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Chapter Two

WITH NELLIE AND BIG JIM

I was taken from the Bronx in the Winter of 1936, only months before they began digging the deep foundation pit downtown for the Empire State Building and I would not return to live there until the Summer of 1941, a few months after the world's tallest building, the one King Kong clung to when he grabbed an airplane out of the sky, was open for business.

They were the years in which my childhood crush, the New York Yankees, won the pennant in five out of six seasons. After all these years I can still go down their lineup from memory and remember how the team's members batted, fielded and pitched. I will never forget the day I listened to our radio with tears in my eyes that matched those of my idol with the dimpled smile, the Yankee's mighty first baseman, Lou Gehrig - the "iron horse- as he bid farewell to baseball because of his wasting, terminal illness. When I have visited his grave in recent years, only a home-run distance from my mother's grave, I relive for a fleeting moment my innocent idolotry in more innocent times of my childhood hero.

I can still remember how forelorn I felt on the day in October 1936 that my mother took me to Lakewood, New Jersey, an hour and a half journey by the New Jersey Central Rail to put me in a boarding school. I was nine years of age and was in no way prepared to be separated from my mother and grandmother who had doted over me excessively since the untimely death of my father seven yers earlier. My handsome thirty-four year mother, dressed in a fir-trimmed black woolen winter coat and a stylish black hat bordered with a strip of astrakhan, sat on the aisle and held my left hand tightly in hers. I was dressed in my courderoy knickers with high stockings, common for boys of my age at the time, a short woolen jacket and on my feet I wore black rubbers over leather oxfords. I stared plaintively through the window

spreckled with grimy soot blown back by the coal-burning locomotive five cars ahead. There were hobos along the right of way, part of the great army of the unemployed, carrying their world's possessions in sacks and waiting for a chance to ride the rods in search of a job, better handouts or more benign climes.

We chugged along past ill-smelling bogs and garbage dumps, shabby gasoline stations with amateurishly handpainted signs, dirty red-brick factories with smokeless chimineys, shantytowns and Hoovervilles, small chicken farms with rickety coops, towns with faded-white gabled homes befringed with washed-out blues, greys and greens, ochre clay quarries, and dull, slate-colored cities. The day itself was drab, rainy and cold, the blare of the throaty, locomotive whistle was mournful and in my mind's eye, the perception of sixty-five years ago, I cannot recall any bright colors or blithe sounds that lifted the sullen pall of that depression-era autumn day.

A tall, slim man in his `late forties with silky, brushed-back white hair was waiting for us on the platform of the Lakewood station. He bent down to greet me and I thought of my Uncle Jesse as I caught a whiff of whiskey on his breath. "So, this is Lionel, I'm Big Jim" he said with his Liverpool accent as he wrapped a powerful hand around the scruff of my neck so that I was obliged to stare into his eyes. Big Jim I knew later was a fierce opponent of corporal punishment but I soon learned that pressure on the shoulders or neck from those strong, sinewy fingers were one of Big Jim's veiled pedagogical techniques for ensuring a boy's undivided and motionless attention as he dressed him down for some real or purported wrong doing. He carried our large brown-leather valise to the school's Dodge station wagon with varished yellow-tan side panels and we drove to 115 Carey Street on the outskirts of Lakewood. A shingle on the small front porch announced in gothic letters:

Lakewood Modern Sc

Lakewood Modern School
James E. Dick - Principal

It was a large, white two-story houses with louvred window shutters, all trimmed in dark blue. When we walked through the front door into a big living room I was engulfed by the pleasurable warmth and pleasantly pungent smell of the burning logs in the stone and brick fireplace. After I had taken off my outer clothing and rubbers The entire school was assembled and I was introduced to everybody: Little Jim, Big Jim's 16-year old, red-haired son, Tiny Jim, a brawny fellow boardar of my own age, Fanny, the short, Russisian cook and the twenty other students evenly divided between boys and girls.

The mantlepiece of the fireplace was framed by wall to wall bookshelves. To the right was Big Jim's leather armchair and a shaded floor lamp. At arm's distance on a book shelf were his pipe rack and a stack of Punch, the English magazine which he received by mail from London. Over the years at the school we often heard Big Jim chuckling over some article or drawing in the magazine but although we leafed through its pages from time to time, none of us could fathom what would make anyone laugh. When we asked Big Jim one day what was so funny he told us: "You have to be an Limey like me to understand Punch". The massage that stayed with me was that there is diversity in the world and not everybody chuckles over the same things.

On that first day Jim's portly and vivacious wife, Nellie Dick, dressed in a sky-blue smock over a dress, took us on a tour of the school. The ground-floor had five rooms. There was a sun porch for arts and crafts with a wooden foot-treddle loom, copper sheets for etching and hammering, pieces of leather and thong on a spool, linoleum for block printing, rafia and reed for basket making, finger paints and water colors, paper, poster-size cardboard of varied colors and all the ancillary tools and materials.

creative activities with a social environment developing responsibility and comradeship.

"The school is international in spirit and eliminates racial and religous prejudices from its teachings...The three R' are approached by relating the subject matter with their lives. Surrounding the child with a well equipped library full of stories of fantasy and information, reading and writing follow naturally. The necessity of number work is found in the shop or craft room...English, History, Geography and Current Events are presented with a view to encourage discussion as much as possible...In all studies our children are allowed to go at their own pace..Selfish competition does not enter into their work...Marks, prizes or punishments do not figure in the Modern School, but encouragement to seek knowledge for its own sake...". When Nellie Dick died in 1995 at the age of 103 years old, the obituary in the New York Times described Modern Schools as "schools with a communal atmosphere with freedom without license, that is, freedom with respect for the freedom others and without exploitation of others or their labor."

The freedom without license had its caveats. School days had strict routines and different kinds of punishment, but never corporal, were meted out. If a child was overly restless or misbehaved in class he or she was sometimes sent into the exile of the big backyard to while away the time and, hopefully, feel a sense of remorse. If the entire class was rowdy, Big Jim himself would simply leave the room. Although Big Jim and Nellie strove to hold constructive two-way conversations with a wrongdoers, they were not reluctant to scold the recalcitrants. The weekly meetings that allowed anybody to vent their feelings.

Big Jim had own persuasive bag of disciplinary tricks to compliment his patient explanations and gentle urging; the pressure on the shoulders by his sinewy fingers that I was the victim of only minutes after meeting him and the "boot". The "boot" demonstrated Big Jim's soccer skills which he had picked up in Liverpool.

Next to the sun porch was the dining room with round table that could sit twenty and a smaller square table for the adults where Nellie, Big Jim ate and took their five o'clock tea. A narrow passage-way with a double sink led into the kitchen with a wood burning cast-iron stove, and just outide was a bathroom at the end of a short hallway. A single classroom on one wall two long oak tables, benches to match, a blackboard and maps and charts wherever wall space permitted

Behind the house and to its side was a two-car garage one half of which was used as the carpentry shop with a loft where lumber was stored and directly to the rear of the house was a large play area with swings, a sandbox, monkey bars and and a clay tennis court which was mostly used for volleyball, kindergarten games, softball, soccer, Giant Steps, Tag and Dodge Ball. A wide-girthed hollow oak trees beyond the court marked the beginning of a forested area where we had rabbit hutches, climbed trees, played cowboys and indians and built huts and wigwams.

I cried inconsolably when my mother made ready to return to the station several hours after our arrival. I tugged at her arm violently and beseeched her to take me with her. She hugged and kissed me and then drew her arms away and entered the car as Nellie restrained me by pulling me close to her ample bosom.

So began my years at the Lakewood Modern School that doubtlessly began to forge in me a questioning spirit, scattered interests, varied skills and a chronic idealism which was perhaps, though I will never disown it, too earnest, too visionary and at times, too dogmatic. These characteristics infused me with the quixotic spirit which urged me to raise my lance and tilt with the windmills of assumed beliefs or common prejudices.

The way Big Jim and Nellie described the school in a 1936 pamphlet made the Modern School sounds like a harbinger of the love-child era of the Sixties:

"A co-educational school for children where the keynote of learning is the freedom of self-expression in

The first time I was the recipient of it was when I put a wood plane upright the workbench. Big Jim had cautioned us to always lay the plane on its side so the blade would not be dulled. "Lionel, what did I tell you about putting the plane down like that," he said, giving me what I perceived to be a menancing stare and walking toward me. I imagined he was going to give me the sinewy finger treatment so I darted through the big doorway. Big Jim burst out of the shop in hot pursuit. As I was running like a scared rabbit across the tennis court, toward the forest, I glanced back, saw him at my heels and heard him mutter in his strong English accent, "I'll kick ya in yer arse ya liddle tyke". Just as I tried to swerve, the instep of his shoe caught me in the rear and I found myself suddenly surfing the ground on my stomach with hands outstretched like Pepper Martin, who was famous for his belly slides into third base. After the boot I followed Big Jim docily back to the shop where I was given the old shoulder squeeze I had tried to escape along with a talking to. To this day I remember to always lay a wood plane on its side.

He attended class during the morning hours. Nellie was in charge of the toddlers who divided their time between the arts and crafts room and the play area behind the house. In the classroom, Big Jim taught directed the study of the other students.

There was an easy going atmosphere in the classroom and and we seldom took advantage of our right to skip class. Remedial workbooks were used for the teaching of arithmetic and English. Big Jim walked around the room helping each student in a low voice with explanations and there were exams. When we finished the remeidal book for one grade, we were able to go on to the next. Current events took the form of reading the newspaper aloud and discussing the article and for geography, students were assigned topics for research and then shared their findings with the others. Spelling was taught by playing games like Hangman's Noose and if the truth be told, I never became an faultless speller.

At ten we had a break for a tablespoon of unsavory cod liver oil made more palatable by a glass of fruit juice and and after finishing class at noontime we had lunch. The menu was Thirty's American - baked or boiled patotoes, cooked cabbage, meatloafs, macarroni and cheese, spaghetti, baked beans, scrambled eggs, corn on the cob in season, ham or chicken a la king known by its vernacular name *shit on a shingle*, out of earshot of Jim and Nellie. Salads consisted of coleslaw, slice tomatoes, icaberg lettuce and shredded carrots. There were always pitchers of creamy milk from a local farm, along with stacks of white and half-grain bread and heaping plate of margarine. In those days, in deference to the dairy interests, margarine manufactuars were prohibited from coloring their product lest it look too much like butter so one of the task assigned to students like me was to mix in the yellow vegetable coloring that came in a tiny packet with a fork.

When lunch was finished, we had to take a nap after which we had free time to play in the backyard and forested area, work in the wood shop or the garden, weave baskets and mats, shape and etch copper, draw and paint or engage in any activity that we wanted to. I remember spending weeks outside the shop nailing small branches with leaves in neat rows on an old garage door. I had gathered them along the streets and in forests and backyards and many had the nuts, seeds or fruit attached, like the butterfly-shaped keyfruit of the maples, sycamores and elms while some, like the white birch, were accompanied with a swatch of bark. Big Jim could have told me the names of many from memory but being an educator he took me to living, pulled down several books on the flora of the northeastern United States and showed me how to look them up and take notes. When I had finally filled the door with my specimens, I used a lettering pen and india ink to make name-tags for all of them. At the official opening of my exhibit one afternoon with the entire school in attendance, I stood before the barn door with a Big's [illegible] tipped pointer in hand , a

towheaded eleven year old in short pants, and gave my first lecture.

Practically every late afternoon we were allowed to listen to the popular children's programs on the radio in the living room. Jack Armstrong, The All American Boy and The Lone Ranger were my favorites. I still can recite from memory as I slap out the sound of the hoofs on my thigh: "A firey horse, the speed of light, a cloud of dust and a hardy hi-oh Silver, the Lone Ranger". It was only when I learned Spanish years later and had developed a sensitivity to racial stereotyping that I discovered with chagrin that Tonto, the name of the Lone Ranger's Indian companion, meant stupid.

Nellie would read to us almost every weekday evening after we had put on our pajamas, brushed our teeth and gotten into our cots in the long dormitory. While we listened to her most of the time with rapt attention, exclamations, cute comments and a fart or belch that brought laughter were not unknown. I can still hear the clear diction and her soft English-accented voice as she read us books that danced as we drifted into sleep: The Jungle Book and Just So Stories of Rudyard Kipling, Swift's Gulliver Travels, Robin Hood, Millar's Story of Rob Roy, Carol's Alice in Wonderland, Stevenson's Treasure Island and Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer and Hucklebury Finn.

I also remember her reading Thoreau's Walden Pond to us one late Spring and while I liked his story of how he learned to become self-sufficient, at eleven years of age I had no inkling that he was a rebel in his time expressing a philosphy of life that Nellie and Big Jim could identify with. Before coming to Lakewoord they had a friend John Scott who had a Ph.D in Sociology, called himself a "Thoreauvian Anarchists" "Scotty" and Jo Ann Scot named their three boys, Marx, Thoreau and Shalley.

Throreau, had resigned as a public school teacher because of his distaste for corporal punishment, and believed that schools should aim to bring out the best in children and teach them to stand on their own two feet. Nellie and Jim Dick agreed with this mission and strove

to arm us with the wherewithall to face nature with Thoreau-like self-reliance. We learned to swing an ax accurately and sever the trunk of a tree with v-cuts, determine directions by the stars or by the moss and bark around a tree, tell the temperature by counting the number of cricket chirps in fifteen seconds and adding thirty seven, tell the distance of a storm's center by counting the seconds between lightning and thunder, dam a stream with sod or branches and mud and forrage for wild fruit and berries. We learned to start camp fires by blowing on tinder that we ignited with indian-style bow-drills, flints or the thick bottoms of glass soda bottles through which we concentrated the rays of the sun. Big Jim taught us how to box a compass, follow a map, splice a rope and tie a dozen useful knots.

When Nellie Dick died in 1995 at the age of 103 years old, the obituary in the New York Times described Modern Schools as "schools with a communal atmosphere with freedom without license, that is, freedom with respect for the freedom others and without exploitation of others or their labor.".

We never learned to use guns because of Jims and Nellies aversion to them but we did sometimes hunt wild rabbits, not all that successfully, with homemade bows and arrows, sling-shots and different kinds of traps. We also planted and harvested tomatoes, green onions, radishes, carrots and other vegetables in the garden alongside the house.

In 1937, after the World Series, I made my entrance into journalism, indeed, I became the publisher and editor-in-chief of *Baseball American News*. I laboriously printed the four pages with black ink on lined on loose-leaf paper. It carried a banner headline:

Yankees Beat Giants
In World Series

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| First Game - | Yanks win |
| Second Game - | Yanks win |
| Third Game - | Yanks win |
| Forth game (sic) - | Giants win |
| Fifth game - | Yanks win |

Also on page 1 I listed the opposing pitchers and noted that Lou Gehrig had played in his 1965 consecutive games. The second page was devoted to the final American and National Standings and an article entitled, "Some Baseball Rules Everybody Should Know". The third page carried my editorial comment headed, "Joe Dimaggio vs. Babe Ruth". It begins with the eye-grabber: "Will Joe Dimaggio break the Babes Record?". The fourth and final page spoke about the retirment of the Yankkee's second baseman, Tony Lazzeri.

Looking at the one and only copy ever produced of *Baseball American News* sixty-three years later, I am impressed by its sobriety - a very credibile job for a ten year old. My eye moves up to the top of the first page, right under the banner headline. There are four words crossed out but I can see what was written: "Published Once A Month". I think, ah yes, how many times in my life did I start something with great expectations like Baseball American News and then just see it fizzle.

At least once or twice a week all the students would gather in the living room in the late afternoon to sing songs, hear poetry or a play read aloud and toast marshmallows We arrived with long, straight twigs which Big Jim would sharpen and during the two intermissions we were each given 4 marshmallows to toast in the fireplace. I observed that the marshmallow toasters were divided into two categories. I was one of those who toasted a marshmallow only once before eating the toasted skin soft and cream-white gelatinous center but there were others who toasted the marshmallow, ate only the crusty outside and then toasted it again and again in the same way until it was all gone. There were also those who wolfed the marshmallows down and those who ate

slowly, savoring each morsel. For me, it was another lesson in the diversity of human nature.

At these late afternoon soirees, the students who were studying a musical instrument or taking singing lessons with an outside teacher gave soloist performances. I took a few months of singing lessons with a teacher who said I had a lovely soprano voice and I was called on give my rendition of By Yon Bonnie Banks one day. We would always sing a few of the old campfire songs - I've been working on the railway; Allohoette; Swannee River; A Frog Went A Courting; Old MacDonald had a farm and the like.

Although some of the smaller children had to retire to the adjacent arts and crafts parlor to make room, we almost always danced. Nellie taught us a Minuet with music provided by a 76 RPM wax record on a handwound Victrola and we did the Virginia Reel under cramped circumstance. My favorite, for which I have perfect but somehow melancholic recall, was one that we sang and acted out with gusto and comradely spirit. One day, I think I will get a group of septuagenarians like myself together to perform Come and Dance With Me:

Brother, come and dance with me
Both my hands I give to thee
Right foot first, left foot then
'Round about and back again

I would dance if I knew how
When to jump and when to bow
Show me first what I should do
Then I'll gladly dance with you

With your hands go clap, clap, clap
With your feet go tap, tap, tap
Right foot first, left foot then,
'Round about and back again

As ten and eleven years of age, the working men around the school made a deep impression on me as they carried out their tasks. I would follow them around and they got to know me even if it were only to acknowledge me with Babe Ruth's favorite greetings, "Hi kid!".

The ice man came regularly in his horse drawn cart and I can still see him dropping the hinged back of the wagon, removing the heavy grey canvas that covered the big slab of ice, chopping at it with his pick until it fissured and then pulling the block off the wagon with his tongs, lifting it onto his padded shoulder and carrying it to the big ice box that was near the back entrance. The Dick's also had an electric refrigerator which served side by side with the trusty ice box for some years.

The Good Humor Man whose arrival was heralded by musical bells and the Dugan Bakery man who appropriately announced his arrival by bellowing "The Dugan Man" were among my favorite vendors because my small allowance permitted me to occasionally buy what I have always believed to be the best ice-cream and the most delicious cup-cakes I have ever tasted. Subsequently I ate the finest patisserie in Paris and Vienna and wonderful, rich ice-creams in many cities but somehow nothing has ever matched the exquisite taste of the burnt-almond-covered vanilla ice-cream pops and the white, pink and chocolate-topped cup cakes that titilated my inexperianced and impressonable taste-buds when I was ten years old.

Almost every day I would wander over to the big barn-like structure behind the house that was adjacent to the school. The place was full of buckets of paint, wooden ladders, scaffolding, paintbrushes, wide rolls of paper and a big upright plywood board. Mr. Reynold's, would usually look my way and then ignore me as he went about his work of painting advertisements for highway billboards. He copied from a smaller version of the addvertisemant with lines that divided it into squares onto the large square sheets of paper tacked to the plywood board. I can remember him to this day, concentrated and unspeaking, dressed in white overalls

spotted with paint, and using a mahlstick to help him paint the straight lines and letters. As I visited on successive day, I saw the big picture taking shape as if it were a jigsaw puzzle - Chesterfield advertisement with a woman in a reclining position and the man in a Ford sedan. Each time we would pass one of his billboards while riding in the school's station wagon I would point and shout, "Mr Reynolds!".

One of the most memorable persons was Tom who would show up at the school each year during the last days of autumn to spend the winter there. Where he spent the rest of the year, I never learned, but I know he was one of hundreds of thousands of unemployed men who drifted from place to place in search of jobs. He had bulging muscles and the tatoo of a big anchor on his right biceps, a souvenir of his days as a sailor. Sometimes he would come into the shop when we were there and talk to us about the far away places that he had seen in his travels, I suspect that it was because of the profanity he used and his weakness for alcohol that he never invited him into the house to socialize with us or tell us stories.

The boy students welcomed his arrival because it meant that they would no longer have to take turns at firing up the wood furnace in the basement at dawn in order to provide hot water for the faucets and radiators. Tom took over that job and, in fact, slept next to the furnace in a folding cot. Unfortuately, since they didn't want him in the house, the Dicks did not add washing the dishes to Tom''s chores which meant we students, on a rotation basis, had to share the chore with Big Jim and Fanny.

While Tom was the general handy-man during his months at the school his most important initial month-long task was choppping down trees in the forest behind the house, sawing them up and splitting them into logs for to fual the furnace, cast-iron stove and fire-place.

This Popeye of a man wore knitted black crew-neck sweater and a watch-cap to match, and we helped him in

his herculean task by carrying some of the split logs to the backside of the garage where they were stacked up.

When Spring came, Tom put all his belonging in a small suitcase, waved good-bye to us, and went off. Each year I felt sorry that he would no longer be with us and even to this day I regret that I didn't learn more about this man in his mid-thirties who came and departed with the seasons.

Besides Nellie, the other women in our lives was Fanny the cook. She was a diminutive chubby woman who spoke English with a strong Russian-Jewish accent. She was a woman who was incapable of getting angry at children, even when we swiped a cookies she had just baked. When I came through the kitchen before dawn on my day to fire up the furnace in the basement, she would already be there getting the woodfire going in the stove. By the time I had a roaring fire going and came up the back steps she had the breakfast well under way: pitchers of orange or tomato juice, a big pan of toast, scrambled eggs, a pot of cocoa, margarine, jam and a few times a week, bacon and pancakes. She always had a dish towel, used to wipe her hands and as a pot holder, tucked into the apron around her waist. I imagine now her saying to me, "You poor daarrlink, you most be cold" while handing me a cup of hot chocolate.

How could I forget Fanny, the woman that gave us our once a week bath Saturday night in the upstairs bathroom next to the dormitories. On that night, the furnace would be stoked so as to provide hot water for the baths and the radiators. With Nellie usually downstairs, we kids, except for the oldest, would strip off our clothes, put our pajamas on the floor next to the bathroom, and run wild while waiting for Fanny to call us by name into the bathroom. Although we carried our towels, most of the time we were stark naked, boys and girls, as we chased each other, slipped under the beds and into the closets and snapped the towels at each others' backsides.

Those who had finished their bath left the bathroom squeaky-clean dressed in their pajamas and the

child whose name was called picked up his or hers pajamas from the floor and went into the humid bathroom. Fanny ordered us to step into the bathtub that stood on legs that reminded me of the paws of a lion. The bathtub was half full of the water used to rinse the previous child, a method used by many American families in those day as a way of making sure there would be enough hot water for the whole family. Fanny soaped her big wet sponge and began to scrub our feet and legs, one at a time while we steadied ourselves by holding on to her shoulders. She worked upwards with her hand made strong from hard work, without missing any of our nooks, crannies or protuberances. She filled a tin pot with water from the tub to rinse us off. That done, we climbed out and stood on a rug made on the loom downstairs while Fanny energetically cleaned the tub with Bon Ami, rinsed it and filled it with mildly hot water. When we reentered the tub, Fanny poured water over our heads, shampooed our hair until it was frothy and let us sit down in the tub for the first time to dunk ourselves under the water for the final rinse. When we got out of the tub again, Fanny vigorously dried us with our towel, helped us put on our pajamas, opened the door, ushered us out and shouted for the next victim.

If it were known by educational, civic or church authorities that boys and girls were being allowed to romp around naked together at the Modern School, they would have had what they called conniptions in those days. This particular brand of libertarian self-expression was never mentioned in any of the school's literature, nor were parents advised that the occassional nudism was aimed at giving the children a short course in human biology while freeing them from the sexual inhibitions and hangups which the Modern School abhorred and which were so much a part of the morality of the Thirties.

Any invasion would have turned up the fact that the Saturday night baths were not the only time that the children shed their clothes. It would have discovered that when the weather became warmer the children were

sometimes allowed to take a shower together in the basement. There, on a raised four by four yard concrete deck with water running toward a drain in the middle, we romped around wildly in our birthday suits and vyed for a chance to get wet under the spray of the big round shower head that jutted out of the wall. At that age years of age, it was all so normal and the truth is that while I observed that boys and girls were different, no liscivious thoughts crossed my mind because I didn't know the details of sexual relations. It was not until years later that I bit into the apple of temptation but I never regretted having experienced the the naturalness of romping around naked with girls and boys at such an early yet impressionable age.

My total innocance was attested to when my little girl friend Toby and I got lost in the woods. It happened during an outing on the Blue Trail about an hour's hike from the school. It was a late Spring day and Nellie led about a dozen or so children though the thick pine forest to the cold, gentle flowing water of the Blue Trail Stream. Before the picnic began most of us stripped off our clothes and edged into the shallow water, making lots of noise and splashing around. I told Toby who was my same age that I wanted to look for sassafras roots which Little Jim had taught me to identify by their glove-like leaves. We left the stream and strolled into the surrounding forest with Toby following behind and me searching for the small plants. After walking for six or seven minutes, I discovered sassafras and I showed Toby how to chew on the tender stem that had the taste of root beer. We began the return journey and although we could hear the muffled shouting of our fellow students, we were lost until Nellie suddenly appeared ahead and led her two little naked pixies back to the picnic area.

The reserves about classroom learning, the emphasis on personal experience, manual labor and self-study as well as the open-minded attitude toward the sexual curiosity of normal children grew out of a heterogeneous

heritage that informed the educational practice of Big Jim and Nellie.

Both were products of the revolutionary, anarchist-influenced working class movement in England prior to the First World War but by the time they established the Lakewood Modern School in 1933, after years of association with radicals of many shades who were often dogmatic, they adopted their own approach to educationg children that was less doctrinaire and, being so, more widely acceptable.

He was thirty and she was nineteen when they met during the 1913 May Day demonstration in London at the Victoria Embankment where she was distributing anti-war material and he was agitating against class oppression as part of a group from the Central Labour College She was already familiar with his children's column in the Voice of Labor which he signed "Uncle Jim". Her upbringing had stressed the teachings of the European anarchists like Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin, who called himself a Communist-anarchist while James Dick had been influenced more directly by the working class struggles that were being led, in large part by the anarcho-syndicalist Industrial Syndicalist Education League (ISEL) that had been formed in 1910. Strikes among Railwayman, Tranport Workers, Miners and Dockers rocked Britain and the trade union movement gained a million members in five years.

Jim and Nellie's ethnic and religious backrounds were worlds apart. He was the son of a Liverpool Presbytarian policeman who had come from Scotland and she was the daughter of a Yiddish and Russian speaking Jewish anarchist activist who came from Kiev to England when she was a girl around the turn of the century. He was a good looking son of Scots with chisseled features, a lithe, athletic body, very pale skin with a red blush, blue eyes and a headfull of silky prematurally white hair. She was stocky and spirited with a strong but sweet character and a countenance that radiated intelligence and warmth. In view of their fervent political beliefs, it is unlikely that sheer physical attraction would have sufficed to overcome the repelling forces of clashing

political philosophies but as it happened their views on world revolution, women's rights and libertarian education coincided, thus facilitating a union which only ended over a half century later upon James Dick's death. Both were ardent defenders of the radical alternative schools, The Modern Schools, that were being organized by libertarian educators in Europe and the United States.

The major inspiration for the Modern Schools, came Francisco Ferrer, a Spanish anarchist and educator whose who was hounded by Spain's clerical regime and who was soon to become a martyr to the cause. Ferrer, who was born in Barcelona in 1859, spent the last 16 years of the ninetheenth century in Paris as an exile with his wife and three children.

In line with anarchist, often called libertarian, thinking, Ferrer disliked governments and believed that society should be based on "the sovereignty of the individual, free from institutional restraints." In Spain, the obstacle to the libertarian society of which Ferrer dreamed was both the authoritarian State and the reactionary Catholic Church which had a monopoly over the educational system since Queen Isabel II signed a condordat with the Vatican in 1854. The Church's neglect of popular education was evidient from the illiteracy rate at the turn of the century - nine milllion of Spain's seventeen million people. The parochial schools that existed inculcated blind faith toward the State and Church teachings, virtually disregarded the teaching of science, used a methodology of iron discipline and rote learning, and rejected any thought of women's equality.

In Paris, Ferrer honed his own views of what a libertarian school should be. He was influenced in this regard by a school for boys and girls run the libertarian educator Paul Robin at Cempuis near Paris. Emma Goldman, the Russian-born American feminist and anrachist visited Robin's school and praised the "love and sympathy and above all, a deep understanding for the needs of the child" that she saw there.

In his seminal study, *The Modern School Movement - Anarchism and Education in the United States*, Professor

Paul Avrich speaks of the precursors and contempories of Ferrar, from Rousseau to Tolstoy to Robin who contributed to the development of the libertarian educational which aimed at encouraging the inner nature of the child to flouish, free from the meddling hand of a presumtious and authoritarian teacher. Avrich neatly sums up its precepts:

"With 'freedom of education as its watchword, this tradition aimed to do away with the formality and discipline of the conventional classroom, the restrictions and regulations that suppressed individual development and divided education from play. It cultivated physical as well as mental development, crafts and arts as well as books. Hostile to dogma and superstition, it emphasized reason, observation and science as well as independence, autonomy and self-reliance. Anticoercive and antiauthoritarian, it stressed the dignity and rights of the child, encouraging warmth, love and affection in place of conformity and regimentation Among the key words of its vocabulary were"freedom,""spontaneneity,""creativity,""individu ality and "self-realisation".

Ferrer was finally able to realize his dream of establishing a libertarian school when a wealthy French woman, Ernestine Meunie, left him half her estate valued at a half million dollars. With his new fortune, he returned to Barcelona in 1911 he opened the doors of La Escuela Moderna.

Spain was in ferment at the time. The nation's ignominious defeat in the Spanish-American war, the lose of its rich colonies - the Phillipines and Cuba -and the war debt and ruined economy gave rise to a powerful movement for radical reform throughout the peninsula with anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists in the forefront of the struggle.

It is easy to understand why the Spanish government and the Church viewed his political objectives as dangerously subversive. According Ferrar himself, the school's goal was "to make children reflect

upon the lies of religion, of government, of patriotism, of justice, of politics and of militarism; and to prepare their minds for the social revolution".

When an attempt was made on the life of King Alfonso XIII in 1906 by the anarchist, Mateo Morales, Ferrer was arrested and charged with complicity. The two men were friends and Morales had worked as a librarian at the Modern School but the evidence against Ferrer was essentially circumstantial. An international protest movement arose in his behalf, in which James Dick took part, and after Ferrer had spent a year in Madrid's Model Prison a civil court acquited him but closed down the Escuela Moderna.

When Ferrer visited England in 1907, Jim was introduced to him by Lorenzo Portet, who was teaching Spanish at the University of Liverpool. While Dick was attracted by Ferrer's libertarian pedagogical principles he believed that the international solidarity of the working class should be stressed. When he established his own center of learning, he called it the Liverpool Communist School, year before the Communist Party of England was founded. His school became an affiliated of the anarchist International League for the Rational Education of Children which Ferrer had just founded in Paris with Anatole France as hononary president. In an article in Freedom published in London that same year Jim Dick expressed his own radical internationalist sentiments when he wrote of "the solidarity of workers of all nations" and denounced "that patriotic piffle which is inculcated into the children of our present-day schools."

In 1909 Spain unleased a war again the Arabs of Morocco that was bitterly unpopular among the people. In Madrid, the populace tried to prevent the departure by train of a locoal battalion and workingman's assocation, Socialists, Anarchists and Republican held protests against the war. In Ferrer's city of Barcelona, the main staging area for shipment of troops to Morocco, women crowded the wharfs on July 18 and shouted to the soldiers, among them their husbands and sons, "Throw away

your rifles! Don't embark! Let the rich men go!" Socialists, trade unionists and anarchist formed a Strike Committee and soon barricades were set up and street fighting broke out. More than fifty churches, convents, religious colleges of Barcelona's five hundred relgious houses and six thousand minor Catholic institutions, were either burned or ravaged before government troops, using artillery, silenced the protesters. Several weeks later, Francisco Ferrer was accused of being "the organizer of the revoolutionary movement in Barcelona" and was tried and sentenced to death by a military court. There were world wide protests but on October 12 the Spanish cabinet ratified the sentence. Ferrer told the priests who came to give him solace, "Leave me die in peace. I have my ideas and I am as firm in my convictions as you are in yours." According to legend, just before the blindfolded educator was shot she shouted, "Viva la Escuela Moderna"

Jim Dick accomanied Portat to Barcelona to settle Ferrer's estate. He returned to Liverpool and changed the name of his school to the International Modern School. The school taught the children to sing the Internationale in French and also has classes in French and Spanish. It was evicted from its premises in January 1911 after the so-called Houndsditch affaire in London when anarchists exchanged gun fire with the police.

Jim Dick then went to London to attend the Central Labor College where he met Nelli (Naomi Ploshansky) and became co-director of the International Modern School that she had established.

When Britain went to war in 1914 the school was placed under vigilance by the British government because of Nellie's and Jim's known anti-militarist views. Some of her father's anarchist friends, liked Rudolph Rocker were arrested and anarchist publications were banned. When it appeared that Jim would be called into the army, they emigrated to the United States and within months joined the staff of the Ferrer school in Stelton, New Jersey which followed the same educational principles as their own Modern School in London.

The United States's first Modern School - the Ferrer Day School - was established in New York City in 1911 on the second anniversary of Ferrer's execution. Margaret Sanger, who would soon win notoriety for her advocacy of birth control, was one of the original supporters of the school and wrote for The Modern School magazine. In 1913 Will Durant, who had quit a Catholic seminary became a teacher at the school. Durant was a convinced socialist, not an anarchist, but the Ferrer to keep the ism out of the school". In 1926 his History of Philosophy was published and before his death in 1981 he had written over a dozen popular books on history.

In 1915, following the U.S entry into World War I, the Modern School of New York moved to Stelton, N.J. What started as a school soon became a small colony of anarchists, socialist, single-tax advocates, pacifists. Over a hundred families bought land there and the settlement had dozens of permanent residents. Although they liked to think of themselves as a utopian colony, the majority of the residents worked in New York or raised chickens on their small plots. It was a unique case of the community being built around a school

At the Lakewood Modern School also, isms played no part in the education of the young. I don't recall any kind of political or ideological indoctrination and never saw the red and black flag of anarchism or the red flag of communists displayed. At the same time, I cannot recall the American flag being displayed nor did we recite the pledge of allegiance of sing the Star Spangled Banner.

When the Dicks arrived at the Stelton school in 1917, the year after the Modern School Association of North America was established. At their second convention in September 1917 Jim proposed the establishment of a Worker's College but it never materialised.

The Dicks were put in charge of the boarding house where the children, many of them from broken families, slept in rustic bunks beds. There was furnace, nor running water or modern bathroom. Several dozen day students lived with their parents in the colony. On cold days, students and

staff often attended classes and ate there meals with blankets wrapped around them. Nellie would read poetry.

They became head of the boarding house and then teachers in the Stelton school. They then went to another utopian colonly at Lake Mohegan in upper Westchester Country for four years to run the school there. In 1928, after reading a report on the Summerhill School in Scotland, wrote to its founder and principl A.S Neill, "I cannot refrain from writing to you about ther similarity of your methods (or lack of 'em) with ours at the Mohegan School". He told Neill: "One day I will go back to the land of my birth., but one gets so wrapped up in school ties that it is hard to break." He never returned.

When the Mohegan experiment began to be torn about because of personal and faccional pursuit Dick write: "Vanity, vanity, all is vanity and that even with Anarchists."

. Nellie and Jim returned to Stelton as co-principles of the school where they remained for five years before they founded their own school in Lakewood. During their tenure there in they made a trip to Europe, Nellie to the Soviet Union visit her parents. It was a time when both of them felt strong sympathy for the Soviet Union. Nellie told me many years later that the school uniforms there and the political indoctrination clashed with her libertarian idea.

While Nellie was visiting the Soviet Union, the land of her birth, Jim returned to Great Britain for the first time in fourteen years. He made a pilgramage to the Summerhill School at Laiston, Suffolk and met A.S Neil face to face for the first time.

On their return to Stelton, the Dicks complained of excessive interferance by the parents. They left and in June 1933 opened the Lakewood Modern School. Four years later, I arrived in Lakewood, a young recipiant into which the Dicks pedogogical experiances would be poured, drop by drop.

The parents that came on Sunday were a mélange of ideological true believers, with the exception of some like my mother who was pleasant with everybody and voted for Franklin D. Roosevelt. The loud voices of the opposing sides

The Dicks arrived at the Stelton school in 1917 and at the second convantion of the Modern School Association of North America in 1918, Jim, with his strong proletarian bent, unsuccessfully fought establishment of a Workers' College similar to the one he himself had attended in London.

At Stelton, the Dicks were put in charge of the boarding house where the children, many of them from broken families, slept in rustic bunks beds. Several dozen day students lived with their prents in the surrounding colony.The conditions were typlically rural: an outhouse, hand water pump, a wood stove for cooking and providing a minimum of heat. On cold days, students and staff often attended classes and ate there meals with blankets wrapped around them

When an offer came to run the school at the new utopian colony at Lake Mohegan in upper Westchester Country, they accept. In 1928, after reading a report on the Summerhill School in Scotland, Jim wrote to its founder and principl A.S Neill, "I cannot refrain from writing to you about ther similarity of your methods (or lack of 'em) with ours at the Mohegan School". He told Neill: "One day I will go back to the land of my birth., but one gets so wrapped up in school ties that it is hard to break." He never returned.

When the Mohegan experiment began to be torn apart by personal and faccional pursuit Dick wrote: "Vanity, vanity, all is vanity and that even with Anarchists."

. Nellie and Jim, hoping to find a safe haven from dispute, returned to Stelton as co-principles of the school where they remained for five years. During their tenure there Nellie left for the Soviet Union to visit her parents. Both of them felt strong sympathy for the Soviet Union at the time but Nellie told me many years later that the school uniforms there and the political indoctrination clashed with her libertarian ideals.

Jim returned to Great Britain for the first time in fourteen years to wait for Nellie and return to

the United States together. While there, he made a pilgrimage to the Summerhill School at Leiston, Suffolk and met A.S Neil face to face for the first time.

When they got back to Stelton they once again the found themselves harried by disputes among board members and excessive interferance by the parents. They decided that the only way they would be free to put their ideas into practice without impediments was to establish their own school. In June 1933 they opened the Lakewood Modern School and four years later, I arrived in Lakewood.

At the Lakewood Modern School *isms* played no part in the education of the young. The educator's role, they believed, was to foster the spirit of freedom in every child in the hope that when they grew older they would embrace the libertarian philosphy. I don't recall any kind of political or ideological indoctrination and never saw the red and black flag of anarchism or the red flag of communists being displayed. At the same time, I cannot recall any American flags, or portraits of George Washington at the school and we never recited the Pledge of Allegience or sang the Star Spangled Banner. The cult of religion was simply ignored although I do recall that Nellie read us passages from the Old Testament, just as she would read Walt Whitman or Thoreau to us.

If the *isms* were not taught, they were certainly in abundance every Sunday when the parents visited. These parents, some of them first generation Americans were, for the most part, a mélange of ideological true believers, with the exception of some like my mother who was pleasant with everybody and kept her liberal views to herself. The parents would usually arrive after lunch and within an hour, the women would be with their children in the backyard and the men would have gathered in the living room for the weekly shouting match. There was an explosivie mixture of Stalinists, Anarchists, Aethiests Socialists, Trotskyists and defenders of Franklin D. Roosevelt whose mix of stridant voices could only be muffled by leaving the house. Nellie steered clear of the living room and spent her time with the

visiting mothers and children while Big Jim would escape by driving into town and having a drink. One book about the Modern Schools says Jim Dick was a teetotaler but I can say from first hand experience that he liked his nip of scotch or glass of very cold beer. More than once I was with him when he drove into town, parked along the main street, told me he would be right back and then disappeared into a bar for five or ten minutes. Several times I got out of the car, opened the bar door a crack and spotted Big Jim standing at the bar with a glass in his hand.

Several of the fathers stopped coming on Sundays. Toby Schechter told me that her father had gone on a long trip. He had sometimes played catch with me on Sundays and I remember thinking how much I would have liked to have him as a father. He was soft-spoken and gentle until he returned to the living room where he became a stalwart defender of his cause. Her mother came by train one day and told her that her father had been killed, that he would never return. She cried for hours and I sympathized with her so much that I cried too. It was not until my High School days that I learned that he, like several other fathers, had joined the Lincoln Batallion of the International Brigade to fight against fascism in Spain. While researching the Spanish Civil war at the University, I discover a Masses magazine with two pages of letters that Toby's father had written from the hospital in Spain after he had been wounded. The article said that he had been an organizer for the Communist Party in the borough of Queens in New York. A later issue announced that his wounds had become infected and that he had died.

Childhood experiences form a bedrock upon which future conduct, attitudes and beliefs are built, but it is only later, when one looks back introspectively, that the formative implications of these experiences can be concatenated and understood. As a boy at the Lakewood Modern School I did not have any awareness that I was a guinea pig for philosophical and pedagogical principles

nor did I understand what the Sunday shouting matches were all about.

Athough Big Jim would sometimes call me Lionel the Lionhearted, I liked it even more when he called me Lefty Goofy, since Lefty Goofy Gomez was one of my favorite Yankee pitchers. My field of dreams then was no greater than playing first base someday for the New York Yankees. It took many years before I came see more clearly how much Big Jim and Nellie's school contributed to who I was and what I did.

I have sometimes wondered for my own amusement if an accident I had after being at the Modern School for over two years had latent meaning. It was late Spring and I went out into the backyard shortly after our early supper. I sat down on the wooden seat of the swing hanging from long ropes, pushed myself off with my feet and glided gently back and forth. It was what I have always called *the quiet hour*, that balmy, calm interlude between twilight and dusk in the country. From time to time a silent bird would fly swiftly above the tree tops, heading towards its nest or other safe refuge for the night. I started to pump rhythmically and the swing's arc increased. I stood up on the seat and pumped harder, throwing my body back with my eyes skyward at the peak of the frontswing. I pumped harder and harder, and suddenly, in one hypnotic moment, I closed my eyes and felt I could fly. I let go of the ropes as the swing rose and I did fly, landing in the sandpile several yards away. Nellie rushed me to the doctor's office and I walked around in a cast for a month for my dislocated shoulder and sprained neck. My fugacious flight that day and its brusque ending was not the only time - in a metaphorical sense - that I tried to fly and ended up on my ear.