Act cannot work. Rather than allow it to collapse of its own accord, they chose to collapse the government. Had they only waited for the roll-out ... But they did not, and the House leaders supported them in their foolishness.

History trumps ideology. Now that there is no history, we are back into the politics, and the news cycle, of ideology. Now that the manufactured crisis has been averted, we seem to be back to ideological business as usual. The news is fishing expeditions regarding Benghazi, kangaroo courts regarding the Health Care roll-out, court appointments blocked, gridlock returns.

The Republicans showed how to play a losing hand. We would never know it from watching television, reading the daily press. "Public opinion" and "learned commentators" seem incapable of separating the gold from the dross. The headlines on CNN are continually "Obama fails ..." or "Administration suffers ..." or "Food stamps malnourished ..." Well, I made that last one up, but any fool can see that the House Republicans willingly support huge subsidies for the largest of farmers, distorting the free market they claim to love so well while chopping away at a program which puts food into the stomachs of children who otherwise would be hungry.

And let's not forget immigration reform ... for some reason it has gone off the radar. How about climate change? Both of these are issues affecting us all, which demand action, and demand the kind of action which can only come from the real political process of compromise. Large issues both, with many moving parts, and all we get are sound bites.

Oswald was a member of Fair Play for Cuba, an organization now a footnote in history, largely because of his involvement in it. Because of his involvement, within one month of the assassination of Kennedy, it no longer existed. SDS survived, despite lacking the kind of big name support Fair Play had garnered --

media stars such as Truman Capote, and Alan Ginsburg, and James Baldwin, and Jean-Paul Sartre.

History came to SDS, in the form of the War in Viet-Nam:

a war which not only distorted this country,
as it distorted Indochina,
but distorted SDS,
transforming it from a Civil Rights organization,
with community organizing in northern cities, the Economic Research and
Action Project (ERAP),
but an antiwar movement,
which distorted,
and lead to its self immolation within five years.

There was no card for Oswald and, had I found Oswald to be a member, there may have been no SDS left. A small swerve in history, Oswald chose Fair Play, because his ideology blinded him to the paramount activist issue of the time, voting rights in the South. SDS survived, wobbly, but survived, about 300 people on the mailing list that year, and the next year, thousands, and then tens of thousands.

It was history which created this prairie fire of organizing. Chapters were springing up unrelated to the national organization. It was as if there was an occupy movement, back then, of the baby boomers. We could tell we were being lied to, about the war, about the land of plenty, and about the land of opportunity, and we were young enough, callow youth, to imagine we could do something about it. We learned not to read the head lines, or listen to the pundits. We sought our own truth. My hope is that this spirit is still alive.

I went back to college. Columbia's School of General Studies had an admission program suited for students like me, who had tried college and failed, so off I went, uptown, and became a student, and then an activist, at Columbia.

More tales to tell.

Between Christmas and New Years, that year, SDS had its National Council meeting in New York. It was the first time I had met the national leaders of SDS, including Todd

Gitlin, that year's President, and Clark Kissinger, from the Midwest, who was the best parliamentarian I have ever met. Many of the people in the room had been student body leaders at major universities, or, like Tom Hayden, editors of the student newspapers. Strange, looking back, how SDS mirrored the rules of that most bourgeois institution, the US House of Representatives, but, anyway, Clark had them down, and kept the sometimes passionate discussion calm. One morning we were told that a special guest would be coming in, and we were not to make any special fuss. His name was Bob Dylan. Bob showed up in the early afternoon, and the bullshit flew. I spoke up. I should not have. I don't think it made any difference, but I did then, and continue to have some things to learn about written and unwritten rules of society.

The major discussion at that meeting was how to structure a new venture of SDS, ERAP, or the Economic Research and Action Project, funded by the UAW. ERAP was, over the next couple of years, to establish neighborhood organizing projects in 5 or 10 cities, including Chicago, Newark, Cleveland, and Philadelphia, I think. A conference was scheduled in Washington DC, and Saul Alinsky was invited to speak. All I remember of the conference was his speech, in which he said that middle class kids, like me, like us, should not lead community organizing. Looking back, I tend to agree, but, on the other hand, in many ways ERAP was one model upon which the yet to be created VISTA program was based.

This is not why I mention the conference. I needed a place to stay, and Peggy, a friend from Oberlin, was taking time off from school and living in DC, so I asked if I could stay with her. She said yes, and it turned out to be in the same bed, and I WAS IN LOVE. She came to visit me in New York, and I went back to visit her in Washington, she wanted to live in New York, so she moved in with me for the summer.

It was a difficult summer for her. She did not have to work. I did. I figured she would understand, and we would spend evenings and weekends together, but she resented the time apart. I think. She was my first girl friend, and I think neither of us knew how to work out such problems. Plus, I was taking a night course at the Baruch School of Business.

But I do remember one thing. One day, I said to her, "Let's have dinner with my grandmother." My grandmother was a pretty interesting person. Peggy was an artist, I think she later went to RISD, and my grandmother, with her sister, ran a summer art school first in Taxco, Mexico in the 1950's, and then in Positano, Italy up into the 1960's. She would always go a little early taking an ocean liner, travel around a little, and then

stay late, coming back to the US for Thanksgiving at our house. I remember seeing her off once from one of the piers on the West Side of New York.

Side story: One thanksgiving, about 1957, we were old enough to have some wine with the meal. That year, after the school had closed, she went to northern Africa, the Maghreb, and took the train to Marrakesh. 1957, mind you. We were getting a little tipsy from the wine, and she said it all reminded her of when she had smoked hashish on that trip. I recall my father standing over the turkey, carving knife and fork in his hand, wondering exactly where he should plunge them into the bird, and which bird should get the sharp end of his sticks ...

Anyway, Peggy was mortified. Here she was, living with me in New York. How could she explain such sinful behavior to my grandmother. Peggy's parents were from Texas, and I believe her grandparents were "typical" Southern Baptists. She could not conceive of a grandmother who was as libertine as mine was. I explained she would have no problem, and I think my grandmother found Peggy to be even more charming because she was breaking social norms.

Now, the reason I was taking a class at Baruch school was because I wanted to go back to college. I wanted to be able to figure out what these very bright, charismatic people in SDS were talking about. So I had gone to NYU, explained my situation to an admissions person, who suggested I take a course to prove I could do the work. "Which course at NYU should I take?", I asked. "Not at NYU." he said, so I took macro economics at Baruch College, then on 34th Street, as I remember. I got an A.

I went back to him, showed him the grade, and asked what the next step was. "Ahem", he said, "Uh, we can't admit you. I am sorry." I asked him what I should do. He told me that the School of General Studies at Columbia had a program to admit students just like me, and I should check them out. So I went up to Columbia, they admitted me as a non-matriculated student, giving me a semester to prove myself.

Peggy went back to Washington, and I went on a camping trip with my father, with a pop-up trailer, around the north shore of Lake Superior, down into Missouri where a friend of mine from Oberlin lived, he too having left Oberlin earlier than expected, and I spent the entire trip pining for Peggy.

By then, the year before, I had moved to the same block, and then the same building, as Bob Markus, another friend from Oberlin, the one most influential in my decision to

discover New York. He and his wife, Karen, and their infant child Noah, lived in an apartment on the top floor. The other apartment on that floor had a free spirited woman, on the third floor lives someone I never saw, and above me, in the front apartment, Michael, a “hooper”, dancer on Broadway shows when he could get the work, gay, and my floor in the back apartment, Edger, not Edgar, but Edger, and his male lover who would have very loud arguments periodically, and me, with another roommate who was taking time off from Oberlin. On the street level was a remnant store, rags, schmata, run by a Mr. Schwarz, who owned the building and was surprised that people like us would want to live in such a place. Last time I went by, a couple of years ago, everything had changed, of course, but where the rag store was a tattoo/biker bar.

Bob helped me decode what was going on in our building, in the neighborhood, in the village, and in the city. We would go up on the roof, with a fantastic view of midtown Manhattan, smoke a joint and hang out. Sometimes I would baby sit for Noah, while Karen was in the psychiatric hospital because of her post-partum depression, and sometimes I would take Noah in his carriage over the Washington Square park. It was really like living in a group home, where we all talked with each other, and I was reminded of it when I saw Julie Taymor's movie. A couple of years ago, I sought him out, he was still living on the lower east side, we were both fifty years older, and I had moved on in my life, a lot.

I began commuting up to Columbia, which, for those who don't know, is in the upper west side, while I was living in the lower east side, so it was a hike, and I had to change trains halfway there.