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# I Was A New York Snob

## How the Dodgers, Don Quixote, and Allen Ginsberg saved me

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by Charles Peters

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I was discharged from the Army in January 1946 and immediately went to New York City to enter Columbia College. For the most part, this was a time during which I was fascinated and delighted by the discoveries of living in New York and attending Columbia. But it was also when I first experienced the snobbery that I have come to detest. The story of how I drifted into it helps explain why *The Washington Monthly* sees snobbery as the great enemy of the ideals of community and service that we hope to encourage. As for the rest of the story of New York life, and its happier allurements, I hope you find it entertaining. Living through it was just that, and more, for me.

While in the Army, I had read *Teacher in America* by Jacques Barzun, one of the luminaries of the Columbia faculty. Barzun's description of the college was seductive. It was not gigantic, like the university of which it was a part, but had only 1,750 students and small classes, averaging 20 students or so. More surprising, those small classes were taught, even at the freshman level, by the brightest stars of the faculty—people like Barzun and Lionel Trilling and Mark Van Doren—rather than by the graduate students my friends who went to other prominent universities often got stuck with.

As Barzun's book implied, teaching was impor-

tant at Columbia. In the fall of 1946, for example, Trilling taught 11 hours a week. Today's average in the Ivy League is more like five hours. And, as Barzun explained, this teaching served an overall education objective, which was to make sure that every student was introduced to the basics of Western civilization. All students were required to take courses that introduced them to the major works of literature, art, and music as well as to the thought of the great philosophers, economists, and historians. Having leafed through the bulletins of other colleges, which listed a bewildering array of electives with no discernible purpose, I welcomed this deprivation of free choice.

As an intellectual experience, Columbia more than met my expectations. Most of the classes *were* small; most of the teachers *were* outstanding. But I had come to Columbia not just to be educated but to live the life of a New Yorker. I had access to that life because it was cheap. Even a student of modest means could enjoy the city. Tuition was \$225 per term. A glass of beer cost a dime. The subway was only a nickel as 1946 began.

One snowy night in late January, I took the IRT from the Columbia stop at 116th and Broadway to Greenwich Village, getting off at Sheridan Square and buying a copy of the *Daily Worker*. I felt deliciously radical with my upturned coat collar and my scarf blowing in the wind. Later, in April and May, the same nickel would buy a ride on an open-topped double-decker bus that would take you down

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*Charles Peters is the editor of The Washington Monthly. This article is adapted from his book, Tilting at Windmills, to be published this month by Addison-Wesley. © 1988 Charles Peters.*

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to Washington Square or up to the Cloisters—a perfect answer to those warm spring afternoons when you weren't going to get any studying done anyway. There were lots of inexpensive French and Italian restaurants, like Le Champlain, La Fleur de Lis, and Barbetta's, where dinner with a glass of wine could be had for less than three dollars.

Watching classic films in the theater at the Museum of Modern Art cost 40 cents. Eddie Condon's jazz concerts at Town Hall were little more than a dollar. You could spend an evening at clubs like Jimmy Ryan's or the Three Deuces on 52nd Street for only two dollars or so.

Theater, concert, opera, and ballet tickets could be had for less than two dollars if you didn't mind sitting at the top of the balcony, and I didn't mind at all. Betty Combs, a voice student and my first New York girlfriend, gave me a free introduction to *Der Rosenkavalier* and her other favorite operas. This did not take place at the Met but by listening to records in her teacher's studio apartment in a brownstone in the West Sixties, which he let us use Friday and Saturday nights. I liked the music, but my main interest was Betty. To be alone with a pretty girl in a brownstone apartment in New York, even though our behavior was relatively chaste, was, like buying the *Daily Worker* in Sheridan Square, very close to the heart of what I had hoped life in the city would be.

And of course there was the theater. In just my first term at Columbia, I saw Gertrude Lawrence in *Pygmalion*, the then-unknown Marlon Brando playing Marchbanks to Katherine Cornell's *Candida*, Paul Douglas and Judy Holliday in *Born Yesterday* (their first starring roles), and Ethel Merman in *Annie Get Your Gun*. The following season I saw the original production of Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*, Lerner and Loewe's *Brigadoon*, and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, with John Gielgud as Worthing and Margaret Rutherford as Lady Bracknell.

The 1947-48 season brought the original production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, with Marlon Brando playing Stanley Kowalski. I saw a Saturday matinee performance, and that evening I tried to play Brando with my date, who proceeded to walk indignantly out of my life.

The next year came *South Pacific*, *Kiss Me Kate*, and the original *Death of a Salesman*, with Lee J. Cobb as Willy Loman. Remember, all these shows opened in just the three and a half years when I was a student at Columbia College. I do not believe that there has been a comparable period of creativity in the history of American theater.

One of the most impressive things about Colum-

bia in the late forties was the brainpower of its students. They were, for the most part, not from the social elite—Jason Epstein was the only person I knew who had gone to prep school. They were drawn largely from two groups. One was World War II veterans. Several of them were my friends: Bob Williams, who had endured the frightening disintegration of the 106th Division during the Battle of the Bulge; John Uhl and Don Kirchoffer, who had served in the Navy; and Ned Gatchell, who had been a bomber pilot and had flown those hair-raising daylight missions over Germany. I was 19 when I entered Columbia, but most of the other veterans were two to six years older and therefore more mature and much less likely to waste time than the average college student. They were tough competitors.

## Allen and Norman

Only a little less tough, however, was the next largest group of students, the bright high school graduates from New York City, like my friend Steve Marcus. Because there were so many applicants from the city, they were subjected to more demanding admission standards than the rest of us. Columbia had a Jewish quota then, which meant that if you were from New York and Jewish, you had to be even brighter to get in. To those of us who were their less diligent classroom competition, these New Yorkers seemed demonic in their devotion to academic excellence—they'd get off the subway at 8 a.m., go directly to the library in South Hall, and stay there, except for meals and classes, until it closed, studying every minute. Norman Podhoretz, who later became editor of *Commentary* and a leading neoconservative, was a member of this group.

I knew Podhoretz as someone who attended a class with me, not as a friend or even an acquaintance. The course we took together was in twentieth-century fiction, taught by Harrison Steeves. Since the lures of life in New York often left me less than prepared for the morning's discussion, I sat in the back of the room. Podhoretz sat in the front and was always prepared. He was constantly waving his hand, constantly talking, constantly trying to impress the professor.

The problem was that Podhoretz was a Jew from Brooklyn and Steeves was a snobbish old WASP with little patience for the upwardly mobile. However brilliant Podhoretz might be, Steeves would not give him the recognition he so avidly sought. Steeves bestowed his regard, instead, on one Donald Maher, a reserved young man with the right accent.

The juxtaposition of Podhoretz and Steeves was

hilarious to those of us on the back benches. But our laughter did not reflect personal animosity (as Podhoretz suggests in his book, *Making It*). Indeed, most of us were grateful to him for deferring the dread moment when Steeves might ask, "Well, Mr. Peters, you haven't said much lately. Why don't you tell us what you think Proust is trying to say?"

Several of my other classmates later made their marks on the world. One who did, and who probably influenced me more than anyone, I met on an October afternoon in 1946. I was with about 20 other students in Trilling's Humanities 3 class, discussing William Blake's *Songs of Innocence*. I noticed that some of the most thoughtful observations were being made by a dark, slight young man who was sitting in that day.

When the class broke up, I wanted to ask him about some of the things he had said, and I spoke with him as we walked out of Hamilton Hall, around to 116th Street, and on to the Amsterdam Avenue bus stop. Apparently we were headed in the same direction, for, still talking, we boarded the same bus. The conversation continued until I reached my stop. "I get off here," I said. "So do I," he said. We walked from the bus stop to my apartment building at 200 West 92nd Street. "Well this is where I live," I said. "So do I," he said. It was time to introduce ourselves. His name was Allen Ginsberg. He lived on the second floor; I lived on the fourth.

Allen and I became friends. He opened up a new world for me, introducing me to people like Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady, people who were much more open and much less careerist than the typical Columbia student of that time. Sometimes I thought they were crazy, but more often I found myself liking their unconventionality.

One of the most appealing aspects of their unconventionality was that they didn't push it. Once, at a party, Kerouac took me into a bedroom to show me pictures of Arab boys in various postures of sexual abandon. It was obvious that Jack thought they might stimulate certain thoughts in my mind. But when I asked him instead about an attractive girl in the front room, he cheerfully put away the pictures and told me, "She works for the United Press and is from Mt. Airy, North Carolina. I'll introduce you."

I liked Allen best. When you talked to him you knew he really heard what you were saying. The barriers of pride and self-image that inhibit real communication between people were so slight in Allen that he could strip them away instantly when you were trying to get through to him. In his gentleness and his indifference to material things, he was almost otherworldly. I may have idealized Allen and Jack

and Neal—Jack and Neal, in particular, had tormented undercurrents in their lives that I was unaware of—but my idealized version provided what was, for me, an important alternative to the Podhoretzes and the veterans, who were all preparing to don gray flannel suits.

## Dinner with Tiny

The reason I was living on 92nd Street was that toward the end of my first term I had decided I didn't like life in a dormitory. The rooms were tiny and institutional, and, worst of all, women were not permitted above the ground floor. So Bob Williams and I launched an apartment search that consumed most of our afternoons for several weeks. Apartments were as scarce in New York in the spring of 1946 as they are today. At building after building and office after office, the word was "no vacancy" or "fully rented." Finally, at a 94th Street realtor's, there was good news. The agent told us that a Mrs. Goldhurst had come in that morning saying she wanted to rent two rooms of her apartment: "Maybe you'll find a couple of law students from Columbia for me." I said I was a pre-law student and that we were both from Columbia.

"Well," said the agent, "she's a very charming lady. Around 45, I'd say. Lives alone. I think she said she and her husband have separated. Anyway, here's her office phone number. I'm sure the apartment is very nice."

I had visions of a forties version of Mrs. Robinson, mature but still attractive, lonely, and lusting in her luxurious apartment. We called Mrs. Goldhurst immediately and arranged to meet at her place that evening. The address was 200 West 92nd Street.

As we approached the building, the luxurious part of my vision began to fade. The building was at the corner of 92nd and Amsterdam Avenue. It clearly had seen better days, and even then it had not been luxurious. We climbed a dark and dingy stairwell to the fourth floor. Mrs. Goldhurst opened the door. She was about five feet tall and must have weighed around 160 pounds. Her hair was steely gray, she had the shoulders of a linebacker, and her jaw made Dick Tracy's look weak.

She led us down the hallway to two modestly furnished rooms that looked out on 92nd Street. Then she showed us the bathroom, which had an old-fashioned chain-pull toilet and a tub of similar vintage. The kitchen looked as if it had been painted around the turn of the century and the fixtures bought about the same time. You could see the lathing through several gaping holes in the plaster.

This was not the apartment of our dreams, and Mrs. Goldhurst definitely was not Mrs. Robinson. She was better. Bawdy and full of life, she was a female Falstaff. She had us laughing in minutes, and within an hour we were enjoying ourselves so thoroughly that there was no question we would take the rooms. The rent was low, and Mrs. Goldhurst said that whenever we wanted she would cook dinner for us for a dollar each.

She became the central figure in my life for the next seven years. During most of that time I was either living in her apartment or dining at her table. From the spring of 1946 until the spring of 1948, I did both.

Her full name was Genevieve Gallagher Goldhurst, but everyone called her Tiny. She was born to an Irish family in Scranton, Pennsylvania. She moved to New York to work in the early twenties and married a man named Harry Goldhurst.

Harry was on Wall Street, and in the twenties that meant doing well. Tiny and Harry settled in a prosperous suburb, Larchmont, in Westchester County. Soon there were four sons—Richard, William, Harry Jr., and Peter.

Then came the crash and with it the discovery that Harry had been a pioneer in what might be called the Boesky-Levine approach to the science of investing. A term in a federal penal institution ensued. By the time Harry got out, the 1939 New York World's Fair was about to open. He figured the city would be flooded with tourists. So what was the smart thing to do? Get into the hotel business, of course. He settled Tiny and the boys in Redbank, New Jersey, bought a hotel on Times Square, and started planning how to spend all the money he was going to make. Unfortunately, the tourists never came, at least not to Harry's hotel. His only regular guests were a troop of vaudeville midgets, who did not rank prompt payment of hotel bills high on their list of priorities. The result was that Harry went broke. In fact, he was worse than broke. He owed a lot of money, and his creditors were in hot pursuit. Harry felt it would be prudent to disappear for a while.

When he resurfaced several years later, it was as Harry Golden, editor and homespun philosopher, of Charlotte, North Carolina. He had failed again with another improbable enterprise called Midas Mineral Spring Water. The brochure read: "Since 1608 Indians have known its restorative powers." Cynics suspected that the "spring" was a broken pipe. But Harry was not easily discouraged. He started a weekly newspaper called *The Carolina Israelite*. There weren't many Jews in North Carolina, so for a while it appeared the *Israelite* would

share the fate of his other enterprises. Then he had an inspiration: he created the Carolina Israelite Award and bestowed it on Bernard Baruch, the renowned financier and presidential adviser. Harry suspected, reasonably enough, that Baruch was an egomaniac and probably couldn't resist coming to Charlotte to accept the award and address a dinner in his honor. The great man came to Charlotte, and the locals were impressed. They might not have heard of Harry Golden, but they had certainly heard of Bernard Baruch. Advertisers began to include the *Israelite* in their schedules. Harry wasn't rich by any means, but at least he could afford to send for two of his sons, Billy and Harry Jr. They were in North Carolina at the time of my arrival at 92nd Street. Dick was in the Army in Japan, and Peter, who was retarded, had just been placed in an institution.

During the war years, Tiny had supported all four boys. This had not left her feeling too kindly toward Harry. In fact, his multitude of failings, and those of his sister Clara, were the subject of many of Tiny's most hilarious stories.

One thing about Tiny's storytelling took a little getting used to. She would assume you knew all the characters. When she mentioned Sam, she did not bother to explain who he was. It usually took half the story to figure it out, and sometimes it took several stories over several months before you had him clearly in your mind. But you were never to interrupt with a question like "Who's Sam?"

Gradually, however, we got to know her regular cast of characters. Our favorite was Hazel, the nymphomaniac. When Hazel's name came up in a story, you always knew what she was doing, or, if she wasn't doing it, you knew that she was thinking about it.

But Hazel was a minor character compared to Harry. However he may have wronged Tiny, he continued to occupy the center stage of her stories. I understood why when I met him in 1947. Expecting to dislike him because he had run out on his family, I was totally charmed. Within an hour or so Harry had discovered my affection for my old Sunday school hymns, and we were singing "Stand Up for Jesus" together. Harry later wrote *Only in America* and several other best-selling books and achieved considerable fame.

So did some others who passed through Tiny's apartment as roomers or as frequent dinner guests, including Ginsberg and E.L. Doctorow, whom we knew as Eddie or Edgar. James Lee went on to Hollywood, where he wrote many movies and television scripts, including "Roots." But Tiny Goldhurst was the star of 92nd Street.

Of those who both lived and dined with Tiny over a considerable period of time, I was closest to Jim-



my Lee and Dick Goldhurst, Tiny's oldest son. Jimmy had the kind of beguiling wit that made you not want the evening to end and an interest in women that was even keener than mine. Dick was warm and kind, with the soul of a poet and, like his mother, the body of a football player. His burliness was an important protection for the rest of us, because Quinn and Kling's, the neighborhood bar where we hung out, did not include among its many endearing virtues a guarantee that there wouldn't be a fistfight or brawl on any given night.

A typical evening at Tiny's would find two or three of us already seated at the table when Tiny arrived around 6 p.m. loaded down with the bags of groceries and exhausted by a hard day's work as an office manager for a small printing company. After depositing the groceries in the kitchen, she would return to the dining room, which was also her bedroom, to sit wearily on the sofa, which was also her bed, and light a cigarette.

Her spirits would gradually brighten as she told us an amusing story about the competition between Harry and Martin, her two bosses, for the affection of the office blonde. Soon we would all be laughing, and Tiny would go to the kitchen to prepare spaghetti and cheesecake, which was the menu at least every other night, while the rest of us continued talking. Tiny didn't have a television set, so we had to entertain ourselves.

## Win, place, or show

When we weren't talking, we were singing. I would lobby for my favorite hymns, but only Harry and a few old Sunday school friends from Charleston really shared my affection for them. Gershwin, Porter, and Rodgers and Hart usually won out on 92nd Street.

And then there were lyrics we came up with on our own. One was inspired by a fling Jimmy Lee and I had playing horses. To the tune of "Battle Hymn of the Republic," it began: "I have been to Hialeah, Narragansett, Churchill Downs, and you'll never catch me hanging 'round any trackless town. . . ." I had been interested in racing ever since my Uncle Lloyd took me to my first Kentucky Derby at the age of eight, but I had never made bets except at the track. Now I had a bookie at 110th and Broadway.

I began with an academic interest in comparing the various handicappers employed by the New York papers. Gradually my focus narrowed to two: Frank Ortell of the *World Telegram* and Joe Gelardi of the International News Service. As I studied various combinations of their predictions, a remarkable pat-

tern emerged: if Gelardi picked a horse to place and Ortell picked him to win, place, or show, a show bet on that horse would pay off often enough to produce a steady, if modest profit.

I urged Jimmy to join me in pursuing this investment opportunity. We each put up ten dollars. I then inquired at neighborhood bars as to the whereabouts of a suitable bookie and soon located the gentleman at 110th and Broadway. The project was launched with two-dollar bets on Brags Rags and Northern Deb at Hialeah. Both finished in the money and they paid a total of 17 dollars, considerably better than show bets usually do. I began to bet every day, the bookie's hangout being conveniently located between Columbia and my apartment. Incredibly, we continued to win—never as much as on the first day, but each week still produced a modest profit. Then the bookie stopped accepting our show bets and demanded that from now on we bet to win. Instead of getting out, we tried to do it his way and lost all our profits as well as our original 20 dollars.

We often had guests for dinner at 92nd Street—friends from Columbia or the theater or people like Doctorow, who went to Kenyon College with Dick and Billy Goldhurst. Occasionally, someone would just appear. One of these was Herbert Huncke, whom we knew through Ginsberg. Allen had met him in the Automat on 42nd Street between 7th and 8th Avenues, which was a headquarters for junkies and petty criminals. Herbert was both. When he appeared at 92nd Street, good fellowship was not his only motive. He was usually trying to sell us something, and that something, one suspected, often was not in the hands of its rightful owner. If he was especially impecunious, Herbert would ask for the empty bottles in the apartment, which he could sell for a few cents apiece. Tiny always gave him the bottles and occasionally bought his merchandise, although the buying was done with a mournful sigh and an upward roll of the eyes as she contemplated the current penalty for receiving stolen goods.

Allen's taste for minor criminals once nearly got me in trouble. Although I continued to eat at Tiny's, in April 1948, I moved to an apartment of my own. One night around 2 a.m., Ginsberg, Kerouac, and Huncke arrived for a visit. That wasn't unusual, except that this time they brought along an exotic young woman—I'll call her Susie instead of using her real name, since her life has subsequently taken a respectable turn.

Susie and I hit it off. The next night, she called and asked if she could come by and take a bath. I said fine. When she emerged from the bathroom, she said she had had an inspiration. My apartment would be a perfect place for her to use for scoring

with Johns. Susie, it seemed, was a prostitute. She had a notebook full of clients. All she needed was a place to do business—a “pad” as she put it. Although I was anxious to make a favorable impression on Allen’s friends, I said no.

Allen was not as successful at avoiding trouble. A few weeks after Susie visited my apartment, I was on the subway, reading the *Daily Mirror* over the shoulder of the person standing next to me. When he turned to the back page, I saw a large photograph of four people staring out of the rear of a paddy wagon—Allen, Susie, Herbert, and their friend Little Jack Melody.

They had been driving around Queens with Little Jack at the wheel when they were stopped by a policeman who wanted to tell them they were going the wrong way on a one-way street. Little Jack, mindful of the possible misunderstanding that might arise from the fact that the car was stolen, did not wait to hear the officer out. Instead, he jammed the accelerator to the floor and sped off into the night. As he attempted to negotiate a sharp corner, the car turned over, and its occupants quickly scattered. Allen returned to his apartment on York Avenue. He opened the door thinking he was safe at last, only to be greeted by several city officials in blue uniforms. It seemed that Allen had left his diary in the car and that it contained his address. Allen had made another mistake: he had permitted Little Jack and Herbert to use his apartment for storage, and, you guessed it, among the stored goods there were few that were the legal property of either Herbert or Little Jack. To beat the rap, Allen had to commit himself to the care of psychiatrists at Payne Whitney.

## Baudelaire and Barnard girls

There are differences between my hometown of Charleston, West Virginia, and New York, and by the end of my first year at Columbia, those differences were beginning to have an effect on me. Charleston is the small town where practically everyone knows you or your family. The good side of this is that it encourages you to behave thoughtfully toward others. If you’re a clerk in a store and you’re rude to Mrs. Jones, it is likely that she knows several people who know you and that she will tell them about it. Also, when people have known you well for your entire life, they aren’t likely to mistake you for either the purest saint or the most evil sinner. Their knowledge of you is protection against unjust accusation as well as unwarranted praise.

But all this is limiting, too, which is why many people want to escape small towns. They want to be more than they have been. Someone in New York

might hire them to do great things, while the small-town employer would know their limits all too well. In other words, the song’s promise—“If you can make it there, you’ll make it anywhere”—is misleading. Some people make it in New York because they couldn’t make it back home. They never would have gotten the chance.

New York also offers anonymity. Your private life can be your own business and no one else’s in a way that’s impossible in a small town. But anonymity also means that, even after living in New York for years, you can walk all the way down Fifth Avenue and not be recognized by a single human being. This may explain why so many people who go to New York thinking that they want anonymity end up trying to be celebrities or envying those who are. Some even seek identity through contact with celebrities. The most extreme example is the horde of autograph-seekers that follows in the wake of anyone famous. Telling their friends about having seen a celebrity, and proving it by showing an autograph, endows them with importance.

I was not immune to celebrityism. Having met a few of the famous during my years in New York—including Grace Kelly, John Huston, Ingrid Bergman, and William Faulkner—I became skilled at casually weaving these brief encounters into conversations with my friends and acquaintances. I could get a sense of importance even by knowing someone who knew a celebrity—“She’s a close friend of Tennessee Williams, you know.” A similar sense of self-importance can come—and this is especially so in the case of intellectuals—from knowing something others don’t, from being among the first to divine what’s in and what’s out in literature and the arts.

By 1947, I was getting pretty heavily involved in this sort of thing. In other words, I had become a snob. One reason was the transfer of my career interest from politics to the theater, which had happened the previous summer. In politics, snobbery is likely to lose you votes. In the arts, it can be viewed as evidence of your higher powers of discrimination.

But a more important cause in my case was insecurity. From the secure world of Charleston High School, where I was “most likely to succeed” in my class, I had entered a world where what I considered my exceptional promise was not instantly recognized. There were a lot of very bright students who were better prepared for Columbia than I was.

During my first term I puzzled over the phrase “perne in a gyre” in “Sailing to Byzantium.” Should I confess, I wondered, that I hadn’t a clue as to what it meant? Of course not—I would only confirm that I was a hick from West Virginia. So I slipped off

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to the library to consult *A Vision*, the book in which Yeats explains his philosophy. But instead of enlightenment, I encountered even greater obscurity in those bewildering diagrams of intersecting cones, and my anxiety became worse.

I finished the first term with two As and four Bs. Although a perfectly respectable record in retrospect, it opened a crack of doubt in my academic self-assurance. At Charleston High School I had gotten As without unseemly sweat. Now it was clear that I would not get many unless I became a grind. I enjoyed the pleasures of New York far too much to take that possibility seriously.

Instead, I gradually became a snob, trying to impress others not with my performance but with my awareness of what was intellectually chic. I could talk knowingly about the latest literary controversy or casually drop the names of the authors who were "in." In the library I would feign total immersion in Baudelaire, especially if a Barnard girl was sitting nearby. The only movie theater I would deign to enter was the Thalia on West 95th Street. It featured ancient classics as well as the work of the French and Italian directors who were fashionable in the forties and who seemed to have a special fondness for overexposed film and scratchy sound tracks.

This was a period during which you could not, as I secretly did, admire a Victorian house or the beaux arts splendor of Grand Central Station. Picasso was in, and so was Henry James. I liked neither, but I pretended that I did. The first minutes of an encounter with someone you wanted to impress were spent flashing your taste badges. And your worst fear was that you might flash the wrong one, that you might be praising last year's poet instead of this year's. So you made sure to keep abreast of those publications that could keep you informed of what was in and what was out—the *New Yorker* and the *Partisan Review* were the essential ones.

My grades began to plummet. I was afraid to commit myself to the effort that might produce an A and then have to face the fact that I couldn't make it even when I was really trying.

In January 1948 I got a call from the dean's office about my sinking grades. This resulted in a referral to a psychiatrist. I knew I had lost my way and needed help. I was turning into someone I didn't like at all, and I was ready to open myself to someone who wanted to come to my rescue. I was lucky enough to find a really good, caring doctor.

At the same time that I was seeking the psychiatrist, another benign influence appeared in my life. That spring, Van Doren offered a remarkable course that began with Kafka's *The Trial* and *The Castle*, continued through *The Divine Comedy*, and ended

with *Don Quixote*. It was a progression from lost bewilderment to what became my true faith—that I had to pursue my own vision even if the rest of the world thought I was only tilting at windmills.

During the worst of my snobbish period, I was fortunate to have friends like Tiny and Jimmy and Dick, who could laugh at my pretentiousness. And then there was Allen, who was constantly saying, "Come down," by which he meant strip away all the posturing that separates you from your true self. Allen himself was not above impressing people with his sophistication. And in that sense he was part of my problem. Occasionally, he would suggest that it was hip to smoke marijuana (he called it "tea") or to be gay, but most of the time when we talked, I felt he was not trying to impress me and that I did not have to try to impress him.

## Crucial double play

Another factor in my salvation was sports. A baseball or football fan quickly discovers that the blue-collar worker sitting in the bleachers is just as likely to be able to discuss the finer points of the game as a Ph.D. from Harvard. It was the same lesson about people that I had learned in the Army and at Charleston High, but during my most snobbish period, in 1947, its only reinforcement came when I went to Ebbets Field or Yankee Stadium.

A few years later, my interest in baseball may have saved my life. It was a Sunday afternoon—or maybe Labor Day—in early September 1951. The New York Giants and the Brooklyn Dodgers were locked in one of the great pennant races of the era, the one that ended with Bobby Thomson's famous home run. I was dating a young woman from Brooklyn whose father was not only hot-tempered but highly, and rightly, suspicious of my intentions toward his daughter. The one thing he and I had in common was baseball.

On this particular afternoon, he had gone to the beach and his daughter and I had the apartment to ourselves. We watched the Giants and Dodgers on the living room television for a few innings, but mutual affection soon led us into the bedroom. The situation was developing along natural lines when suddenly we heard the front door open and someone walk in. She whispered, "Oh my God, it's my father." This presented several problems, not the least of which was how we were going to get from the bedroom to the living room unobserved. There was a clear view from the front door down the hallway that we would have to cross, so it was not going to be easy.

We were given a moment's reprieve when we



heard the father go into the kitchen. In that moment, she slipped into her dress and rushed down the hall to greet him and keep him in the kitchen so I could put on my pants and shirt and sneak into the living room. By the time he entered the room, I was sitting before the television set absorbed in the game. He greeted me and sat down to watch, but I sensed that I was not yet out of the woods. For one thing I had not managed to get my shoes on. The daughter's disheveled aspect, which I probably shared, might also arouse suspicion. But when the father complained that he had missed the last inning coming from the beach, I saw an opportunity to lay his suspicions to rest. I immediately launched

into: "With the Giants leading two to nothing and one out, Snider doubled off Maglie, then Robinson tripled, scoring Snider, but with Robinson on third, Pafko hit a scorcher down the third-base line. Thomson grabbed it, tagged Robinson, and threw to Lockman at first for a double play." Although her father was disappointed that the Dodgers had blown an opportunity to tie the score, he was obviously reassured that I had been attending closely to the game. This feeling, unfortunately was not shared by the daughter, who realized that I had been listening while we were in bed. She refused to be comforted by my involved explanation of how the human mind can operate on two levels. □

## TIDBITS AND OUTRAGES

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH AND  
THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF  
IRAN WE HAVE BEGUN THE  
TRIAL OF THE SPY, WILLARD  
SCOTT

### AROUND THE WORLD

#### TEMPERATURES ABROAD YESTERDAY

Observations made at Noon GMT

City	Weather	Time	Temp.
Aberdeen	Cloudy	1 p.m.	41
Amsterdam	Drzl	1 p.m.	47
Ankara	Ptcldy	3 p.m.	44
Athens	Cloudy	2 p.m.	62
Auckland	Clear	Mdnl.	59
Beijing	Cloudy	8 p.m.	42
Beirut	—	2 p.m.	—
Berlin	Cloudy	1 p.m.	46
Bonn	Rain	1 p.m.	47
Brussels	Rain	1 p.m.	46
Calro	Cloudy	2 p.m.	83
Casablanca	Clear	Noon	63
Copenhagen	Clear	1 p.m.	38
Dakar	Ptcldy	Noon	68
Dublin	Drzl	1 p.m.	42

"LOOK, WE'RE NOT GOING TO MAKE THE PROMISES OF THE PAST. BUT I CAN GUARANTEE YOU THAT, WHEN IT COMES TIME TO SELECT OUR CABINET, WE'RE GOING TO BE TAKING A VERY CLOSE LOOK AT O.J. SIMPSON."

While campaigning for the New York primary, Michael Dukakis said that if he is elected president "I'll do what I can to get a major league team to Buffalo."

### THE MOST LOYAL VICE PRESIDENT IN AMERICAN HISTORY

In Idaho, George Bush said of his years with President Reagan: "We've had triumphs, we've made some mistakes, we've had sex."

### LIFE IMITATES ART

Four cast members of "L.A. Law" refused an appearance this week at Harvard Law School because the school wouldn't provide first-class, round-trip airfare.

### SO MUCH FOR THE WIMP FACTOR

According to a professor at Ohio State University, Woody Hayes endorsed George Bush just before he died.

### THE FEC DISALLOWED THE CONTRIBUTION BUT UPHELD THE CAMPAIGN'S EXPENDITURE ON ROSARY BEADS.

Republican Tom Blair, challenging Senator Paul Sarbanes, lists a \$1,500 campaign outlay to a Massachusetts convent for "prayers and spiritual support."