

Mendon Center

In 1953, when I was ten years old, we moved to Mendon Center, a hamlet about 40 miles north of Warsaw, and 12 miles south of Rochester. My father had received a promotion. No longer the Assistant, he was now the Work Unit Conservationist of the US Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation District for Monroe County, New York. We moved from substantially rural hill town country to the exurbs of a secondary metropolitan region of upstate New York. Rochester was, and is, a medium size city, with a strong manufacturing base, and a large university.

My mother's years in the wilderness were over. For the first year we lived there, we attended a Methodist church in the town of Mendon, but soon mother discovered the First Unitarian Church of Rochester, and its minister, David Rhys Williams. The next Fall, we started attending that church, regularly.

What a relief it was for me! Rather than argue with the teachers about the Bible, or science, the teachers encouraged me to think, to dispute, to make a religion my own. Sophia Lyons Fahs had designed the Religious Education curricula for both the Unitarians and the Universalists, and it was child centered, and creative. It was wonderful. During the coffee hours, when the adults did whatever they did during coffee hour, we children got to watch Walt Disney nature films.

Mendon Center was a hamlet in the township of Mendon, surrounded by dairy farms. I was getting old enough to understand where I lived, and how to get from my house to other locations, near and far. The house we bought had been the hired man's house for the Young's farm; Dan Young, the farmer, expanded the lawn by cutting out an acre from his bean field. My father planted a hedge of multiflora rose, to mark the limit of the lawn, and planted a substantial garden.

We had looked at several other houses, modern ranch style houses, which is what I wanted, but what my parents chose was an American eclectic, to which there had been several additions over the hundred plus years of its existence. It came complete with an earth floor basement. The bathtub did have a shower, so it was modern in that way, but it had only three bedrooms, which meant that my brother and I would share a room. Dear reader, this probably would not have been a big deal to you, but for me, at that time, it was a downsizing. Steve and

would fight a lot, about the most minor of things.

A year before my parents would not have chosen this house. It was the first year that the school system in the township had been centralized. The high school in Honeoye Falls, the larger town to the south of us, had added an elementary wing, and we were bussed to school there. I was in fifth grade. Until 1953, kids in Mendon Center attended the one room school house in the hamlet, at least until high school.

Through Facebook, I have been in touch with three people from my years going to the Honeoye Falls Central School. One is an ardent Trump supporter, we agree to disagree, another lives outside Washington, DC, and the third is Dave Maloney, who has made his living as a folk singer song writer on the west coast. He even has a song about Honeoye Falls, which you can find [here](#). I was able to spend a day with him about 2015. His older brother, Peter, who was in my sister's class, has been able to forge a successful life as an actor in New York City. Dave was one of the class jocks. Basketball was his game. His father was the editor/publisher of the weekly newspaper, and I remember going on a cub scout field trip, I think, and seeing the [linotype](#) machine in operation. This was, of course, long before computer typesetting.

Our class size was something like 60 people, and for many of the kids there, college was not the foreordained plan, as it had been for the three of us. I asked Dave how it had come to be that he and his brother, and for all I know, his sister, the same class as my younger brother, had gone on to carve out exceptional lives. He really did not have an answer.

At some point I hope to visit with the third, Martha, who lives outside Washington, to ask her the same question. I was friends with her older brother Albert, and my sister was very good friends and classmates with their older sister, Rachael. I do know that towards the end of the sixties, Rachael moved to Maine, back to the land, and I heard that Albert stayed in Rochester, making a living as a house painter. Because they too were members of the Unitarian Church, our families would sometimes socialize together. The husband, Walter was his name, operated a chicken farm, and sold eggs to custom customers in the city, the old fashioned way, making delivery. Martha mentioned that he would always listen to the Metropolitan Opera as he was slaughtering and dressing the chickens on Saturday afternoon. Looking back on my life, I realize that there was something atypical about this family, also.

I had been in cub scouts in Warsaw, and believe I had another year in

Mendon, until I joined the Boy Scout troop there. Troop 105. I still remember the number. We would march in the annual Memorial Day parade in Honeoye Falls, singing the songs of the various military services. My classmate and friend, Donny Ainsworth, once snidely called us Hitler Youth on parade.

The Scoutmasters, and assistant Scoutmasters, were mostly WW II vets, which gave scouting an even more militaristic feel. We could go on camporees in the Fall, Winter and Spring. The moms would sew lightweight canvas tents for us to sleep in. We had cotton sleeping bags, and would cook our food over open fires, even in the snow. Looking back, I am astounded that the adults put up with such harsh conditions, but then, many had endured much worse during the war.

At the camporees, scout troops from various towns would attend. Ours, being rural, was the least worldly, but the ones closer to the city were tougher, and we avoided any kids who were from Rochester. They were like gang members.

And me, I was not only the smallest, but the least sophisticated of all. For example, I was sent out, almost every year, to get some red lantern oil. I would go to a neighboring troop, and ask if they had any. They did not, but they said they heard that the next troop over had some. So I would go to that troop and ask, but, of course they did not, and they would send me on to another troop, and on, and on. I never got it; there is no such thing as red lantern oil, or thirty feet of shoreline, or the keys to the oarlocks. I was just trying to be helpful, but all of my "friends" in scouting were in on the joke.

Of course, being simple did have one advantage. Sometimes, at night, we would have snipe hunts. We would go off into the woods, and wait until a snipe, a small bird came by, and try to catch it. Of course, there was no such thing as a snipe, at least in those woods, and we would find ourselves abandoned, alone, in the woods, with their strange sounds. Well, the other kids might have felt that way, but I enjoyed, sitting, alone, in the woods, with all the sounds and smells, waiting for this very rare animal to appear.

In Mendon Center, we also joined the 4-H club, the 4-H's being hands, heart, health and home. It was oriented towards rural families, and we would do farming style activities, including exhibits at the county fair. More on this later.

As I mentioned, the house we moved into had at least one major problem, at least for me. It meant that my brother and I shared a room, while my sister got her own room. We each had a twin bed, and I remember that we fought a lot, probably the normal amount of sibling nonsense, but sharing a bedroom meant that we had no where to go which was our own, private space, if we wanted to be alone.

My guess is that my parents accepted this in order to live in the country, and were unwilling to spend more for a larger house. Unwilling, I say, because they did not have a mortgage, as I recall, and had paid cash for the house, as they had paid cash for the house in Warsaw. The cash came from the sale of the farm. I have no idea why. As a homeowner myself, I find the mortgage interest deduction most helpful in my taxes. Perhaps this was because of the financial scars of the depression, or perhaps it was because my father had moved from apartment to apartment when he was growing up, and his parents had never owned their own home.

This was unlike my mother's brother Louis, who, though a member of the Communist Party, who worked in a factory, owned the apartment building where they lived. In other words, he, like his wife, a socialist, was also a landlord. Just another odd fact about my parents, and my extended family.

My father immediately made two major improvements to the property. He created the vegetable garden, and had built a three car garage, two bays for the two cars, and a third for storage. Living in the country had the financial disadvantage of needing to own two cars, one for my father to commute in, and the other for my mother to use. This was, to them, a necessity.

The third bay of the garage held the miscellaneous tools necessary for taking care of the lawn, and the garden, and the steamer trunks which my mother still had, remnants of her trips across the ocean when she was a little girl. In them were all kinds of surprises, including a really wonderful mineral and sea shell collection, from her mother's family. I still have one or two pieces left from this collection.

The house did not have a fireplace, which I missed, but it did have a large mud room off the kitchen, unheated, in which my parents installed a freezer, where they would store bulk purchases, such as when pork loins were on sale, or when they bought a side of beef, or half a side of beef.

We also used the freezer, once, to make apple jack, allowing cider to ferment, and, before it became vinegar, freezing it, and separating the liquid alcohol from the frozen water. The stuff tasted terrible.

There was also a small study off the living room, where my father had his gun collection, he had between ten and twenty rifles and shot guns, though he only used one to hunt, and his own father's extensive pipe collection.

My father smoked a pipe, like his father. He also dipped snuff. I guess he was a nicotine addict, but it might have been to anesthetize his gums, for he really had bad teeth, losing them all before he was fifty.

The best thing about the house, to me, was that, now that we lived close enough to Rochester to get good television reception, this was long before cable, we got a television, black and white. TV viewing was strictly limited by our parents, but at last we had a TV. I remember wishing we lived closer to Buffalo, which had one more channel than was available from Rochester. I think we only had two the big three networks, NBC, CBS, and ABC. This was a decade before PBS was established, or even the wide spread acceptance of UHF television stations.

Rochester was the home of Stromberg-Carlson, a long ago sliced and diced electronics company, which had its own studios, and one of the original radio stations, I believe WHAM and WHAM-FM. As I recall, Queen for a Day originated in Rochester, from their studio. My father would be on the radio, occasionally, giving farmers advice during the noon time news shows. I remember the building where the studio was, along with the theater in that building which housed the live audience show which originated their.

Rochester was best known for Kodak. George Eastman, and Kodak, meant that there were lots of cultural facilities which other cities lacked, including the Eastman School of Music, whose students taught us instruments in grade school and high school. Rochester also had decent museum of science, with a planetarium, Bausch and Lomb was also in Rochester, and as I recall, the optics for the planetariums through out the country were produced by Bausch and Lomb. Also Rochester Carburetor, but I had no idea what this was, because I knew so little about internal combustion engines.

I think they are all defunct now. Xerox, which was then Haloid Xerox,

was extremely small, until the sixties, but by then I had left home.

My mother insisted we have a piano, and piano lessons, which was in the dining room the formal room for our meals.. After a year of this, and the obvious truth that I was not practicing, the lessons ended, and the piano was given away. Most of our meals were at the kitchen table, a table I still have. The kitchen had a window above the sink which looked out to the hills above the Finger Lakes. I believe this is what sold the house to my mother, who, without a dishwasher, spent a lot of time at the sink. I recall seeing a thunderstorm, complete with lightning, out on the horizon, out of this window.

When my parents had guests, we kids had to eat in the kitchen, while the adults sat in the dining room. My mother always had a formal place setting, along with the silver set she inherited from her mother.

Each Thanksgiving, my grandmother, my father's mother, would return from her travels in Europe. In the Spring, typically, she would take an ocean liner over. I remember seeing her off in Manhattan once, she was sailing in the Isle de France, and then she would fly back into the Rochester airport in mid November. It was always a tense time, because she was difficult, and my father was angry, especially at her, and what to her was a discussion was to him an argument. I believe the "discussions" were mostly about money, and how he should be giving her some, or more, and he was saying that he did not have to support her on her "grand tour". Of course, the emotional source of the tension was far deeper than money.

Anyway, this particular Thanksgiving, she brought us a bottle of champagne, and we all had some. While my father would never share beer, or whiskey with me, my parents did not object to us underage children drinking alcohol at an event like this. If they had wine, we would often have watered down wine.

The problem arose when my grandmother started holding forth. I was twelve, I think, so my sister was 14 and my brother ten, and my grandmother had just spent the last months, after Positano, travelling in North Africa. She must have been close to her seventies by then, so she was spry old bird, taking the train to Marakesh, alone. Anyway, I remember her commenting on how the champagne made her feel slightly giddy, much like when she smoked hashish on that trip in the Maghreb. This happened in 1955 or 1956.

In my mind, my father, who was always tanned, turned a particular color of purple. He was displeased, to say the least.

Family rarely visited us in Warsaw, or in Mendon Center. Uncle Phillip came, once or twice, married, childless, he worked for Dun and Bradstreet, lived in Hastings-on Hudson, emulated his father, and smoked his pipe and blew smoke rings. Smoke rings is the only thing I really remember him for. When he died in the 1980's, it turned out that he still had his father's very large book collection.

Similarly, we almost never saw my mother's brother Louis, or his wife and family. First of all, they lived in the Bronx, in a down at the heels neighborhood, and did not have room for us to stay, though I do remember visiting their apartment once, and second, he did not have time to travel, because he worked as an hourly employee at an electrical manufacturing company, and third, and this was probably the real reason, he was a Communist.

It was the fifties, and I think my parents, in particular, my mother, did not want the neighbors, or my father's boss, to have any suspicion about this. I got to know Louis a little as an adult, and I really thought he was the sanest of all the Haas kids. Of course, as I mentioned, Dorothea, my mother's sister, was certifiable, spending most of her adult life in a psychiatric hospital.

We did see relatively frequently my father's cousin, Michael Lewis, his wife Peggy. The Lewis children, Michael and John and another one, who I never met, and my father spent summers in Lee, MA, on a farm, where my father learned that he wanted to become a farmer.

Michael and Peggy, never Uncle Michael and Aunt Peggy, nor Cousin Michael and Peggy, but Michael and Peggy, had three kids. I remember, once, when we were still living on the farm, meeting them at their grandmother Ellie's house on the coast of Connecticut, in Westport. One of Michael's kids had a clubbed hand. Later, by high school, his nickname was lefty, because of this, but I, being less than five, pointed this out, and so had pointed out that I too had a deformity, my the toe next to my little toe on my left foot was bent under the middle toe. I remember my mother trying to fix it, then, with cotton balls, because she probably was ashamed of this, but it did not work, and the toe is still turned in.

Michael had a brother, John, who we met only once. He was a doctor,

had gone to Johns Hopkins undergraduate and then for his MD, and then immediately moved to Ghana, Africa, where he did work on sickle cell anemia. I believe part of the reason he left the country was because of his politics. Anyway, he visited us one time, while we lived in Warsaw. My father was upset with him because he had brought with him his second wife, African. I never fully recognized my father's racism. It was not, for whatever reason, passed down to us three kids.

I also remember from this visit picking up a chair on the deck, expecting it to be very heavy, so heavy that I would be barely able to move it, and almost threw it off the deck. It was made of aluminum, which was just coming to be used for purposes such as this. I remember the adults laughing at my surprise. I also remember my terror of the horseshoe crabs which wandered around on the beach, and also the eels that a fisherman landed from the bridge over the slough, as the tide went out. Years later, I asked my father why we did not visit Westport anymore, and he said the house had been washed out to sea in a hurricane.

Another vacation the whole family took was on Highland Lake, in Northwest Connecticut, A cabin that looked out over the lake, no beach, woods behind it, with glaciated boulders among the trees. I remember wondering why anyone would like to vacation in a spot like this, no beach, a cold lake, and nothing but woods behind the house. Some friends of my parents from Millerton were also in the house, they might have owned it, and when drinks were served, one evening, before dinner, our host poured me a full glass of Scotch, inviting me to drink it. I did not like the taste, and only took a couple of sips, wondering why this adult was so wasteful with what was, in our home, a precious product.

Soon after we moved to Rochester, J. Robert Oppenheimer, who ran the Manhattan Project which produced the first atomic bomb, was scheduled to speak at the University of Rochester. The year was 1953 or 1954, and he either was about to or had just lost his security clearance. My interest in science was by now quite pronounced, and so my mother, especially, wanted to attend the lecture, and wanted me to come also. For her, it was a reminder of her political activism in Millerton, solidly liberal, defending our freedoms.

Additionally, my father had gone through elementary and secondary years with Robert's younger brother Frank. Robert, too, had attended the Ethical Culture school system, and I believe the families were, if not close, then in communication with each other. I remember a blanket we had, in the back of the car, which we kids used to keep ourselves warm

on long trips, that had on it an Oppenheimer name tag.

Anyway, we got to the University, and the auditorium was over full; loudspeakers had been set up for the over flow audience. A lot of people were there to support academic freedom, and I am sure my mother was glad we had moved close to a city which sponsored such talks. Of the speech itself, I remember nothing. Later, I learned that the University had sponsored an important annual convocation regarding nuclear physics, and also possessed on its premises a cyclotron, where one of the sub atomic particles, a mu meson I believe, was identified.

My mother was also interested in the Rochester Philharmonic, though she did not get to attend as frequently as she probably wanted. She really wanted us to become high culture people. Like my grandmother, my mother was a culture vulture, wanting a higher class life than that in which she lived. One of the advantages of the Unitarian Church in Rochester was that it offered her some of this, intelligent people to talk with, and a choir that had professional soloists, so that going to church was, for her, somewhat like going to a concert.

It was an unending source of tension that my father did not want to participate in such activities, nor did he want to take summer vacations. So they would spar over this, and then we would go away for a week, sometimes with him, sometimes without. He did go with us to Selkirk Shores State park, staying in a cabin with rotting screens, having to use a pit toilet, and I think my father like this part of it, and walking along the shore line of Lake Ontario, collecting bottle caps with my brother. We amassed a collection of over 100 different bottle caps. (this was before there were cans, or, if there were cans, before there was cans with pop-tops.) I also amassed a really stupendous case of poison ivy. For some reason, I could not stay away from it. As my children were growing up, I was always vigilant about it, they were both allergic, but they for some reason, once they could identify it, stayed away from it. I don't know why I could not.

One of my favorite vacations, without my father, was a week at Long Beach Island, New Jersey shore. We rented a cabin, sight unseen, which was three houses from the beach. The island itself is a barrier island, so it was difficult to get to far from the beach, and I remember my mother commenting on the promised, and delivered, cross ventilation, literally, a cross, from door to back door, and side window to side window. But I loved the ocean, and wanted for years after that to live next to the ocean, a dream I was able to fulfill much later in my life.

The house in Mendon Center was on a state highway, which meant that it was a busy road. It was close to the highway. The "front door" lead to a porch that was probably ten feet from the road. We never used it. We knew that if someone knocked on the door, they were unfamiliar with the house, were strangers. The door we typically used lead into the kitchen, off a farmers porch. Looking back, having learned something about American vernacular architecture, the house was probably built in pieces, and of no particular style, with the kitchen added on, and then the large pantry/mudroom later added on. The basement had a dirt floor, and there was probably barely room for a normal adult to stand, though I was just still pretty short by the time we moved. It did have a drain at one end, more about this drain later. Unlike the coal furnace we had in Warsaw, in Mendon we had oil heat, much cleaner than coal. My father installed a water softener, which required the addition of bags of salt, which he would hoist onto his shoulders, to my amazement at his strength. I remember them being 100 pounds, but believe that was total weight, and they probably weighed fifty pounds each, he would carry two to balance the load.

Behind the garage he had installed his own gasoline tank, with a hand operated pump. Farmers can do this, and don't have to pay taxes on the gasoline either. By the time I was twelve or thirteen, I was allowed to back the cars up to the pump, and fill them with gas.

Behind our house were the bean fields where Dan Young raised his beans, I suppose pinto beans. His farm had been a substantial dairy farm in the past, with several sets of large barns, and his house was large and commanding, with two driveways leading to its formal porch. Maybe, now that I think of it, he family were long time residents of Mendon, and he was related to one of Mendon's most famous residents, Brigham Young, who had lived several miles down the road from where we lived.

In one of the barns he stored the hay he harvested from his fields, selling it, I guess, to farmers who were still dairy farmers. His son, Gordon, and I, and my brother would go into that barn, and build forts among the bales of hay, passageways below the surface, with warrens or dens. Very dangerous, and very, very dangerous if ever we had played with matches. The other set of barns had a barnyard. I was surprised to see that some of the walls had been finished, plaster and lathe, and never figured out why.

One of the barns was only one story, and in that barn Gordon and I, one summer, as part of a 4-H project, raised two pigs. We would sit with the pigs, oblivious to the smell, perhaps because there were only two of them, perhaps because we were twelve year old boys, perhaps because we kept the straw clean. At the end of the summer, we exhibited them at the county fair. They were then sold, butchered, and, in exchange, my parents received some pork, perhaps from our pig, though I remember them telling me this was not so.

My brother and I also raised animals at our house for our other 4-H projects. My sister did not, because she was a girl; she needed to demonstrate home making skills. She once won first prize, when she was thirteen or fourteen, for demonstrating how to make peanut butter cookies, even though she forgot to include the peanut butter as she was doing the demonstration. We also joked, later in our lives, that she got a blue ribbon for her gardening skills, because she was the best little ho-er in Monroe County...Well, my brother and I did.



One summer, we raised two sheep, Hamilton and Jefferson. We had them on a tether, on the part of the lawn which was reclaimed from Dan Young's bean field. It was far rougher than the original lawn. We would move the tether every week or so. The next summer, we could clearly see how much the sheep had fertilized the lawn.

Above is a picture of my brother and me with one of the sheep. In the foreground, one of us is carding the sheep, to bring the wool up, and the other of us, behind the sheep, with a set of shears, to even the height of the wool. You can also see the tether, and the multiflora rose hedge on our property lines, as well as three of the barns of Dan Young's farm, and two silos, no longer used.

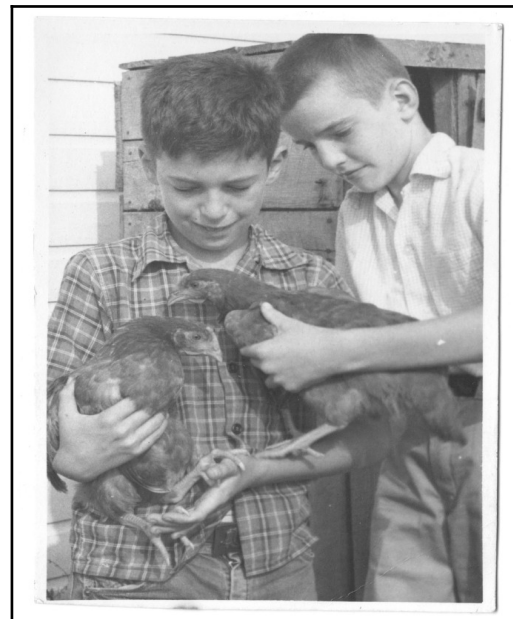
These sheep were taken to an auction, at the end of the summer, where I saw how rural auctions worked. We had groomed the sheep, but it was pointed out to me at the county fair that I had cut too much wool off the sheep's back. Live and learn, After the auction, in which we hardly

made the money back the sheep cost us, both for lambs, and then feed, it was pointed out that the two sheep, both males, had not been castrated. This was supposed to have been done by the person from whom we acquired them, because otherwise, the meat would be very tough. To prove the point, I was invited to feel their scrotum by the buyer. I declined.

Several months later I received a check from the government. It turned out that the sheep's wool was part of a federal price support system.

Another summer, while I raised chickens, and my brother raised rabbits. This was in cages behind the garage. For some reason, the rabbits died. The chickens survived, until my father and I slaughtered them in the fall.

To the right is a picture of me and Gordon Young, holding two of the chickens.



My father showed me how to slaughter them: hang them upside down from the branch of a tree, the old apple tree next to the garden, take a pen knife, and cut up through the roof of their mouth into their brain. They were then dead, so we could slice their carotid artery in their neck, hanging on to them so they did not flail, and they would bleed into either the ground or a bucket. We would then feather them by dipping them into a pot of boiling water, and the feathers, including the pin feathers, would fall off. We would then gut them. The chickens were really not that good, pretty scrawny, like what people used to have to eat, I am sure. I think my father felt he was teaching me very important things about life, things he had not learned when growing up in New York City, but things that farmers know with their hands.

Behind Dan Young's bean fields was an old black barn, unused, which we explored. I am sure it fell down before it was torn down, but it was fascinating to me because we could explore its foundation, and its first floor. A dirt road led from the Young's barns, between the fields, to the barn, and then snaked down to the valley below, what had been in one of the inter-glacial periods, the Genesee River. Now it was the Lehigh

Valley Railroad, and also a great campsite, where we go, off in the woods, for camping adventures. Sometimes we would to the tracks and put pennies, or rarely, rocks, on the tracks, to see what the trains would do... they would flatten the pennies, and the rocks were forbidden, because the worry was they might derail the train. We would hid when the train approached, because the engineers in the locomotives, always diesel-electric, would activate their very loud horns, warning us to stay away from the tracks.

Down the road from us, next to the Youngs, were the Lords. They were operating their dairy farm. When I got old enough, they would hire me to drive the tractor pulling the hay wagon, on which stronger people would throw the bales of hay. One summer, after we moved into Rochester, my brother lived with them, boarded, much like what my father had done, working on the farm. I was always too scrawny for that.

From the time I was probably five or six, in my brothers recollection, adults confused us. Once, when I was about twelve, I heard one say, "But I thought Walter was the older." I was, but even then, I looked younger than my brother. To the right is the picture of the three



of us, when we took a trip to Washington. DC, I imagine Jane is 16, I am 14, and Steve is 12. I am the one carrying the camera in my right hand. Steve is already noticeable bigger than me. When he was fifteen, he was big enough to be useful on the farm. It has always astounded me how much of my work life has been manual, because I was the least likely person to do manual labor, based on my first two decades. My mind, as one carpenter told me, was far stronger than my back.

Phone service: Unlike Warsaw, which connected us with the switchboard, in Mendon Center, we had a party line. About seven different houses shared our line, as I recall, our phone number was 543f11, which meant that when the phone rang with a long ring and a short ring, it was for us. 543f12 would have been a long ring and two short rings. We always heard a click on the line when we were talking,

and after several years, discovered that it was old Mrs. Lord, Charlie's aunt, Ronnie's great aunt, who lived up the road from them. It was her clock. Whenever the phone would ring, she would listen in, just to keep up with the gossip. For several years I made money during the summer mowing her lawn, riding my bike the half mile to her house.

I rode my bike everywhere back then, in the country. Sometimes even into Honeoye Falls, three miles away, to visit friends, but more often to another lawn mowing site, where my father had designed a farm pond. The Buckley's, a nice couple but no kids. I thought that strange. He was an engineer at Bausch and Lomb, but could not tell anyone what he worked on, because it was classified, government work. His was not a farm so much as his country, exurban estate with a beautifully restored, typical American farm house of the 1830's, and a barn across the street. When I was fourteen and fifteen, I would ride my bike the three miles to his place, and mow his lawn. Later, when I was fifteen, he was quite helpful for my science fair project. He gave me a couple of lenses, and a prism, for a spectograph I made, and then helped with the photography.

I also rode my bike to Mendon Ponds Park, a county park about three miles away, glacial kettle ponds, including the pond where I learned how to swim. I would meet my friend Ricky Sleight there, and we would ride around, exploring, discovering mysterious roads high on the hills, mapping them, showing the map to my father, who smiled, but never told me that we had discovered the fire roads, or what they were for.

One afternoon, coming down a hill in the park, near where the pheasant hatchery was, I lost control of my bike, and crashed, skinning myself, and crumpling a wheel. A state cop came by, and talked to me, and offered to give me a ride home, which I declined, so he looked at the sky, and told me he thought it was going to rain. I accepted his offer. Imagine what my mother thought when the state cop drive into our driveway!

There was another pond, called a dug out pond, down the hill from the Young's place, where we would swim, a little, but we were afraid of the leeches, and the snapping turtles that lived there. Leeches, as I recall, were a big problem in many of the swimming places near Warsaw, and Mendon. They were ugly creatures, sort of like a line of slime attached to your leg, but they could be convinced to let go if you sprinkled salt on them. Mendon Ponds Park pond did not have leeches, nor did the swimming pool in Warsaw, with is chlorinated water.

I was also active in the boy scouts, in Mendon, troop 105. I guess I

mentioned the number before. We learned the pledge, and how to salute with two fingers, rather than three, or was it three fingers rather than two, the difference between cub scouts and boy scouts, and I climbed the ladder of badges, up to Life, which required a set of merit badges. I was never physically adept enough to get the swimming merit badge, or the physical fitness badge, both of them required, for Eagle.

In Boy Scouts, we always marched in the Memorial Day parade in Heneoye Falls, and occasionally a parade in Mendon. I remember my fellow scout, Donnie Ainsworth, muttering something about Hitler youth on parade. His mother was English; his father operated a muck farm several miles from us. They had met during WW II, and looking back now, I sense there was some subterranean story about their relationship.

His sister, a friend of my sisters, showed up at my father's Memorial Service, in 1999, and told me that he was maybe in California, had become a truck driver, on the open road, after a failed marriage, etc. Then about 2005, John McPhee had a piece in the New Yorker describing the life of a long haul, hazardous cargo truck driver: Don Ainsworth. I emailed McPhee, but he never responded.

My brother and I were also friends of the Powells, whose father was a farmer about half a mile from our house. We would play basketball in one of his barns, empty except for the basketball hoop. I asked my father if Mr. Powell went to him for advice, and he said no, the Powells were very good farmers and did not need advice. I never really figured out what kind of farming they did. Like the Youngs, the barns were dairy barns, but they were no longer used for dairy. The land had muck fields, very fertile fields, that bordered the bogs of Mendon Ponds Park, so maybe they raised vegetables. Occasionally we would stay for dinner, my brother and me. I remember having, for the first time, oyster stew, which I loved. When I told my mother I liked it, she said that she couldn't cook it because it was too expensive. The Powells also had one of the earliest TV's, a black and white with what must have been a 7 inch screen, diagonal. But it was their TV.

During the summer I would mow lawns and go to summer camp, sleep away camp is what my kids called it, for a week at a time. The first was the Buffalo YMCA camp near Warsaw, when we still lived in Warsaw, and then, after we moved to Mendon Center, there was a Bible camp the first summer, the last Bible camp I went to, Thank God. It was part of the Sunday school for the Methodist church, or was it Presbyterian, in Mendon. I found the building using Google maps. It is now called

Westminister chapel, and next to it, the old Grange Hall where Boy Scouts met, is now called Cibi, a catering hall. The Youngs farm has been subdivided into horse farms, and the Lord's is looking very spiffy, but not a cow in site. Wikipedia says this about Mendon: "The most affluent town in all of upstate New York." Not when I lived there.

Where was I? Oh yes, summer camp. Once I was in Boy Scouts, we would go for a week to the boy scout camp in the Adirondacks, a six hour bus ride away. I remember the first time we left, I had a twinge of homesickness, but it only lasted a little bit.

The camps name was Massawepie, on Massawepie Lake. We took merit badge courses, swam, and ate in the dining hall, drank bug juice. Our sleeping arrangements were canvas tents on wooden platforms, four beds to a tent, with straw tick mattresses made of burlap.

We hiked up to Moosehead Mountain. I remember sitting on the trail as we broke, either for a break, or lunch, and reading the contents of the tinned meat, which convinced the other scouts to give theirs to me. It was basically a list of all the parts of a cow, or pig, you would not want to eat. The scouts had a very good system for hiking 15 minutes, or half an hour of walking, then a five minute break, with the slowest one leading the pack, so that no one was left behind.

The second year we were at Massawepie, they opened a whole new camp complex. We had the joy, to me, of being in real wilderness, land that had not been used to the extent that everything was worn down by over use. We returned the next year, and the sense of virgin land was gone.

It was this third year that I experienced my first, remembered, antisemitism. I was completely unaware that my father's family was Jewish. He was Ethical Culture, but his mother was born Jewish, as had been his father's father. For some reason he wanted to deny his Jewish heritage, and insisted that Ethical Culture had people from a variety of backgrounds, when, in fact, it was a most liberal off spring of German reform Judaism. When I was about twelve, visiting my grandmother in New York, she was shocked when she understood how little of my family's heritage I knew. She told me a story from her family, I am not sure if it is true, of being expelled from Spain, which happened to the Jews in 1492. If true, it explained my fathers Moorish appearance, at

least this is the story I tell myself. Any, the point is that I had no idea that Hitler would have sent me to the gas chambers.

Anyway, I took Nature merit badge that third year, an easy one for me, what with my brains, and my father's work, our experiences in the outdoors. I had a prepubescent crush on the teacher, a high school kid. I idolized, him. He was tall, handsome, muscled and named Mark. I never liked the name Walter, and his name was Mark, Mark Clark, actually, and I wished I had been named Mark.

At one point, out of the blue, to me, but probably because I had just shown, again, that I was really smart, he asked me what religion I was. I told him Unitarian. He told me I was not. I was surprised by this, but I knew I was a Unitarian, because we went to the Unitarian Church. He did not believe me. When the merit badges were given out, at the awards ceremony at the end of the week, for some reason, I was not awarded the Nature merit badge. I might not have been able to earn the swimming merit badge, or the physical fitness merit badge, but the Nature badge should have been a slam dunk.

It was not until we moved into Rochester, and attended a high School with a substantial Jewish population, that I met people who I thought of as Jewish. My world was entirely Christian. We were well involved in the Unitarian Church, and the Unitarian Universalist youth programming. Being now a high school student, I could go to the teen age week at Unirondack, the UU camp in the Adirondacks for a week. It was there that I first heard Martin Luther King, a tape recording of a speech he had given at a Unitarian annual meeting, and there where I met Byron Rushing, whom, as it turned out, my sister was surreptitiously dating. The rest of that summer I would hitchhike up to Locust Hill country club, yes, hitchhike, and caddy. Not that I knew anything about golf, or caddying, or tough kids from the city, who knew a lot about hustling. I got hustled out of my eager earnings several times.

The great fear parents had, those days, was polio, I had wanted to go to a large amusement park west of Buffalo, on the Lake Erie shore in Canada, and almost got to go, but for a polio epidemic that summer. Pictures of children in wards of iron lungs were in the magazines. No way they would take me to such a place, because they were not sure how polio was transmitted, but that it had something to do with large assemblages of children. Turns out, it is a virus, transmitted through fecal matter often on beaches, which is exactly what the amusement park was.

I was really interested in science. I liked to figure out how things worked. I still do. It was when we lived in Mendon Center that Uncle Charlie started sending me, as birthday presents, a subscription to science kit of the month. Each month I would receive a small box which contained materials which would help me understand some aspect of the natural world. For some reason, I remember meteorology, but I am sure there were a number of botanical, biological, chemical, physical, astronomical, you get the point, kits.

When I was in eight grade, the science teacher invited himself to dinner at my house. Teachers in those days would do that. He was new to the school, and he came with a purpose. He told then that the school was not equipped to teach someone of my intelligence, and that we should seriously consider sending me to a private school. They did not talk with me directly about it, but they did mention Exeter to me, of which I knew nothing. My sense is that they approached Uncle Charlie about paying for it, he turned them down, because the subject of Exeter was never mentioned again.

The following year, ninth grade, was my first year in high school, so I was old enough to enter something in the science fair. I decided to make a [Van de Graff generator](#), a machine that generates static electricity and small bolts of lightning. I have no idea where I got the plans from, but I used a aluminum loaf pan for the base, but the erector set motor in it, made a rubber belt out of a rubber bed sheet, a brush out of some screening, bought a plexiglass tube, well, my father paid for it, and a piece of plexiglass rod for the top roller, and constructed the ball on top out of two dog watering bowls.

The thing worked. I would plug it in, and sparks over an inch would come off it when I placed my hand near it. I won second prize in the high school science fair, and was entered into the county wide science fair at the local teachers college. There, I received an honorable mention. There I also saw what a real one looked like. Next to my jerry rigged contraption was a larger model, constructed by a team of upper classmen at McQuaid, the Jesuit high school which served Rochester. Their top ball, I remember, had been machined, and looked like the real deal. Something like that simply could not have been produced at Honeoye Falls Central School.

The compensation for second prize in the high school science fair was a subscription to Scientific American. I read ever issue, though I did not

understand all of it. Back in those days, the mid-fifties, there was a column entitled "The Amateur Scientist" which each month would discuss a piece of apparatus that one might be able to create at home.

I was fascinated with the article about a spectograph. With a spectograph, lines appear on the rainbow of the spectrum which can identify the elements of which a sample is composed. I decided to build one, and asked Mr. Buckley if he knew where I could get the prism, and lens needed for the project. He got them from his work and gave them to me, telling me that they should not be returned. I already knew how to develop film, and print pictures. I put together a couple of pieces of stove pipe, rigged a system of wooden clamps to hold two carbon rods from a welding materials shop, hooked up the family toaster in series, to serve as a resistor, and went to the high school science teacher asking him for some chemicals that would show good spectrums. He was also the vice principal of the school, and I think he was a little taken aback with my plans, but gave me several chemicals, one being potassium phosphate, I think. I built a small table to hold the prism and the lens.

The thing worked! I could clearly see the lines. Mr. Buckley was interested in helping me with it, and one evening we set it up in the kitchen, and ran it with several of the chemicals. Each one showed different lines. He asked if he could take it into his work; I agreed, and it came back with some of the bare wires, widow makers they would be called, more carefully attached. I was lucky I did not electrocute myself with the thing.

I put together a poster board exhibit showing the exposed photographic paper, and wrote up a one page piece of paper, explaining what it did, at least to the extent that I understood it. By the time of the science fair, I had already moved on with another little scientific toy, connecting a microphone and headphones to a single cell battery, and demonstrating how the electricity carried the sound.

At the science fair, a couple of the juniors had put together a very complex exhibit of how petroleum is fractionally distilled into various fuels. I don't think it actually worked, but it showed the complex process which happens with fractional distillation. I was very impressed. To me, theirs was far more interesting than mine. Further, though I did not understand the meaning of this at the time, one of them was the son of the science teacher.

The judges included a town resident who taught optics at the University

of Rochester. Third prize was announced. Not me. Second prize was announced. It was the fractional distillation demonstration. Was I not going to win anything? First prize was announced. It was me. I was surprised; I did not really know what I had done.

I wondered what the regional science fair would think of it, but, for some reason, my project was never entered, so I never found out. Looking back, it was pay back from the assistant principal, as far as I could tell.

My sister graduated that year. Her grades were excellent. She was a very dutiful student. Radcliffe turned her down; Swarthmore accepted her. She would have preferred to go to Radcliffe. Later was mentioned that she was not admitted because of the Jewish quota. True or not, I am not sure. Like both me and my brother, she was very active in LRY, the Unitarian Universalist youth group. Had she been admitted, the choice of schools would have come down to which was the cheaper. My father somewhat bitterly complained that, because we owned our house free and clear, we did not qualify for financial aid, but I must say, our parents kept these kinds of facts and figures pretty close to their vests. I did not learn until decades later that my father had received an inheritance from a spinster cousin which pretty much paid for all our college expenses.

That summer, my father drove up with an old, weather beaten Plymouth, at least ten years old, and missing a rear fender. I had just received my driver's license. He looked at me and told me it was mine. "Wow!", I thought, not really understanding the freedom that this would mean. The next day the car disappeared. I think my mother and father had a heart to heart. Since Jane was going away to college, we could move into Rochester, close to my father's office, so he could walk to work, and my brother and I would go to Monroe High School in Rochester, substantially superior to Honeoye Falls. They found a house in the city, no vegetable garden, no garage, but separate bedrooms for my brother and I, and a room for Jane when she was home, and a short walk to the County agriculture offices.

They rented the house to an incoming graduate student in the optics department at the University. He had a young family, so he needed the room, and I think the optics professor may have had a hand in arranging the handshake. Any way, this guy had just graduated from Cal Tech, and looked at my spectroscope, and the one sheet description of how it operated. He asked me if I had had chemistry yet. "No, just biology. Chemistry was next year." So then he explained valence to me, and

energy levels, and light quanta, which each have a specific frequency, and what generates the spectral lines in a spectroscope, and urged me to go to Cal Tech. His professor, and he, were most impressed with this device. I only knew that I was on to something.

One more vivid memory from those years in Mendon Center. This happened in New York. My mother had been married when she lived in Europe, in Paris. It was a very short, very unhappy marriage. But she stayed in touch with her ex-husbands brother, and his family. We knew them as Uncle Otto and Fanny, Fanny pronounced with a broad a, like tawny like ass. My mother made sure of that. Every year we would receive \$5 from them, and every year we would have to sit down and write a thank you note.

They lived in New York City, but their daughter had returned to Austria, to work at a home for orphans, Kinderhof. I asked my mother why, and she gave a sad look and told me that World War II had created many orphans. Each year we would receive a hand painted Christmas ornament from Eva, pronounced German style, Ay-vah.

Otto had an art gallery, named Galerie St. Etienne. I suppose this was the name of the gallery he had established in Paris, after the family left Vienna, before the Anschluss. Fanny was raised Catholic, but Otto's family was nominally Jewish. They had to get out of Europe, and it was my father who signed the affidavit which guaranteed their safe passage, agreeing, I imagine, to cover whatever financial needs they had.

In fact, they had very few. The name of the gallery in Vienna was the Neu Galerie. You who know New York galleries will recognize the name. Otto exhibited works of artists Hitler considered degenerate, artists like Klimt and Schiele, and many other Austrian expressionists. The story is told in his granddaughter Jane Kallir's book, Saved from Europe. He established the gallery in New York, and then, by hook and by crook, apparently, came to be the gallery which presented Grandma Moses to the world in the late forties.

Remember, I was a simple country boy, a yokel. About my twelfth birthday, we met up with Otto and Fanny in New York, and he gave me as a Christmas present a recording of Maria Callas arias. I did not really want it. He sensed that, and asked why. I told him, basically, that I was a boy, and boys don't like opera. So he said he would get me something more appropriate, and the next day, gave me the cast recording for the musical "L'il Abner", based on the comic strip by that name about a

hillbilly community, and its various characters. I loved it. I can still sing to myself part of the piece about their political leader, Jubilation T. Cornpone (old weary and worn-poner.)

Flash forward to the summer of 1959. We moved into the city. I, at 16 years old, finally hit puberty. Big changes afoot.