

## THE CORNELL STUDENT HOMOPHILE LEAGUE

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This memoir tells the story of the founding and early months of the Cornell University *Student Homophile League* (SHL). It has been long overdue, coming as it does now in my 70th year (2016). Much of what follows is an attempt to paint a detailed, background picture leading up to the *League's* founding in May 1968 at that extremely vibrant and politically active university in Ithaca, New York, a full year before the historic riots at the Stonewall Inn in New York City's West Village in late June 1969.

Before writing this, I debated with myself as to how open I wanted to be about private matters, such as my own 'coming out' process (intellectually, emotionally and sexually). In fact, it is my perception that today's more assimilated gays and lesbians are generally less open about anything to do with sex than was my generation, young adults of a more radicalized era: the late 1960s and early 1970s. (The promise of a widespread dialogue about sexuality seems to have been put in a bottom drawer around the time the AIDS epidemic began to wane, except for an increase in the education about - and the awareness of - sexually transmitted diseases. In addition, the anonymity granted today by the Internet can now even be used to create and maintain a new kind of closet!) So, after a certain amount of waffling, I decided that such personal elements are central to this story and, as always, add color and a human dimension that are essential to the understanding of being homosexual.

Note: I have not always given the full names of the individuals involved in this document since it is not my goal to ruffle any feathers or cause anyone any problems.

## Part I - Personal History

### Cornell:

I entered Cornell as a freshman, having been accepted as a biological sciences student by its Agriculture College in September 1964. During my last year of high school in Niagara Falls, New York, I had applied at three state funded New York universities and was excited that my first choice, Cornell University, had accepted me. With no funding, except for a State scholarship that covered my tuition, and with only my own savings to rely on, I quickly realized that I was likely the poorest freshman in my dormitory. (No Trust Fund for me: I had been a paperboy for about 10 years and, then later, I worked as a waiter in a bar as well as at the local Carnegie Public Library.)

In early September 1964, I moved into a shared dorm room down the hill from Willard Straight Hall and the Olin Library. My roommate was from a well-to-do Hamburg, New York family. As it turned out, we were both gay; each of us still deep in the closet. I suppose it was bad luck that I found him mentally as well as physically unappealing (we were even incompatible as friends!). Fortunately, our dorm was full of intellectually interesting guys as well as a few who were physically mesmerizing.

Unfortunately, I was still pretending, in my social behavior, to be straight: hiding and suppressing my recently emergent homosexual longings in an attempt to conform to a heterosexual mold. I even had a girlfriend who was a couple of years older and who attended school at

Oswego College on Lake Ontario. She was from a German family and had been born in Germany. I was at a stage in my life when I was captivated by the German language and culture (and, to a degree, I still am). She was extremely dedicated to me but had a "clinging vine" type of personality. We hoped to wed once we had both been graduated. In retrospect, I believe I let these illusions of heterosexuality exist because I just wasn't ready to stand on my own two feet and fully embrace my homosexual feelings and needs. *In short, I exploited her interest in me as a way of hiding from myself.* This relationship no doubt complicated and delayed my 'coming out' for years.

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Being at Cornell - in such an atmosphere of personal and intellectual freedom - and after growing up in a family and a town that constricted any attempt at truly being oneself, I didn't take very long to throw off the shackles of repression that had been the legacy of my childhood. However, I found my first year quite challenging academically and had little time for much else. Unlike my roommate, I felt that my status as a freshman at Cornell was the greatest facet of my young life.

My relationship with my roommate, however, began to seriously deteriorate after he started opening and reading my girlfriend's letters. He even showed them to some of the other boys, making my life difficult and forcing me to ignore the few floor mates who had joined in, with him, in mocking me. Nevertheless, my roommate really wasn't someone you could despise or hate: I remember him being more of an irritating clown. As things turned out, he did not apply himself to his studies and, fearing failure, dropped out sometime near the beginning of the second semester, thus leaving me with our entire dorm room.

I ran into him a year or two later: somehow he had managed to return for a second try. After that, I don't recall ever seeing him again ... until

years later, when we encountered each other in a Buffalo gay bar! Oh, what a collection of ironies! We both had been hiding our homosexuality from the world ... and ourselves! Otherwise, who knows? We might have become allies.

Early on, I discovered the Music Room in Willard Straight Hall and it became the 'center of gravity' for the rest of my undergraduate life. The Music Room was a space committed to classical music and to the students who were dedicated to listening to it. (Classical music was already one of my passions: the first complete recording of Wagner's *"Die Götterdämmerung"* - with Kirsten Flagstad as Brünnhilde - had been my choice as my high school graduation present.) There were large tables inside this room, with chairs along the walls and two huge Bozak Floorstanding speakers blasting out the music while people studied or did their homework. This was still the era of the 33 1/3 rpm vinyl LP although the Room's in-house library also had hundreds of old 78s. The front desk had a sign-up request sheet and an index box cataloging the recorded holdings. When you entered, you could sign in and, if you were still there when your turn came up, you could select and play the musical piece of your choice.

A small group of senior Music Room devotees oversaw the operations, including locking up around 11pm and returning the keys to the main desk. There was an unspoken hierarchy, largely determined by how many hours one had spent at the Room which was usually related to how many years one had been coming there. (By my last year, I was often the person "in charge" and performed the closing procedures at the end of the night.)

The regulars were pretty much what you'd call "the eccentric intellectual crowd": people who didn't fit into the elaborate fraternity and sorority social structures which attracted the majority of Cornell students. Some of the personalities who congregated in this space weren't always the

most open and friendly sort but, over time, I was able to form a few friendships.

Indeed, it was in this room that I met people who played a positive role during my 'coming out' process, which in turn encouraged my steps towards activism. Many were, as I learned later on, also politically active in the Anti-War Movement; something I also became a part of, eventually. There was also a cast of other characters, including several closet cases, with whom I never became close, at least not enough to be able to call them friends (but certainly all of them were interesting individuals).

After I obtained a camera, provided by my Photography class, I practiced by taking photos of the Music Room personnel. (Several of these photos are in the "Cornell & the SHL" picture gallery on this website).

### *New York City:*

When my sophomore year began (fall 1965), I moved into a rooming house on Dryden Road, Ithaca. That school year proved to be very tumultuous and, even now, it presents something of a challenge to write about. During this period, I foolishly became engaged to be married. I also fell seriously in love, around the same time, with a local lad a few years my junior! Unfortunately, the homosexual relationship I wanted with him was never to be. He seemed emotionally and sexually paralyzed, showing no discernable interest in either the same or even the opposite sex. (I spent years hoping things would change and that he would give us a chance).

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In the middle of my second year (January 1966), I decided to drop out of school and go to live in New York City, in order to explore the heart of East Coast "gay society". Believe it or not, I had never seen New York and this adventure turned out to be a major formative event in my life. I was still a fairly prudish young man, but my time spent at Sloan House (the old 34th Street YMCA), in Greenwich Village and on 42nd Street would soon change all of that!

So my teaching grounds went from the wonderfully secure and privileged micro-environment(s) of the Cornell campus to the bigger-than-life world(s) of Manhattan. (When I finally returned to Ithaca, I had a far deeper understanding not only of my own sexuality but also of the class, racial and sexual structure of American society. Intuitively, I sensed that Ithaca was simply too small for me ... and that most of the gay people there were too deeply closeted and self-oppressed.)

My sexual initiation and exploration at Sloan House happened within three environments that lent themselves to meeting other homosexual males whose paths had also led them to this notorious YMCA Hostel: there was (1) the inner courtyard, (2) the communal showers and (3) the cafeteria.

(1) The windows on one side of every hallway faced an internal courtyard. In the late afternoon and evening, randy young guys would exhibit their nude bodies - complete with hard-ons! - in these windows. They would shout across the courtyard to other - equally undressed - young men. Formal invitations were made by yelling out room numbers, making it easy for anyone, wanting a closer look, to turn up at their/your doorstep. This was a pretty nifty and ingenious way of connecting and was a complete turn-on! (Far more direct and real ... *it beats Grindr any day!*)

(2) And then there were the communal shower rooms. One day, I found myself seduced by a handsome, somewhat older guy with an inviting hard-on who I then took to my room. This turned out to be my first and most intimate encounter ever ... with the Catholic Church! Yes, I had picked up a good-looking priest whose parish was in Connecticut (only an hour's train ride north). Our sexual contact - sadly never to be repeated - was surprisingly athletic and satisfying ... later, I even fantasized about his taut young body clothed in clerical drag.

(3) The drab cafeteria was the place where gaggles of queers met, gabbed and planned their next moves, etc... It was here that I found myself developing a crush on a particular teenager, probably 2 or 3 years younger than my own age. I suppose this was my third attempt at courtship and I really wanted it to work, so I made it clear to the kid that I adored him. (I have always needed to try and love someone, even if this has rarely worked out. The key aspect to ponder here is why *this* particular choice flared in my heart and mind.)

The boy said that his name was Jan and claimed that his grandfather was none other than the great Czech composer, Leoš Janáček. As a classical music lover, I was fascinated by this declaration. I rushed off to Sam Goody's record store to search for any recordings (although American culture had barely heard of Leoš). All I found was a disc with Karel Ančerl's performance of the "*Sinfonietta*", coupled with the tone poem "*Taras Bulba*". Since I did not have access to a turntable (until I returned later to Cornell), it would be a few months before I was even able to hear them ... they then turned me into a lifelong Janáček fan. I knew nothing, however, about how much veracity there was to Jan's story. It wasn't until years later that I had a sense of whether his claim might actually be true.

(In 1970, I found myself in Brno, Czechoslovakia and I visited Janáček's house there, which had been turned into a museum. This was two years

after the Prague Spring had ended abruptly – in August 1968 - with the arrival of Soviet tanks snuffing out the brief period of liberalization initiated by Alexander Dubček. I was invited to sleep over *in* the composer's house, visitors apparently being *that* rare during this period.

A couple of months later, my massive hitchhiking expedition brought me to Edinburgh, Scotland where I lucked out and was able to attend performances of three Janáček operas staged for the Arts Festival there by the Prague State Opera. Sometime thereafter, I read a biography of Janáček and was finally able to learn about his marriage and sexual life as well as see several images of the great composer. It turned out that Leoš had had an unhappy marriage. *It seems though, officially, that the couple never had any children, thus making my friend Jan's elaborate family claim a rather dubious one. However, in his later years, Janáček also had a love affair with a much younger woman and, it WAS conceivable to have an out-of-wedlock birth covered up, so ... who knows?*)

What *was* true was that Jan was a tough-and-tender, street-smart 42nd Street hustler and so my courtship involved asking him to be my 'teacher'. We went together to 42nd Street and he schooled me on the postures one had to assume in order to dominate "center stage" there. (All of this notwithstanding, Jan never showed any interest in either having sex or forming a relationship with me.)

Thereafter, my late afternoons took on a daily routine and pattern. First, I'd find myself a vacant corner on one of the blocks in the Theatre District, north of 42nd Street, and made sure that I was visible and looked available. All the potential 'clients' were in automobiles, driving around and around, stopping to chat up any of the young males who might interest them. It would then be decided if things would go any further. I really don't recall any discussion about money until after the "event": everything came down, - somewhat innocently compared to today's world - to whether the customer had been pleased with the



interaction. (The money I made back then was far more than I would ever earn again in the labor market.)

I learned my lessons well and soon found myself inundated with customers: usually middle-aged, married men. Surprisingly - but fortunately for me - the contacts nearly always involved more of what I'd term counselling than any real, true sex. Most (but not all) of these men were simply too caught up in the socially woven net of oppression to enjoy a liberated, physical experience. In the decades to come, I would certainly put these early 'counselling' skills to good use.

In my total naïveté, I was shockingly oblivious of all the action going on around me in the countless peep shows (with their glory holes) and in the dozens of adjacent cinemas. Half of these movie theatres were showing second run or B-grade films; the others featured porno reels of one sort or another. However, the real "business" and purpose of these places was often to provide sexual encounters for homosexuals, yes, even within these supposedly heterosexual spaces.



During the month or so that I stayed at Sloan House, I spent my days exploring the city, visiting its great museums and endless neighborhoods. On some evenings, I was able to attend a play or a concert. One of the high points included seeing The Royal Shakespeare Company's production of Peter Weiss' play *"Marat/Sade"*, about the conflicting philosophical views of Jean-Paul Marat and the Marquis de Sade during the French Revolution. It had a lasting impact on my views of humanity; reflecting, as it does, the eternal struggle between pessimism and optimism.

Another afternoon, I went to see *"Cabaret"*, a Broadway production based on Christopher Isherwood's *"The Berlin Stories"*. My reason for

attending was to see (and then hopefully meet) Lotte Lenya who played the landlady, Fräulein Schneider. She had been the wife of the German composer, Kurt Weill, whose operas "*Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*" (Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny) and "*Die Dreigroschenoper*" (The Three Penny Opera), she had starred in during their Berlin premier performances before the Nazis' takeover. So, afterwards, I waited outside, by the back door of the theater from where the cast members exited. When she walked out, I called to her and she came over, reaching out for my hands. She held them for what seemed like a very long time while I chattered on about how much I admired both her and Weill. I likely told her that I was performing my own "hustler" act, stationed just a few blocks south of the theater.

During another evening, I joined the 'Standing Room Only' crowd in the Gallery, way up near the ceiling, at the old but still functioning Metropolitan Opera House at 39th and Broadway. The opera that evening was "*Un Ballo in Maschera*" and starred Leontyne Price. Everyone in this perch, far above the stage, struck me as 100% gay. There, I met a kind airline attendant who, to my astonishment, offered me his Brooklyn Heights apartment - free - for an entire month (no strings attached) while he went off to the West Coast.

I also spent many days and nights wandering about the West Village, surviving on pizza slices and Orange Julius, including many hours searching through the stock of classical LPs in the 8th Street record shops, in between brief visits to various gay bars. I have never been much of a bar person and I would just have a beer and then move on. I guess I've always felt that the street was 'my turf' and I've never had any difficulty in making new acquaintances, at least not back in the counterculture days when so many of us were young.

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One night, I decided to try hustling in the Village but was clueless as to where I would find the action. It was late, I was exhausted and did not want to take the subway back to Brooklyn Heights: so I let myself be picked up by a handsome, slightly older collegiate type who lived in an apartment, right on 8th Street. It turned out to be the night I lost my so-called "virginity". (And THE experience which made me avoid anal sex for a long time thereafter!).

My host's bed was not the only thing that he possessed that was king-sized. He was likely utterly delighted to have so easily picked up a reasonable looking kid - barely 20 - to fuck the daylights out of! I only remember him pulling me over to his side of the bed and shoving his very sizable tool up my ass.

There was no sense of affection in his physical interaction with my body. I buried my head in the pillow, screaming, until he came and pulled out. This must have been repeated at least four times during the night. I said nothing and just let him have his way. It was freezing cold outside, I was not dressed for the winter weather and the subways had stopped, so I saw no way out of the situation. I realized this was quite possibly the worse introduction to anal sex ... but that was where I found myself. I remember that I kept hoping that he would show a bit of affection and, perhaps, even talk to me about what was happening. No such luck!

In the early morning, we got up, showered and dressed. He was obviously some sort of suit-wearing young professional. He put on an old 78rpm recording of Ralph Vaughan Williams' *"Serenade to Music"*, the very first recording with Isobel Baillie and 15 other top-notch soloists. It's a setting of verses from Shakespeare's *"The Merchant of Venice"* and the weaving of the voices - as it reached its crescendo - was devastatingly beautiful. All the while that it played, I stared out of the window at the rooftops with their chimneys pouring out smoke on a cold winter's morning. Oddly, everything suddenly seemed much better

and it gave me an emotional boost, like a deeply felt embrace, exactly what my selfish bedmate had denied me. I almost forgave him for the way he had treated me, while wondering how such a person could relate to this wonderful music and yet be so cold and self-centered in bed. (Sex, for me, has everything to do with giving more than taking, sharing feelings, empathizing with the pleasure of my partner's experience). It was one lesson I wouldn't ever forget. Never again would I allow myself to be put into such a situation: the exact opposite of what I felt a sexual encounter should be.

### *Military Induction:*

Some time during my second month in Manhattan, I phoned my mother and she informed me that the U.S. Army had sent me a notification stating that, now that I was no longer in school, I was to be drafted! America needed human fodder for its Vietnam War machine and, by my taking a leave of absence from university, I had automatically become a target for the Draft. My older brother had already joined the Army, thus demonstrating how far apart we were on most everything we understood about life ... and our country. Of course, I knew this might happen once I dropped out of Cornell, but I had hoped that I would have enough time to come to terms with my gay identity and return to complete my degree before I was caught in any military net cast in my direction. My mother read me the Notice, which gave the date for my physical examination for induction. It was a criminal offense if you failed to show up, so I had to face the music or risk an even more complicated scenario.

My month of free accommodation was up and I did my best to convey my appreciation to the flight attendant who had trusted me, so spontaneously, with his home. I then got on a bus going back to Niagara Falls, determined to figure out what to do. I was determined that I was not going into the Army to do my so-called "patriotic duty" like my

older brother! So I tried to orchestrate a way out, without destroying a future with which I still had not come to terms.

Upon arriving back home, with the clock counting down towards the induction physical, I called a psychiatrist in Buffalo and made an appointment. He was quite the opposite of the shrink I had once sat with at the Cornell Gannett Health Center. *That* pipe-smoking, crusty old fellow would not engage in a dialogue with me about anything I had learned from my readings, observations and experience concerning human sexuality. The Buffalo professional was just the opposite and was actually more of the kind of counsellor I had been looking for originally: someone to debate with, to be open with and with whom I could feel connected. We seemed to be on a similar wavelength - perhaps my optimism overrode my skepticism, I will never know. He wrote a letter for me to give to the Draft Board stating that I was in "a confused state" about my sexual identity. In other words, it was written in a calculated manner to prevent me from being drafted but worded in such a way that I *might* escape the '4-F' category that could damage and even destroy my future career options. An illusion! ... and he likely knew it to be so.

The day of the physical exam is still vivid in my memory. At the Induction Center - a huge basketball court somewhere in Buffalo - I stood in a long line with at least a hundred other guys about my age. They were mostly Black or Latino, obviously not dropouts from an Ivy League college. I handed in my letter in at the registration table and made my way to the change room where we had been instructed to strip down to our undershorts. We then made our way onto the court, positioned in lines 5 or 6 feet apart. Some sort of medical inspector then ordered us all to drop our underwear, bend over and hold our buttocks apart. (What were they hoping to find between all those ass cheeks? Hemorrhoids? Dingle-berries? Please tell me!) I felt sorry for the poor schlep assigned to this 'Anal Inspection Corps'. Even back in those days, many of the guys were so seriously overweight that, once they bent over

and tried to pry open their mountainous buttocks, they simply fell face forward onto the floor. After that ordeal was over, we were marched in a line for some other kind of mindless inspection. At that stage, I heard my name being called and I followed the army functionary into a room where a higher-up showed me my letter, told me I was rejected and that I could put my clothes back on and leave.

Of course there was no grey area within the military's classification system, so I still ended up being coded '4-F'. A year or two before this point, I would have been seriously traumatized by this since there was a line on most job application forms asking about one's military status. If you wrote '4-F', you could pretty much forget about being hired ... by anyone. In other words, it was a way of stigmatizing you for life, at least within the proud United States of America. I had done my best to avoid this but, now, its psychological impact was limited as I had already embraced both my homosexuality and my defiance of society's damning judgment. My outsider and outlaw identity was finally emerging, a result of both my readings and my life experience. Ironically, the two weeks or so that I spent visiting the Buffalo shrink had given me the one thing for which I had long been looking: positive reinforcement of my own thoughts and feelings about being gay by someone intellectually mature; thereby advancing my political thinking along the road to activism.

All of this likely happened in April 1966. I then made the decision to find work in Buffalo, rent a room and start saving up enough money to return to Cornell and complete my degree. I was fortunate to find work, as a chemical analyst in a factory in South Buffalo, and a room near the University. This allowed me to accumulate enough of the money I needed to see myself through to graduation, without any thoughts of a loan.

I returned to Cornell that autumn ...

## Part II - A Campus Full of Queers

The Cornell campus was full of queers. From administrators and faculty to a student body brimming with closeted gays and lesbians (unsurprisingly, many of them had yet to come to terms with their sexuality). A lot of male students, gay and not, took advantage of several washrooms where you could get (or give) a quick blowjob, while still others frequented the Collegetown bars ... or drove to Cortland or Syracuse where there were dedicated gay bars. It was a time of openness and experimentation.

It was also a time when the mid-range categories on the Kinsey hetero/homo scale, primarily the 2s and 3s (out of a rating of 6), were peaking in numbers within the counterculture. A '3' on the scale would be close to the ideal definition of bisexuality: "equally heterosexual and homosexual". Those classified as a '2' were "predominantly heterosexual, but more than incidentally homosexual". Indeed, as Alfred Kinsey's survey of the sexual practices of 5,300 American males proceeded, he realized that, despite the commonly accepted mythology of people being either gay or straight, he was finding that the majority of men had had sex (i.e. reached orgasm) with both genders. [As my comment above suggests, new found shifts in cultural attitudes - specifically those that happened during the counterculture years - had a tremendous impact on the numbers of people willing to be placed within these more sexually 'flexible' categories.]

*Once I was 'Out of the Closet', what influenced me and led to the founding of the SHL?*

So is there a reasonable answer as to why I "took on the world" to try and change things for the better for homosexuals in the Cornell community? ( ... and later in Toronto and Boston?) The answer has to

do with two things: (1) my class background and (2) how much I was influenced by the books I had read.

Cornell did offer me a chance to experience a cultured, intellectual and politically 'alive' world and I savored those years as I discovered who I was and what I truly believed in. Still, I had no serious focus as far as my future was concerned. I was locked into the Agriculture School's curriculum and my options for exploring subjects in the Arts & Science College were limited. The science to which I was being exposed often had to do with exploiting and controlling the natural world rather than preserving the environment and studying the lives of other living creatures. (Activist conservation groups like Greenpeace were only founded around the time that I was graduated. Serious animal behavioral studies also began during the same period. I mention these because I might well have found a passionately felt career within those fields if the timing had been slightly different.)

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Back at home, there was never even the slightest talk about my future and never an offer of assistance to help see me through college. During those first summer holidays, while enrolled at Cornell, I worked in some of the factories that were still booming in Niagara Falls. Coming from such a background had its advantages as well as obvious disadvantages. Values related to social and political conformity, materialism and financial success were not fixed within me; class conditioning had not imprinted itself on my brain. I was never focused on either power or money ... and growing up in this time of social unrest permanently turned me away from established rules and regulations.

Luckily, I happened to be at Cornell at the height of those years of student revolt, when the counterculture had a major impact in loosening the repressive bonds sewn into the social fabric by conservative views



about nationalism, gender, race, sexuality and sex roles ... all very much part of the earlier post-WWII years in America. How permanent an impact did those alternative values have on most of my fellow Cornellians? I can only guess, but my suspicions are that, with the right 'Degrees' under their armpits and, therefore, with career paths almost guaranteed, the notion of material 'success' would have taken priority in their lives. In addition, this conservative strain would have been reinforced as they got older, when people usually try to feel more secure by locking into more traditional ways of living and thinking.

I believe that people who haven't been molded by their class (re: the job of the Middle Class is to maintain the status quo; the job of the Working Class is to labor; the job of the Upper Class is to rule) are more likely to take initiatives, by applying some basic application of Freudian and Marxian theory, which could upset the Capitalist apple cart. Someone in my class position was more of a free agent, with no predetermined role or status fixed in the back of his/her mind. Indeed, I did not aspire to be Middle Class or to being a member of the 'Nouveau Riche'. I gradually became focused on trying to liberate society from what I had personally experienced as its oppressive way of organizing sexual behaviour.

### *Literary Influences*

The second factor that helped influence my wish to found a gay student group – a full year before Stonewall – and which contributed to my self-manufactured "career" within the Gay Movement during the decades that followed, were the books that were instrumental in my intellectual development. In the absence of any Movement (or sexually radical) friends or even classroom exposure to ideas that attempted to analyze the prevalent anti-sexual and virulently anti-homosexual posture of society, I was left to find my own way among various authors who offered insights

into the evolution of this repressive/oppressive way of organizing sexual behavior.

At the age of 13, I had somehow discovered and read the American Transcendentalist philosophers Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. I still have my Modern Library edition of *"Walden"*, presented and inscribed (at my request) by my grandmother on my 14th birthday. This idea of self-reliance (knowing and believing in oneself) laid the foundations for the rest of my adult life.

During my German literature classes at Cornell, I was also exposed, for the first time, to two important German writers/philosophers, Goethe and Brecht. On my own, I discovered the dialogue in Plato's *"Symposium"* (which provided the first positive reinforcement for my sexuality) as well as the various works of William Blake which offered his vision of liberation. [In the winter of 1965, the Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art held an exhibit of the original handmade plates of Blake's poems. They affected me so deeply that I recall going back to see them at least three times. A year or so later, Allen Ginsberg spent a week on campus, giving a series of lectures full of references to the poems by Blake that had had a powerful influence on his own thinking.]

These ideas strengthened me and provided the backdrop for my first exposure to both openly gay writers and works about human sexuality, especially homosexuality. There were very few enlightened perspectives in American writing at this time but, fortunately, Kinsey had published his great studies shortly after I was born (the Male volume in 1948, the Female one in 1953). I also read Edward Sagarin's 1951 overview *"The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach"*, published under the name Donald Webster Cory. The book read more like journalistic Pop sociology; however, considering the year in which it was published - plus its content, which no one else had dared to tackle at the time - it had a positive impact on homosexuals of that era (as well as on society at large).

Unfortunately, by the mid-1960s, this sociologist had backtracked and argued for pathologizing homosexuality.

In addition, in 1967, Hawthorn Books (New York) published Wainwright Churchill's milestone study of male homosexuality called *"Homosexual Behavior Among Males: A Cross-Cultural and Cross-Species Investigation"*. Because of the book's posture, securely grounded by its scholarly stature and its un-dogmatic tone, its 'karmic' effect was one of inspired positive reinforcement that had a profound impact on those literate gays lucky enough to find it in bookstores. I know of other gay activists for whom this work played a pivotal role in their political evolution ... and yet, today, if you do an Internet name search for the author's biographical material, you will find almost nothing. One reference mentions him as being a clinical psychologist but nowhere have I found any useful information about his life ... or his death in 1971, for that matter. I remember reading, from the back cover of the book, that he lived in Rome, a wise choice for a self-affirming gay man during that epoch. For a man, who wrote such an incredibly important, ultimately gay affirming tome, both scholarly and rational, which spoke so eloquently about male homosexual behavior and its history from a multitude of perspectives - two years before Stonewall! - to be so devoid of any basic biographical presence on the World Wide Web is indeed disturbing.

I also devoured everything in translation by André Gide, including his journals and the prose poem *"Fruits of the Earth"*. At the same time, curiously, I was unaware of classic gay novels such as John Rechy's *"City of Night"* (1963) and Gore Vidal's *"The City and the Pillar"* (1948), and read them only a few years after my coming out. In particular, *"City of Night"* came across, after my stint in New York City, as shockingly autobiographical: my own experience closely mirroring that of its protagonist.

The ultimate and everlasting intellectual mountains I crossed that tied everything together and answered my deepest questions about sexual repression and oppression came from two of the greatest philosophical visionaries of the age: the American classicist, Norman O. Brown, and the Frankfurt School philosopher, Herbert Marcuse. Although coming from two very different directions, they both tried to answer the big questions about human perceptions and how the manipulation of our sexuality - by culture and history - had led us to create our present day civilization. In attempting to answer questions about life and death instincts, they also found a common base in the later works of Sigmund Freud and in the writings of William Blake. The classicist Brown went back to the ancient Greeks for many of his insights while the German philosopher Marcuse looked into the ideas of Karl Marx. (I am referring of course to their primary works: Brown's *"Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytic Meaning of History"* and Marcuse's *"Eros and Civilization"*. For anyone interested in knowing more about the radical vision of social transformation that motivated at least a few of the early gay liberationists, I can suggest nothing better than finding and thoughtfully making your way through both books.)

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When I returned to Cornell in September 1966, I found out that my girlfriend/fiancée had a teaching job near Ithaca and had moved into a Collegetown apartment. This meant that our situation needed to be fully clarified and I knew that this would not be easy ... for either of us. As a last desperate measure to find a way through this dilemma, I made an appointment to see a shrink at the Gannett Health Clinic. After about three sessions with this staid, pipe smoking, old gentleman (who refused to engage in any actual conversation), I realized that things were going nowhere and I simply stopped going.

So I needed to come out to my fiancée. And I did ... while in bed ... telling her that, during sex, my mind had been firmly engaged ... elsewhere ... thinking about my young male friend! It was the hypocrisy of that moment that precipitated this cathartic confession ... which, in turn, resulted in a flood of tears. We didn't actually part ways then and there and, to her credit, she sought to be supportive, perhaps hoping that our relationship might still work. However, I had passed that point, knowing that this was definitely not the road I wanted to travel down. Eventually, we simply went our separate ways. It was a year or so later that I truly 'broke rank' when I fully came out of the closet!

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During these years, I also began to realize that, as much interest as I had in science, it was (and still is) really more of a philosophical and aesthetic reference point for how I saw the world ... rather than one oriented around a career. As a serious science, Ethology was just in its beginning stages and I did not find the introductory course particularly engaging (or I might have chosen to head in that direction, academically). What I did try to do was take the maximum number of courses allowed within the Arts & Science College for someone enrolled in the Agriculture School. (In fact, I was thrown out of my French class because I already had the maximum number of courses an 'Aggie' was allowed to take.)

I seriously resented the courses that my Faculty considered mandatory, such as calculus and organic chemistry to which I couldn't apply myself at all. (I still can't understand how these could ever be of any practical use in my life and yet some bullheaded administrators insisted on shoving them down my throat when there were dozens of other courses that would have enriched my life no matter what work I might have chosen). On the whole, my academic life was more enjoyable because I took a wide variety of courses on subjects that I was *interested* in, even if they didn't fit into any traditional scholastic formula.

### *The SHL at Columbia*

On April 19th, 1967, the first *Student Homophile League* chapter became an officially recognized organization at Columbia University. On May 3rd, the New York Times paid it front-page attention in an article that, fortunately, I read. Apparently, I then wrote a letter to "Stephen Donaldson" (a pseudonym for Robert Martin) - which has survived in the Cornell archives - dated March 5th, 1968, in which I stated that I was "seriously considering an attempt to organize a Cornell chapter of the *Student Homophile League*."

However, my memory had failed to recall what a long gestation period there had been between my reading the 'Times' piece and the date when I finally got up the courage to write to "Donaldson" ... certainly part of that delay could be accounted for because the semester was almost over, but as for the additional seven months? Well, I suppose it was a combination of personal trepidation and the effort to finally put an end to my farcical heterosexual life - all the while trying to succeed academically. (Still, to give myself a bit of credit, Cornell did become the second campus to have a gay student-based organization!) "Donaldson" replied with a phone number and when I called, we set a date to meet on the Columbia campus. I made the trip over to Manhattan and we sat together in his dorm room trying to get to know each other and for me to learn more about the group he had founded.

We only actually met this one time. Beyond our homosexuality and an interest in activism, we found little else in common (or at least that was my take on things). He had been a military brat so our backgrounds were totally dissimilar. I remember the walls of his room being plastered with magazine images, mostly 'Physique' type of pictures of guys who, I assumed, attracted him. This was, undoubtedly, a brave visual statement for a student to make while living in a university dorm room in 1967-68.

I suppose that - at my still somewhat prudish level of development - I found much of this off-putting. As I recall, our meeting didn't last very long and there was no suggestion from either of us that we should share a meal so we could get to know each other better. Nonetheless, I was committed to starting a group at Cornell and Martin did help out by providing copies of everything his group had printed in order to get his own University's recognition. It's a shame I did not get to attend one of their meetings or even meet a few other members. After that, there was little communication between us ... except, of course, a phone call to let him know that the Cornell group had been recognized.

### May 1968

Near the end of that spring's semester, in May 1968 - after submitting the required documents - the Cornell Chapter of the *Student Homophile League* was officially recognized.

It never occurred to me to use a pseudonym until I realized that Robert Martin at Columbia had done so by using the name "Stephen Donaldson". (Indeed, I believe Bob Martin kept this pseudonym during his entire life.) People today might have difficulty understanding how it was before Gay Liberation, as the fear of being publicly known as a 'homosexual' could very definitely destroy most career aspirations ... and I was already a military 4-F'er. Even as I was personally afraid of what this might do to my future, I also had concerns about my family finding out. So I adopted two pseudonyms! This charade lasted, at the most, about 3 or 4 weeks but, ironically, it has followed me most of my life within the written accounts about the founding of the SHL.

The first name I used was "Robert Hermann" and that, apparently, was the name on my correspondence with Martin. A few weeks later, I was "Joel Morrison". A short time after the official recognition of the organization, I was interviewed on a Cornell radio talk show. I know

this may sound absurd, but I was so nervous that I forgot what pseudonym to use and felt utterly embarrassed – instantly seeing how ridiculous and dishonest this was – so I gave out my real name and, from that point on, I was finally and completely 'out' ... *except to my family!*

Once I reflected on this public media event, I decided that the sensible thing to do would be to inform my parents and older brother about my gay life and activism before they heard about it from another source. Unlike so many people I came to know later on, I was in no way receiving any financial assistance from my family and so it could not blackmail me into silence, locking me back into the closet over monetary concerns. As it so happened, the next time I was back in Niagara Falls, my older brother and father started in with their usual bullying tactics, calling me a "queer" or a "fairy". So the moment chose itself to inform them that, indeed, I was homosexual and, not only that, but I had formed a homosexual group at Cornell. My dad and my older brother screamed that they were going to get a shotgun and kill me. Mom ran to get the Bible. Fortunately, they were in so much shock that they did not follow through on their threats. Of course, things were never the same again with any of them ... but least the harassment stopped and, over time, our relationship improved.

[My father died in November 1970, about 8 months after I had taken off on my first trip abroad (trying to put a silver lining into my life after the University of Toronto had dismissed me for founding my second student gay organization there). Just before I left, the preceding March, my father and I went for a drive. These were the only times when we could have heart-to-heart talks about his life and mine. My dad told me that he realized that my act of coming out and of starting the Cornell group was a statement of courage, something that contradicted his prejudiced view of what a gay person was supposed to be. That was our final conversation ... and it has always meant so much to me.]



### Summer of 1968

I spent the summer of 1968 back in Manhattan fulfilling a strange "work requirement" imposed by the Agriculture College: each student had to spend one summer at a job somehow reflective of the related study program at Cornell. The Department came up with a very short list of options and I selected the most absurd choice because this one would take me back to New York City for a second extended stay. Thus, for nearly three months, I became an exterminator! But not just any exterminator: I was the summer replacement for exterminators all over Manhattan. I was on a daily rotation anywhere from the Bowery flophouses to the heart of Harlem; from the Park Avenue apartments of America's wealthiest to the sweatshops of the Garment District.

It was one hell of an amazing job since one never knew what would be the next assignment. I had my uniform and my suitcase full of poisons and, each morning, I would go to my company's headquarters in Lower Manhattan and be given an initial list of jobs. Once those were completed, I would phone the office for the next list of places to call upon. The customers were on contract, either individually or with the buildings' management. I would show up, announce that I was from the exterminators and ask to be let in so I could begin my work. At the top end of the economic scale, I recall the apartment (nine bathrooms, one floor!) of the famous American lawyer, novelist and historian, Louis Auchincloss, as well as many other wealthy residents on Park Avenue. I also paid a call on Walter Cronkite's home on the Upper East Side. There were rooms full of suitcases and other travel related items.

Such people rarely had any roaches or rodents and I came to realize that, if someone saw a fly, they would call the exterminator. I would carefully look behind, under and around any spot where they claimed to have seen such creatures but I usually couldn't find any telltale evidence. Nonetheless, they wanted the place sprayed and/or powdered with DDT.

(Even though Rachel Carson had warned America, in her groundbreaking book, "Silent Spring", of the carcinogenic nature of DDT and other pesticides, they were still in full use that summer of 1968.) In retrospect, I consider myself lucky to still be alive ... considering the volumes of poison I exposed myself to while dispersing them into kitchens, bathrooms, closets and basements that summer.

Sometimes I had the distinct feeling that the customer was simply lonely and had called the exterminator for some company. Other times, they would even try to openly seduce me: both men and women. I remember one dame pointing to her crotch when I asked where the roaches were! Another time, a flamboyant gay hairdresser started stroking me. Unfortunately, I never found any of these people attractive, so I always declined their invitations.

There were plenty of days when I would knock on the doors of very poor people in Harlem or on the Lower East Side. They often resisted letting me have access to their apartments until I convinced them that it was their landlord who was paying for the service. Once I was let in, I asked the usual questions about where they had seen the roaches, rats or mice. The usual answer was that they didn't have any ... despite the fact that their walls might be crawling with roaches! Of course, it was all a hopeless situation given the mobility of these creatures, going from one apartment to another, from one floor to another. My company, quite frankly, wasn't interested in killing all the vermin as that would have put them out of business. What kept up my interest was the experience of seeing - close up - how people lived in New York City: from the wealthiest to the most destitute.

Some days, I would visit the kitchens of high-end restaurants. I was often told to spray everywhere, regardless of the possibility of food contamination: one cook even pointed to a pot of soup and offered the absurd suggestion that I spray directly into the pot! (That experience so

stuck with me that, to this day, I am cautious about eating anything I haven't prepared myself.)

One day, in one of the flophouses on the Bowery, I contracted an infection that nearly did me in: my temperature rose suddenly and the fever so zapped my strength that I had to crawl down the five or six flights of stairs to the street where I struggled along my way until I spotted a MD sign in a window. Fortunately, a shot of penicillin did the trick and I quickly recovered. On another day, when I was leaving a subway car, its doors closed on my arm while my hand still held my suitcase full of poisons inside the compartment. The train started to move and I ran, screaming along the platform, frantic that the conductor would notice and stop long enough for me to extract my arm and case. He did.

After work, I would prowl Greenwich Village, visiting all the gay bars as well as The Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop (which had opened the previous year). I often felt like I was on some sort of sociology tour ... as few of these bars held my interest. Eventually, I visited one on Staten Island that appealed to me enough to keep making the time-consuming trip out there. I think it attracted me because the crowd was a mixture of lesbians and gays of all ages. It reminded me of a small bar back in Niagara Falls, next to the Greyhound Bus Terminal ... right down to the not a few customers dressed up in cowboy outfits.

My visits to the tiny Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop were when it was in its first location on Mercer Street (this was before the explosion in gay literature that followed the year after Stonewall). It wasn't until 1973 that it moved to its better known and slightly larger space on Christopher Street (at Gay Street!).

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It was most likely from the SHL mailings (which I had started receiving from Columbia University) that I found out about and then attended an ECHO (Eastern Conference of Homophile Organizations) meeting. It was during this event that I first met the gay rights activists Frank Kameny, Barbara Gittings and Foster Gunnison. The actual conference session was pretty dull and boring (except for Barbara's cigar smoking!). Bob Martin did not attend. All that I can now recall is that *Robert's Rules of Order* was repeatedly referred to ... while, whatever they were really trying to talk about, fell through the cracks. Gunnison showed an interest in me (and the group I had just formed at Cornell) and was kind enough to take me out to lunch while I talked about the SHL.

It was clear, however, that the older activists had a very different take on how to approach the social - let alone the political - liberation of homosexuals. These Homophile Movement activists, it seemed to me, offered no vision for truly transforming society. By merely focusing on changing laws, they were just spinning their wheels and, while certainly important and well intentioned, such efforts lacked the dynamism that would result in the rising up of an entire social minority. Unsurprisingly, therefore, even the focus of the pre-Stonewall gay student groups seemed alien to this earlier generation ... and the basic idea of large numbers of gays and lesbians coming out of "their closets" seemed impossible for them to grasp. However, in their own way, the gay student groups - that emerged between 1967 and late June 1969 - acted as a sort of bridge between this Homophile Movement and the Gay Liberation Movement that was to burst onto the scene, just one year after I attended the ECHO Conference.

After that, with the summer finally over, I was anxious to return to Cornell and try to get the newly recognized SHL off the ground.

### *Gay Students and Others*

Which gay-identified students supported the idea of forming the *Student Homophile League*? Who was involved from the very beginning, after I went through the application process to have the student organization recognized? Well, there was Bob Roth and Theodore Gulick. [Bob, his lover Maurice and I lived together during my final semester (the fall of 1968) and I include some of my memories of Bob among the individual portraits below in Part III.] In the wings, there was Gustavo, Theo's Colombian lover ... and another student named Bruce (I have no recall of his last name) who was the lover of a Philosophy professor. Theo was in the Music Department studying organ performance. I recall he spent at least one summer in France studying with the famous composer and conductor Nadia Boulanger. We had a short period of closeness until he and Gustavo became lovers.

Among the female students, there was Janet Hadda whom I knew *before* the founding of the SHL ... and Pauline Layton whom I believe I met shortly *after* its founding. Janet was a grad student and a dedicated Music Room person. She was also a very mature and compassionate human being. Neither identified as lesbian. (None of the people mentioned above were what you'd call political activists at the time). Pauline was from Ithaca and had a cute young boyfriend and identified herself as bi-sexual. Despite spending time together on many occasions, it was never clear to me how she experienced the other half of her identity. She was fairly shy and, at that time, seemed hesitant to 'out' herself. At some point after I had graduated and moved north to Canada, she wrote what is certainly an interesting, if somewhat bizarre, historical reflection about me entitled "*Why People Didn't Like Jerry*". Having never seen it, I recently requested a copy from the Kroch Library. I was dreading reading it but was also full of curiosity. I had no idea "People" (whoever this refers to) didn't like me. I guess I am either a bit naïve or too dense to notice such things. Of course, perhaps only people I really cared about did "like" me. In truth, in whatever I did at Cornell or

elsewhere, I never saw life as a popularity contest. In the article, Pauline suggested that many of the queens (a nuanced term that could be something of a put-down but could also be an affectionate and self-deprecating term) were jealous of the amount of attention I was receiving from a number of attractive young guys despite being, as she put it, on "the average-to-homely side."

### **The First Meeting**

The first publicly advertised *Student Homophile League* meeting took place on November 21st, 1968.

### First Activities and Initiatives of the SHL:

As I recall, there were four initiatives during my time as head of the organization:

#### *1) Setting up a literature table in Willard Straight Hall.*

We achieved and sustained a public presence through our table in the foyer of the Willard Straight Hall Student Union Building. It seemed to be the absolute best way of getting the word out, of generating a dialogue and of attracting new members. Within a short time, the entire campus seemed to be aware of our new group. I printed a series of handbills (on the mimeo machine I ran at the Olin Library) which we gave to any student who came over to our table. While I cannot be sure exactly about their content, they likely had quotes from various authors of whom I was fond: people such as Wainwright Churchill, Thomas Szasz, Walt Whitman, André Gide and Plato. They would have also included our Mission Statement. Interestingly, the number of male friends of either straight or undefined sexual orientation likely equaled (or surpassed!) the number of gay and lesbian students who stopped by to sit and chat. As I recall, Janis Kelly (who did identify as lesbian) found out about the group by visiting our table. (She would go on to co-author a book on female sexuality in the era of AIDS). One day, a

doctor from the Gannett Clinic stopped by and declared how great it was that the organization both (1) existed and (2) was doing so in such a public way. I have no doubt that his offices were filled with students experiencing anxiety over their sexual orientation during this period.

2) *Inviting high profile speakers.*

The "Guide to the Cornell Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Coalition Records 1967-1999" mentions two speakers who had been invited to address the Cornell community. The dates are both after I was graduated and had left Ithaca. These speakers were the two most prominent activists in the Homophile Movement: Franklin Kameny (on September 23rd, 1969) and Barbara Gittings (one month later on October 23rd). The Cornell document makes no mention of a talk given by Thomas Szasz, a radical psychiatrist from Syracuse whose 1970 book *"The Manufacture of Madness"* included a chapter entitled *"The Model Psychiatric Scapegoat: The Homosexual"*. The documents, referred to in the Haftan Eckholdt '87 Papers, did include an undated letter written by me to Dr. Szasz. Unless my memory is playing games, I asked him to be our *first* speaker and the event happened sometime between October and December 1968. (I did in fact invite Frank Kameny to speak but that was in Toronto on behalf of the *University of Toronto's Student Homophile Association*).

3) *Letter of protest to Professor Charles Ackerman.*

I remember composing a letter to Professor Ackerman, on behalf of the SHL, asking him to cease using the 1962 book *"Homosexuality: A Psychoanalytic Study of Male Homosexuality"* in his course on "Social Deviance". This discredited text was one of a handful of similar books that considered homosexuality an illness, to be cured through therapy. . He did not reply to the letter and no copy was made, so there is no official record of this initiative. *Ackerman's use of this text will always be remembered as a hallmark of (his) self-oppression* (There is a brief section on Sociology Professor Charles Ackerman in Part III of this history.)

#### *4) Flyer distribution in the Collegetown bars.*

I may have performed this activity less than half a dozen times ... since it really didn't accomplish anything positive. I included 3 or 4 of the mimeo sheets that we handed out at the Willard Straight table in envelopes and tried giving them to anyone in the three Collegetown bars who sent 'signals' to my gaydar. This usually got me into a confrontation with some queen who would denounce what I was trying to do. One lucky evening, my gaydar picked up positive vibes from a man in his late 30s. It turned out to be the famous choreographer Paul Taylor. We had a drink or two together and I talked about starting the SHL. I distinctly remember discussing butterflies with him and how, when we were both young boys, we had collected specimens. Nowadays, I am happy just to photograph them.

#### *Graduation and Departure*

In January 1969, when I had graduated and left Ithaca for a job at the University of Toronto, I hoped my friend and roommate Bob Roth would agree to take over as head of the SHL. He declined to do so at the time, most likely because of advice he was getting from his lover, Maurice Essam, a British immigrant some 15 to 20 years older ... at least that was my speculation. And yet, a few months later, I heard that he had indeed taken over the leadership. When I left, my Music Room friend, grad student Janet Hadda, had agreed to step in at least until the group sorted things out. While writing this essay, I did a Google search for Janet with the intention of writing her for information about those transitional months. Sadly, she died in June, 2015. After Cornell, she went on to become the first tenured Yiddish professor in the U.S. and later studied psychoanalysis, writing two books analyzing Jewish writers (she also wrote a "much admired" article on Allen Ginsberg). She is survived by her husband, neuroscientist Allan J. Tobin, whom she married in 1981.



I was more or less out of the Ithaca loop during all of 1970 and most of 1971. I was getting resettled in Canada, founding the *University of Toronto Homophile Association* (UTHA) in the early fall of 1970 (and getting fired for doing so) and then leaving for Europe on my 8 month voyage, returning from Berlin for my father's funeral in November 1970. I then re-involved myself in the burgeoning Canadian Gay Movement, founded Glad Day Bookshop late in 1970 and then *The Body Politic: A Journal for Gay Liberation* in the fall of 1971.

In late 1971/72, I began returning to Ithaca, *privately*, because I was still deeply in love with a young man I had hopelessly courted since we had met in my sophomore year but, *publicly*, because of my friendship with Greg Lehne, the head of what was called, by then, the "Gay Liberation Front" or "Cornell Gay Liberation", and his roommate James Steakley, a gay history researcher in the making. Once *The Body Politic* started to gain momentum, we were anxious to distribute as many papers as possible and, on at least two occasions, we drove down to Cornell in my friend John Scythes' 1948 Packard (a vehicle that in many ways resembled a tank) with that intention. This was usually timed to an event held by the gay organization (which was now – I was told – the single largest student group on campus!). So, for a year or two, there was an active Ithaca-Toronto connection. Greg and Jim came up to Toronto, my housemate John and others went down to Ithaca. We even managed a trip or two to the north country of Ontario where John's family owned an island on the French River.

When Greg Lehne and Jim Steakley completed their degrees, Greg moved to Baltimore and Jim came up to live in Toronto for a year until he was offered a professorship at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. During that year, he wrote his first history of the pre-WWII German gay movement that we then published in *The Body Politic*.

After this period, the connections between Ithaca and Toronto came to an end.

Another member of the Cornell group whom I met during these trips was Ken Popert, a Canadian from Mississauga, Ontario, who was finishing his PhD. in Linguistics. In 1972, he returned to Canada and I introduced him to the Gay Alliance for Equality and to The Body Politic Collective: he joined both organizations. From our first encounter, Ken struck me as shrewd, calculating and highly intelligent. He also seemed to fit the classic profile of what I might characterize as an Anglo-Canadian 'cold cucumber' and, over time, I saw that trait reveal itself again and again.

*That* history, however, will be examined in my documents on The Body Politic and the ensuing years of censorship in Canada.

## Cornell Part III - Certain Memorable People

### *Charles Ackerman*

For a few years, Professor Charles Ackerman was, possibly, the most popular professor of all the faculty members in the Arts & Science College. He taught introductory Sociology as well as another undergraduate course on "Social Deviance", which included a study of homosexual behaviour. His classes were said to be the most attended on campus! Indeed, Charlie (as he was affectionately known), was a charismatic personality and a marvel as a communicator. He was really an actor ... and he flaunted his (self-oppressed) gay identity in a theatrical manner that was both awe-inspiring and somewhat frightening.

He was also very accessible, especially since he was somewhat of a barfly who cruised the Collegetown bars (which each had its own special gay corner). I chatted with him briefly a few times about the SHL and vented my frustration and anger at him for using what was perhaps the most negative, oppressive and dangerous book on homosexuality then in print: Irving Bieber's *"Homosexuality: A Psychoanalytic Study of Male Homosexuals"*. Despite his contradictions, this complex and incredibly bright man was both charming and as down-to-earth as any academic you could ever want to meet.

One night, Charlie invited me back to his apartment and so I went ... curious to see what might transpire. No one had ever told me any stories that might offer any insight into his sex life ... or even if he had one. As I recall, nothing of that nature ever came close to surfacing. My strongest memory - and I likely imbibed enough to blur any recollection of what we actually talked about - was the state of his living room: totally spartan ... except for a pile of empty beer cans ... on the floor ... in a corner.

Research on the Internet today yields little information on what exactly happened to Charlie at Cornell. However, in the edition of *The Cornell Daily Sun*, Volume 36, October 29th, 1969 – available online – someone wrote a letter ("name withheld by request") that strongly suggested that he had been sacked and that the incident – or the reason behind such a decision – was being covered up by the Chairman of his Department. (I can relate to that!)

### *Robert Alan Roth*

Bob Roth and I met in the Music Room. I don't recall Bob logging the hours I did there but the Room served as the rendez-vous location for our frequent get-togethers. When I met Bob, I was living in a room on Dryden Road. Both Bob and his lover, a Brit named Maurice Essam, were heavily into opera and other genres of the classical repertoire. They often needed a place to stay together on weekends and, on several occasions, I let them have my room for a night or two.

Maurice worked for a classical music radio station in New York. He also wrote LP jacket material and liner notes for London Records in Manhattan. He was always very kind to give me a bunch of concert and opera records from his label (in those days, my hunger to hear any and all classical music was insatiable). He once organized an especially memorable event to which I was invited: a recital, held in Syracuse, by the French soprano Régine Crespin, famous for her renditions of Berlioz songs as well as her roles in his grand opera *"Les Troyens"* and in *"Dialogues of the Carmelites"* by Poulenc. Later, Bob and Maurice brought Régine down to the Stonewall Inn in New York's West Village on a night when we were all there together.

Bob was always an over-the-top, energetic and cheerful fellow, with a wide toothy smile and a handsome nose. We generally got along great

for the entire three years we were at Cornell and I lived with Bob and Maurice from September 1968 until I graduated in January 1969. In an interview years later, I think I described Bob as "obnoxious", something I've always regretted. I must have been thinking about his tendency to go on and on about his sexual conquests in terms that I found a bit too much at the time.

Once Bob got his Law Degree from Fordham University, he set up a law practice in New York. He also worked in some capacity helping the sales and distribution of gay guides, namely The Spartacus International Gay Guide and a North American series known as The Gay Yellow Pages that were less commercial and more community/movement connected. Bob called one or the other Glad Day bookshops on many occasions to see how our stock was doing and to chew the fat.

We never saw each other after I left Cornell and Bob subsequently died of complications from AIDS on July 9th, 1990. On July 20th, the New York Times published an obituary that failed to mention anything relating to his gay activism. However, a correction appeared in the July 27th edition that added the following: "He was active in representing gay and lesbian clients on issues like Landlord-Tenant disputes, often without charge, and was a founder of the Cornell University Gay and Lesbian Alumni Association."

### *Daniel Berrigan*

Back in the mid-1960s, as part of the counterculture atmosphere at Cornell, the campus was dotted with small cafés. My favorite was in Anabel Taylor Hall which was on my way home in Collegetown. Dan Berrigan's office was along the corridor adjacent to this coffee house and I often saw him at his desk. I was somewhat familiar with his involvement in the Anti-War Movement since I attended all the rallies

(and even went down to Washington for one of the largest demonstrations against the Vietnam conflict).

When the time came to ask a faculty member to act as an advisor to the SHL, I knew that couldn't ask the professors whom I knew to be gay: they were either in the closet or just too conservative to have their names associated with an openly gay group. Although Berrigan was a Jesuit priest, I felt that he would likely be the most willing to serve as "faculty advisor" because of his overall political beliefs. I remember that when I asked him that there was no hesitation whatsoever in him saying yes. Unfortunately, his willingness was in name only: he never actually met with either myself or the fledgling organization. This did not concern me at the time. However, later, once the history of the group began to be written, the articles usually suggested that he had a more participatory role.

[It was not hard for those of us at the time to realize that Dan, along with his brother Philip and seven other anti-war activists, were preoccupied with other matters. On May 17th, just two months after the formal recognition of the Cornell STH, the "Catonsville Nine" (as they came to be known), removed and burned draft files from the Selective Service offices in Catonsville, Maryland. Their actions proved to be a major act of defiance for the Anti-War Movement.]

Years later, after Berrigan had served some 18 months in a Federal prison, I noticed that he had appeared as a speaker at a New York Gay Activists Alliance gathering (and possibly at other gay liberation group events). I must admit that I've often wondered what *exactly* was his take on homosexuality, both before and after his prison experience. The only thing that WAS clear was his positive on-the-spot reaction to putting his name down on paper in support of the SHL ... yet another firm statement about his broad political understanding of the world.

Personally, I considered it an honor to have had such a historically important figure as Father Daniel Berrigan supporting us.

### *Gary*

In my sophomore year, Athletics was still a mandatory part of the University's program. I have no distinct memory of what we actually did in these classes, I only have memories of the beauty of so many young male bodies and the smells of such a group of nude sweaty boys.

One day, while in the locker room, during my last semester participating in these half-hearted gymnastic activities, I noticed a handsome, slender built youth staring at me from the other row of changing benches a few yards away. I took in what some call the 'eye candy' while trying not to be too obvious. In fact, we both stared ... and this soon led to the next stage of our mutual cruising: over the following couple of weeks, we watched each other carefully and co-ordinated our exits to be at exactly the same moment. One time, I would follow him out; the next time, he would follow me out ... with neither of us getting up the courage to start talking. I soon realized that it was up to me to break the ice.

And so, one sunny spring day, when the boy, named Gary, followed me along the pathways leading out toward Sapsucker Woods (no pun intended!), I turned to speak with him once I felt we were completely alone. Although it was obvious that we lusted after each other, nothing physical happened. Both of us were still repressed and, although I was consciously trying to overcome my inhibitions, all I could bring myself to do was to tell him how much I wanted him ... and then I gave him the address of my boarding house on Dryden Road.

A few days later, upon returning to my room, I found a letter from Gary declaring his love and inviting me to his room in a building tower on campus. I arrived at the appointed time, hungry to consummate our

mutual desire. He had bought champagne as well as a new set of glasses and I was touched by this statement of how seriously he was taking the moment, even if it seemed a bit like a hetero-imitative scenario.

Realizing that Gary was more inhibited than I was, I decided to take the initiative and tried to put my arms around him, to hold him tightly so that our torsos would be engaged as closely as possible. However, when I tried to kiss him, he burst into tears (of guilt, apparently) and he pushed me away. He immediately wanted me to leave ... and so it was impossible to salvage the moment. Things had come so very close to what I longed and yet ...

I left ... in a state of shock.

Nevertheless, about a week later, I found a bouquet of flowers on my doorstep with another note from him in which he apologized for his reaction and proposed another rendez-vous. I was still hopeful that things could still take their natural course and that we would finally find ourselves nestled, naked together, in a bed. I was more than ready to show him how much I was filled with desire. Alas, it was not to be. When the moment came to embrace, he burst into tears and rejected me. His Catholicism still had a stranglehold on him and our encounter ended in disaster, again. I left feeling angry at a world that could create such a sense of guilt that was so insurmountable.

A few weeks later, I found out that Gary had dropped out of Cornell (where he had been studying Philosophy) and that he had gone back to his hometown of Binghamton where he enrolled in Engineering. A sad tale. Hopefully, he pulled it together and ultimately found what he wanted ... and needed.



### *Frank Rosenblatt*

According to his Wikipedia entry, Frank Rosenblatt wore many hats at Cornell, starting with his BA in 1950 and then his PhD. in 1956. The entry continues: *"In 1959, he went to Cornell's Ithaca campus as Director of the Cognitive Systems Research Program and also as a lecturer in the Psychology Department. In 1966, he joined the section of Neurobiology and Behaviour within the newly formed Division of Biological Sciences, as Associate Professor. Also in 1966, he became fascinated with the transfer of learned behaviour from trained to naïve rats by the injection of brain extracts, a subject on which he would publish extensively in later years."*

I met Frank during that period – most likely in 1967 – because he often spoke about these on-going experiments in behavioural memory transfer. No doubt he was a scientific genius; however, the memory transfer tangent was, ultimately, not very successful and his scientific legacy remains around "Perceptron", which is considered a *"forerunner to artificial intelligence"*.

What follows are some of my memories of our friendship ...

Physically, Frank was slight in stature; an eccentric looking fellow who seemed to care little about his appearance. He seldom changed his clothes, usually wearing the same shabby sports coat or well worn sweater, always carrying his papers and books in one arm rather like a student. His expressionless face made you feel he was definitely a lonely, solitary sort. And while Cornell was certainly his element (he had been there almost continuously from 1946 onward), I had the impression that, outside of his office and research labs, he wasn't quite sure where he fit in.

Each and every day, late in the afternoon, 'lonely' Frank could be seen wandering around Willard Straight Hall, stopping in at the Music Room as part of a ritualistic stroll. However, he never stayed very long:

I'd see him raise his head a bit, his slightly squinted eyes peering into the room to see if he might spot someone he knew. His glasses were too large for his face and added to his eccentric presence. His eyes rarely seemed to focus on anything or anyone for very long. If, and when, he did notice you, his mouth broke out into a wide open, toothy smile. This is all embedded in my memory because it was a year or more before we actually spoke ... a period during which I had often wondered who this rather goofy looking, aged man-boy might be.

How we came to finally speak, I can't recall ... but, once we did, a friendship slowly took hold, based largely on the both of us being two gay guys with an intellectual bent. Frank was pretty closeted and needed someone gay to open up to, so our relationship almost turned into a kind of extended counselling session for him. I was on the brink of founding the SHL and was full of radical ideas about homosexuality and the history of sexual repression/oppression. I tried to discuss the ideas around organizing a gay student group with Frank but he was adamantly opposed to it (and he certainly wasn't interested in joining). Basically, he advised me against it; his main argument was that old canard about society not "being ready" for Gay Liberation. And yet he was active in the Democratic Party and had a significant role in Eugene McCarthy's progressive 1968 Presidential primary campaign in California. Knowing how introverted Frank was, I had a hard time understanding how he could help run a political campaign. (*And I guess being "Clean for Gene" also included staying in the closet!*)

Frank lived out in Brooktondale, a village about 6 miles southeast of Ithaca. His house was run as a sort of commune and I visited him there a few times. I suspected that Frank's homosexuality was some sort of open secret, but I was still careful not to engage in any 'gay talk' with his housemates. As Frank's confidant, I heard him speak regularly about a straight grad student with whom he was in love: in order to bind the relationship, he told me, he sometimes added the grad student's name to

his publications. Nevertheless, I think Frank was careful to keep his relationships compartmentalized as, in all the time I knew him, he never once showed me his office or lab ... or introduced me to his "heartthrob".

Sometime in the late autumn of 1968, Frank asked me if I wanted to go with him on a weekend trip to New Hampshire's Mt. Washington. We drove to the top of the mountain during a snow storm but immediately came back down, fearing the road might become impassable. We checked in at the first motel that we spotted along the road. That night, Frank and I slept in the same bed and he made a few awkward advances toward me, something with which I had no trouble. I was not at all turned on by Frank (and I'm not sure how it worked the other way round). He spent a few minutes touching me in various places and I remember telling him not to be so shy but this didn't lessen his inhibitions. I wondered afterwards, if that scene, in that motel room far away from Ithaca, wasn't what he had planned in his mind all along ... and if that hadn't been the first physical encounter of his foreshortened life.

I never saw Frank again after I graduated and moved to Canada. It could well be that I had been his only gay friend. Then, somehow, I happened upon his obituary in the New York Times: Frank had drowned in a Chesapeake Bay boating accident on his 43rd birthday, July 11th, 1971. I have always wondered about the circumstances of the accident. In the book *"Prefiguring Cyberspace: An Intellectual History"* published by MIT Press in 2004, there is a reference to certain individuals' speculation as to whether his death had been a suicide following the loss of funding for his Perceptron project and a *"devastating attack on the entire project"* by two other scientists. However, knowing Frank as well as I did, I have difficulty buying into this theory.

It has only been in the past year or so (2016) that, after almost total neglect, several entries about Frank and his work have suddenly appeared on the Internet. I include this short excerpt from a very long and technical article "*Alan Turing: Father of the Computer*" by B. Jack Copeland and Diane Proudfoot, published by The Rutherford Journal (article 040101.html) that places Frank's work in a historical context. As you will read below, the researchers at MIT, from whose work Frank's research stemmed, were unaware of Alan Turing (who was also gay ... and died a tragic suicide). It is an intriguing question as to whether or not Frank Rosenblatt himself was familiar with at least some of Turing's achievements in this area.

*"In the year of Turing's death (1954), two researchers at MIT, Wesley Clark and Belmont Farley, succeeded in running the first computer simulations of neural networks. Clark and Farley were unaware of Turing's earlier work and their neural architecture was quite different from his: Clark and Farley used "weighted" connections between neurons, as is now usual in connectionism. Clark and Farley were able to train their networks—which contained a maximum of 128 neurons—to recognize simple patterns. In addition, they discovered that the random destruction, of up to 10% of the neurons in a trained network, does not affect the network's performance of its task—a feature reminiscent of the brain's ability to tolerate damage.*

*The work begun by Clark and Farley was developed very considerably by Frank Rosenblatt at Cornell University, who built neural network-like computers that he called "Perceptron". Rosenblatt used the term 'connectionist' for the approach and his 1962 book "Principles of Neurodynamics" became the reference work for the emerging field. Modern connectionists regard Rosenblatt as the founding father of their approach... and it is still not widely realized that Turing wrote a blueprint for much of the connectionist project as early as 1948".*

## *Paul Goodman*

I was not introduced to Paul Goodman by his most famous book "*Growing Up Absurd*". During the late 1960s, it was a safe bet to say that it was THE text utilized by the majority of first year Sociology courses across America. But no, I discovered Goodman via his sheer notoriety ... and the diary "*Five Years: Thoughts During a Useless Time*" in which he opened up about his homosexual life, something he had never hidden in his daily behaviour. In fact, quite the opposite!

According to a biography published on-line by Anarchy Archives, Paul was fired from every teaching job in his life "*because he insisted on his right to fall in love with his students*". I had heard that sometimes he would have a young lad, whose looks and intelligence had charmed him (we're talking 15 to 18 year olds), speak, personally, about the relevant topic at the beginning of Goodman's own public lectures. Paul stood by the concept of emotional/sexual connection(s) between teacher and student as if we were still living in the age of Pericles.

I can't really verify any of this for, alas, sadly there is still no biography of Paul, even 40+ years after his death in 1972. However, not only could this be accurate but it might actually be one of the reasons why this honest, uniquely American genius has no biography. He was just another free spirit who has been shuffled into the dustbin of history, as nothing much about his life would serve the interests of the politically correct scribes working in today's assimilated, farcical social landscape.

For decades, I'd heard that his friend and literary executor, Taylor Stoehr, was slated to write a bio but the closest Stoehr ever came to doing so was his 1984 book "*Here Now Next: Paul Goodman and the Origins of Gestalt Therapy*". Stoehr died in 2013. I suspect that a complex

figure like Goodman would be an incredible challenge for any biographer and, so far, no one has accepted that challenge.

While looking over the Wikipedia entry for Paul, I note that he published between 40-50 books in almost every imaginable literary category. For at least 20 years, he was America's "public intellectual". *Why hasn't American history been crying out for someone to tell his story?!* There has been, however, an independently produced documentary released, called *"Paul Goodman Changed My Life"* (2011). It focuses on the importance of Goodman's life and works as observed by a number of people who knew him well. (Still, in my opinion, nothing short of several biographies will ever fill the current void!)

During the 1960s, right up until his death in 1972, Paul Goodman was at the height of his fame. His name was practically a household word and his writings were, literally and figuratively, all over the place: sociology, psychology, essays, novels, short stories, autobiography, poetry, even city planning pieces ... most of them issued by high profile publishers like Random House. His speaking engagements must have been phenomenal as, wherever I was at the time, I seemed to be able to find a lecture by Goodman somewhere waiting in the wings. Nevertheless, besides *"Five Years"* and a few essays, I really hadn't bothered to read Goodman. From what I knew about his life, however, I wanted to meet him and see him close up. Part of my interest, of course, had to do with the fact that he managed a heterosexual married life and yet never shied away from indulging his homosexual attractions! He seemed a man far above the crowd with a force of personality simultaneously brilliant, spontaneous and down-to-earth.

His son, Matthew, was a Music Room fixture as was Burton Weiss, who talked about Paul as if he was Goodman's greatest admirer. I felt no attraction to the bespectacled Matthew. I had the feeling he lived in a sort of glass bubble, symbolized by the exceptionally thick lenses he wore.

You could never look him in the eye and hope to see him looking back, something I normally did not do to show interest. In addition, Matthew's girlfriend was always dotting on him, even more the "clinging vine" type than the woman from whom I was trying to free myself. One just felt that he was already claimed and taken. All I could do was wonder what he was really all about ... and how he understood his very complex father.

In 1967, I finally met Goodman when, after a visit to Ithaca, Burton let on that he and Paul needed a ride back to Manhattan. It just so happened that my girlfriend, Heidi, and I were going down to the city in her tiny VW Beetle (with her at the wheel), so we offered the two a lift. Unfortunately, Goodman sat in the front with Heidi, leaving me virtually invisible in the back. Once in New York, we dumped Burton at his destination and arrived at Goodman's apartment on West 23rd Street. He invited us up but then disappeared into another room leaving us in the kitchen with his wife, Sally. It was not a comfortable situation: the main act seemed to be Paul and Sally sparring over something or other and yelling across the apartment at each other. We felt out of place and left after a short time. I assume they had a difficult relationship but, as a common law couple with three children, things must have worked out for them on some important levels.

[Burton Weiss was also prominent in the Anti-War Movement and often gave speeches from the podium at the political rallies I attended. I never knew him as a gay man while at Cornell, however, I gradually came to realize that he was an active "tearoom queen", somewhat of a wild scene at Cornell (and everywhere else in those days! Unfortunately, I was too shy at the time to indulge in such activities, something I now regret!) I will never know why Burton never opened up to me about his sexuality or showed any interest in the SHL ... perhaps this was because there wasn't – as yet – an actual gay political movement and he (and

other individual anti-war gays) felt that they might find themselves alienated, out on a limb from the Left.

Some 35 years later, I received a call from Burton, then the owner of an antiquarian bookstore in Berkeley, California. The famous gay French writer, Roger Peyrefitte, had died (on November 5th, 2000) and Burton was involved in looking for a gay bookshop or a collector who might be interested in buying parts of his library. It was certainly a shock to pick up the phone at Glad Day in Toronto (which I had sold in 1991) to find Burton on the other end. It was interesting that he looked to me during his 'fishing expedition' for booksellers and collectors. (Only recently have I become aware of Peyrefitte's passion and obsession with gay history, so I imagine he had one of the great gay collections). A few years ago, I found out that Burton Weiss had also passed away on June 19th, 2011.]

My second and last encounter with Paul Goodman also happened in 1967, outside of Ithaca at a Quaker Meeting House. His son, Matthew, had died as the result of a climbing accident in New Hampshire and a Quaker memorial service was to be held at the House. I asked my close friend, Bob L., also a Quaker, to attend the service with me. Bob was about as handsome a young man as they come, with a gentle, intelligent sort of masculinity that exuded warmth that was undeniably seductive. When I introduced Bob to Paul, I could see that it was love at first sight: Paul was immediately fixated on Bob and started courting his attention.

Bob and I chuckled about this (I had warned him!). I, of course, felt superfluous to the whole drama: just an observer, a shy Plain Jane, out of the field of interest. Paul's fixation became so obvious – even during the service! – that Sally could no longer bear it. Once again, I heard her barking at Paul, trying to remind him that this was, after all, a memorial service for his son! No one ever doubted Paul's loving devotion to Matthew but his spontaneous desires got the better of him that day. I



believe Paul and Bob did manage to get together sometime later in New York.

During the Toronto winter of 1971-72, The Body Politic Collective was at work on Issue 3 of the newspaper and it was part of my role to solicit contributions from established writers as part of a strategy to help elevate the paper's profile. I wrote to Paul, sending him copies of our first two issues, and asked if he might submit something for publication. He showed his support by sending along some recent, unpublished poems which we then printed. To my knowledge, they have never been included in any anthology, including the hefty volume *"Collected Poems of Paul Goodman"* published by Random House.

Five years after Matthew's tragic death, Paul himself died on August 2nd, 1972 at the age of 61. The general perception, at the time, was that he had died from what some called "a broken heart" ··· it was, however, his third heart attack.

