

My father was a bartender. The bar was the Alibi Room on Chippewa St in Buffalo. Before that he worked at a place called the Shamrock Grill on Michigan Ave. Michigan Ave was the Harlem of Buffalo. Why would a bar in the colored section of town—owned by a Jew—be called the Shamrock Grill? I dont know.

The Shamrock was not a class place. It was the opposite of a class place--a toilet. It catered--if that is the word—to a dismal collection of losers---mostly white, mostly welfare or pension types, disability types--on the ropes types. It was OK with my father who qualified a job by how much he could steal. The Shamrock was like shooting fish in a barrel. His preferred method was to get them sufficiently hammered and start shortchanging--a ten would receive change for a 5, a 20 for a ten, etc. They frequently passed out at the bar and then he just took the money clean--no change required. He had a pair of tweezers for precision work.

That was my father.

The classic story about the Shamrock involved a local named Ricky--a homosexual--of the flaming type. He occasionally wore drag. He was black--a Negro. He adored my father. He called him Mr. Phil. He was constantly pestering him to give him some work---tending bar. He insisted this was a smart business move. The rap went like this: He said: Mr. Phil--lets face it. The place is a loser. Its a toilet. These people are chumps--welfare types. What you need are some sporting types--people with a little bread who dont mind spending it. Put me behind the

bar and in a week you wont recognize the place. Its a gold mine, etc, etc

My father listened to this pitch and was sympathetic. Possibly Ricky had a point--there was some business to be done here. Ricky was a dude. He knew people--everyone. And Everyone liked him. He was a sweet guy--or girl—who didnt have a mean bone in his body. Also: he was entertaining—a priceless asset in a bartender.

But there was a problem—Art Raisen. Art was the owner. Art didnt like spades. He wasnt a racist. He just didnt like spades.

This happened next. Art took a trip. He went to Florida for three weeks. My father took this opportunity to install Ricky behind the bar--to test this thesis of his—the sporting thesis. He was curious about this one.

Three weeks later Art Raisen returns form Florida. He pays a visit to his bar. He walks in and is greeted by a roomful of spades who have the place in an uproar--they are drinking and dancing and carrying on in a delirious spade way and the jukebox is going full blast shredding the air with some of the preferred rhythm and blues favorites of that time: *Too Much Woman, Gimme Them Ribs, Jesus Said No*, etc.

There behind the bar is my dad and Ricky--wearing slacks and a halter.

Art gestures for my father to join him for a few words.

My father comes over.

Art says: whats going on?

My dad: the kid asked for a job and I gave it to him and this is the result. I have here the receipts for last week.

Before Art left for Florida the Shamrock averaged 800 a week. Now it was averaging 2300 a week.

Art said: hes hired

That is a true story.

He worked at the shamrock for 10 years. The place was sold and he took a job at the Alibi—on Chippewa St. Chippewa was a stretch of six blocks featuring a mix of sleaze, upscale and a little everything else in between. There was a strip joint, Decos the junkie coffee shop, the used girlie magazine store, a few ratty bars, etc. There was a good Italian restaurant, Leonardos, nate Seebergs for mens fashion, and for your bookmaking fix, operating out of an office over Leonardos, John Sacco, nephew of Joe DeCarlo, hit man for Steve Maggadino, the Godfather of Western New York.

And there was the Alibi—a class bar. The class bars were the Alibi, The Chez Ami on Delaware (“Home of the Revolving Bar”), and Olivers on the north side.

What is a class bar? A class bar is a place where you can arrange to meet a class hooker. That is the definition.

The year was 1958. In 1958 we had Eisenhower in the White House and Frank Sinatra in Hollywood. In Buffalo we took our cue from Sinatra. Sinatra had a taste for hookers and that is the other definition of a class bar--a place Sinatra would visit if he were in town.

At the Alibi there was a core of regulars—the Ballroom Boys. The origin of this name will never be known. My dad told me once but I have forgotten. There was Sid Guttman—the worlds strongest Jew--Ben Polkowitz (Pokey), Manny the mover Isenberg, and the Jeep—the gin rummy champ of Buffalo.

Why was the Jeep called the Jeep--because he owned one or looked like one? Neither. He was called the Jeep because that was the perfect name for him. The Guinness book of records doesnt have a category for most games of gin rummy played in a lifetime but you can take it from me the holder of this title is The Jeep.

There was Elmer Covelli--mens clothing salesman—the Nate Seeberg connection. In those days you wore a suit. Its possible to be a sharp dresser wearing casual threads but there is nothing like a fine suit, bought off the rack at Seebergs and altered to fit. The materials were wool, sharkskin, gabardine and another fabric that enjoyed popularity at this time called \_\_\_\_\_--a blend of wool and nylon, or maybe rayon, or maybe all three and there must have been a little radium mixed in somewhere because suits made from \_\_\_\_\_gave off this disturbing glow. You bought the suit, got fitted for shirts at Lafayette

Custom Shirts followed by a shine next door at the newsstand and you were ready for action—at The Alibi.

There was another dude—Teddy Shavers—the subject of this story. Teddy didn't have a nickname but if he did it would have made reference to his head. He was bald as a monkey. But as my mother was fond of telling him: you look better bald. This was true. It was true because no one could remember him with hair. He had been this way always.

At the alibi there was music--the Dave Horn trio. Dave and Teddy were tight. They played golf together and participated in orgies at Teddys apartment. Dave was married and had been for years--and he had been participating in orgies for years. Sid Guttman was the worlds strongest Jew and Dave was the worlds most unfaithful human being. He was Italian. He had the pussy gene.

I have chosen to speak of these men for a reason—because they represent a particular type that flourished in Buffalo at this time—the sporting type. They had three interests: drinking, gambling, women. It was more the gambling—action. Mario Puzo--who wrote *The Godfather*--had a few things to say on the subject. He spoke from experience. He made \$600,000 writing the script of *Godfather 2* and he took the \$600,000 to Las Vegas and blew it playing craps at the Sahara hotel. It took 6 months to write the script and one day to blow the money playing craps. He had to go back to Hollywood and write another script. But he describes this type—the degenerate gambler type. My point is this: Mario Puzo

would have fit right in among the ballroom boys at the Alibi.

And need I make another point—that these things—gambling and women—in no way complement each other? From time to time a marriage occurred and there would be a honeymoon and the day following the honeymoon the lovebirds would be sitting around the apt and at some point the groom would notify the bride of his intention to leave the house by the way he was putting his hat on and walking to the door, causing the bride to query him on this one and the racetrack—Erie Downs—would be mentioned.

He didn't add: And after the track I may fall by the Alibi for a taste. There followed a long conversation to thrash it out. Sometimes it didnt get thrashed out.

I met Teddy playing golf. I was with my father. the course was Grover Cleveland. He was a single and we invited him to join us. he was a novice--struggling to break 90. I was a 4 handicap. Nothing is worse than for a good golfer to play a round of golf with a hacker.

The first hole at Grover is a short par four—340 yards. I remember it well. You tend to remember a golf course you have played 300 times. Its a moderate dogleg right with out of bounds on the left and a tree protecting the left half of the green that is bunkered in front. You must fade the drive to work the dogleg and remove the tree from play. That is the shot. This leaves you with a short wedge to the green—a routine shot. you stick the wedge nine feet from the pin and nail the putt for the bird. That's

how the hole is played. That's how I played it. Teddy took a 7—actually a nine. He had this little snap hook he was working on that he ripped over the fence on the left side into the backyard of a house and destroyed someones rose bush.

My dad said: take another. My Dad was very generous in the mulligan (free shot) dept—esp when it applied to himself. Teddy re-tees, tries another drive, a little better, a pop-up but in the fairway. From there he chunks a 5 iron, throwing up a plate size divot, a nice divot, but behind the ball, not in front, and the ball travels 30 yards. Out comes the wedge, here comes a shank from the wedge—the most hideous shot in golf—that flies straight right off the hozzle of the club at a 90 angle to the line of flight. He tries another wedge, finds the green and two putts for the 7 (the 9).

That was the first hole. Two is a nice hole, another par four but longer--420 yards with a fairway that funnels down into a narrow approach to the green and there is more out of bounds on the left—more yards with rose bushes. On the right is a long fairway bunker. Teddy pushes one off the tee into the bunker, thrashes around in the trap for a few shots, finds the fairway and hits a terrific seven iron that flies over the green. He chips up and down, makes a nice putt. He was a good putter. This saved him. You can teach the other shots but putting is more instinctive—a feeling for the pace of the shot—like Bocce. For myself I hit a good drive down the middle, a four iron to the green and two putt for the par.

Three is a par three—on the short side--140 yards to a slightly elevated green bunkered left and right. Choke up on a seven iron and hit a little punch shot with good backspin. That's the shot. The opposite of this shot is Teddys shot, the thin or "skulled" shot—a miserable shot—that fails to get airborne and sails along a few feet off the ground for a hundred yards, drops to the ground and takes a few bounces into the trap.

In other words, in three holes he has hit for the cycle—the snap-hook, the push-slice, the pop-up drive, the shank, the fat shot, the thin shot.

We played along. Where did he get that swing? The golf swing is an inside-to-inside situation. The club is taken back on the inside of the intended line of flight, the downswing retraces this same path as it returns to the impact zone to strike through the ball and continues back to the inside to the golfer's left as he follows through. That's the swing. You deviate from this and that's where the problems begin. Teddy had the opposite of the inside-to-inside. He had the outside-to-inside, going back outside to return the same way and the result was this evil downward spinning out motion of the hips and shoulders with the arms whipping across and chopping at the ball like he was trying to beat a small animal to death.

We played along. He had a few good holes. At one point I stood him up on the tee and made a few adjustments by way of grip, stance, address. The grip and how you address the ball is 50% of it.

We finished the round. I shot a 76, Teddy had a 93, my father an 83—plus or minus. You never knew with him. He played golf the way he tended bar. You had to keep your eye on him at all times.

Into the clubhouse for a few beers. We toted up the scores and replayed a few holes, talked some golf talk. He was a funny guy, congenial and I took to him at once. You are much better off with a lousy golfer but a good companion anytime. The secret to golf—as in other things—is attitude. You must concentrate on the shot—at hand. The last hole is history and there is nothing to be done but learn something from it.

Teddy said: we must do this again.

A friendship was born.

Teddy was my mentor. He was 35. I was 20—a student at the University. There is an expression: wet behind the ears. I was wet behind the ears. This is where the mentor comes in--a wise person who assumes the role of counselor to the younger person under his wing and seeks to guide or advise in a judicious way.

This wasn't Teddy. Teddy was a member in good standing of the Ballroom Boys—a collection of names that rarely surfaced during a conversation on the subject of role models. With Teddy the direction you were guided in was the Peace Bridge and over the Niagara River into Canada to pay a visit to Erie Downs—the track.

But—there were laffs. Laffs are important.

We played a lot of golf. There is no fanatic like the golf fanatic and there was no golf fanatic like Teddy Shavers. He took the game up late and there were a lot of unplayed rounds to make up for.

The lineup was me and Teddy and whoever else decided to tag along—my father, Dave Horn, Elmer Covelli. Dave appeared on a hit or miss basis. He worked nights, signed off around two and had a taste at the bar to unwind and then followed home some chippie for a quickie and he waltzed through the door of his house circa 5am in a semi-conscious state, a disheveled state, a lipstick covered state. He was married to a terrific girl, had two kids and so forth but there was nothing to be done. He had the pussy gene.

On the course there was another problem. Dave weighed 130 pounds. He was a stick. He took one out of his bag and you couldn't tell which was which. The lack of power was frustrating. The tee shot is the home run of golf. Nothing is more satisfying than to reach for the driver and crush one 240 yards down the middle, with a bit of draw—overspin—and the ball hits the ground and runs for another 20 yards.

Dave wound up and fired away and took this tremendous whack at the ball, made good contact, hit a nice shot, the shot went 200 yards.

He said: I dont get it. Chi Rodriguez weighs 135 lbs. and hits the ball 270 yards.

This was true. Chi Chi hit the long ball. Dave hit the short ball. Its also true that Chi Chi on his downswing came into the ball delivering a clubhead speed of 110 mph. Dave generated a clubhead speed of 65 mph. He suffered from a common hacker problem--the decelerating downswing.

There are two parts to the golf swing—the backswing and the downswing. The third part is the little pause at the top of the swing in between the two. The backswing stops, there is the little pause, the downswing begins. Dave took a long pause. The long pause generates something called the “reverse pivot”—a physics type situation that dumps all the weight on the right side at the moment of impact, instead of driving forward and hitting hard into the left side—the classic pose you see in all the golf books. That’s the deceleration of the downswing. Also: you must get your *ass* into the ball. That was another problem. Dave didnt have an ass. He was assless

There are two parts to this story. Playing golf with Teddy Shavers is one part and the other part occurs at a place called the Campus Lounge--a bar on the west side. I grew up on the west side. The neighborhood was Italian--make that Sicilian. There is a difference. Italians are white people. It was a neighborhood of narrow streets and narrow houses with a bit of yard in back and bakeries and pastry shops and meat markets and fish market and chicken markets and sausage markets. There was a bowling alley and a pool hall and the Marlowe theater

where mothers sent their kids on Saturday to watch 5 hours of movies, cartoons, short subjects, the news and a serial.

The Campus was called the Campus because two blocks away was Buffalo State Teachers College. But the name was deceptive. The students from Buff State didnt go to the Campus. They went to Coles, next door to the Campus, featuring Guinness Stout posters, cozy booths, dart boards and the exposed beam ceiling framing detail, etc, The English pub treatment , much better suited to their collegiate preppy instincts.

A better name for the Campus would have been Greasers Paradise. The Campus catered to guys like Sam Arena who passed his high school years over at Niagara Billiards working on his nine ball game. He worked on it with me. Pool is an indoor version of golf. Its played with a ball struck by a stick aimed at a hole. Position is important--the next shot. There is a mental side to the game. Pool is obsessive. An obsession is something that keeps you awake at night. Pool keeps you awake at night.

Sam managed to graduate and joined the army--a good place for him. He got discharged and asked me if attending UB- -The University of Buffalo--also known as Jew B--was an advisable move--higher education.

I said: they dont offer a major in Bullshit.

Then I said: and you are better off.

He took my advice. He got a job with Smith corona selling typewriters. Later he joined Prudential--life insurance. The rest is history.

At the campus it was me and Sam and a guy named Jack D'Amico I will get to shortly and there were a few Jews thrown in to add to the mix.

Shelly was a regular. A greaseball isnt exclusive to a particular race but the Italians are generally conceded to have the edge. Shelly was a Jewish greaseball. He was also a cripple. He was a greaseball Jewish cripple--a full sweep.

He was crippled from birth--some palsy condition that messed up his left side leaving him with a bent arm and a limp, more of a shuffle with the left foot dragging along behind on the ground. He had a speech impediment--the Daffy Duck syndrome—the tongue bladdering the air like the deflating action of a balloon leaving covered with spit the face of the person on the other side of the conversation.

That was Shelly. But he was funny, smart and had a good heart. He would give you the shirt off his back. Sam and Jack D'Amico were the same. These are friendships, the kind that endure and are made in a city like Buffalo. You can leave the city and return 10 or 20 years later and reunite with these people and the conversation picks up right where it left off. You don't miss a beat. Nothing has changed.

Shelly was the first guy on the West Side to smoke weed.

One night I was in the campus with a girl—Marge Tasca. Marge was in love with me. She wouldn't fuck me. She typed my English papers. She wanted to get married. We could fuck after we got married--maybe. This was the fifties--in Buffalo. Getting laid was a problem. It was still possible at this time for a girl to insist on this concept--the virginity concept--without being considered hopelessly square or provincial--or poisoned by Catholicism. Later, when the 50's became the 60's this changed. the virginity concept got cuffed around a bit. In the TV business its called losing share. It wasn't laughable--more like quaint.

There I am in the Campus at the bar with Marge and in walks Shelly.

He said: come outside: I wanna show you something.

We went outside. There was an alley in back.

He said: I have something for you. he held out his hand. There was a cigarette. But it was a funny looking cigarette—pinched at both ends--the torpedo shape.

He said: its marijuana--grass.

I had never seen a joint. This was Buffalo. Buffalo wasn't cutting edge. Buffalo was semi-cutting edge.

He said: you wanna get high?

I said: I am high. Ive been drinking for 3 hours.

He lit up and took a hit and passed the joint over. I took a hit and he explained the correct dope smoking technique—suck in deep and hold it, etc.

He said: its great for sex. You can screw like a horse.  
I said: I am with marge. I have been trying to fuck her

for 2 years. This stuff is useless to me.

I will sell you an ounce for \$5.00. Normally its \$10.00.

There remained the problem of making a cigarette—rolling a joint. I didnt roll joints. I bought my cigarettes pre-rolled--20 at a time--the pack concept.

Ill make a long story short: I bought an ounce--a lid. I never smoked it. I still had it three years later when I moved to New York. But then, when I was in New York, in my apt one night with a girl, and we were screwing on the couch, and she had a joint and we smoked it, it was true: I had a hardon that refused to go down. It was amazing. I thought of Shelly.

That was the Campus. We drank and played Sinatra on the jukebox and we talked. We talked, talked, talked. What did we talk about? I dont recall. Nothing worth repeating. we talked about Sinatra.

The Campus could have been called Greasers Paradise and it could also have been called Franks Place. It was the shrine concept. There was a jukebox with 50 records, 40

by Sinatra, pictures on the wall, movie posters, framed newspaper clippings reporting photographer punchouts, etc. It was 1958. Sinatra was on top--way on top. Today as I write--1992—people like Madonna are on top. Madonna is huge. but Sinatra—Frank—was different. The fame was part of it but there was something else as well. There was a style here, of dress, behavior, the way the money was spent. Also: he was Italian. We were Italian. We were 20, had our lives to live, and on this one we were in the dark—totally. But now we knew. We wanted to live like Sinatra.

Sam told me a good Sinatra story. It involved Ava Gardner—before he married her. She was shooting a movie in Spain and there were rumors of involvement with a bullfighter. Sinatra flies over to inform himself in person about this one and checks into a hotel, a suite adjoining Gardner's. He goes over that night to straighten this thing out, there is a huge fight, he storms back to his suite, retrieves a gun and fires a shot out the window.

He waits for her to come rushing in an hysterical state. She fails to appear. There is nothing. Sinatra returns to her suite and raps on the door. She opens the door and says: hi Frank.

Frank: Didn't you hear that shot

Gardner: I heard the shot

And you did nothing? I could have been dead!

If you were dead you were dead. What could I do about

it?

That was the story.

I said to Sam: Avas a class broad.

That was the Campus—Franks place. If Sinatra had decided to play Buffalo and pay a call on the boys at the Campus it would have been a cosmic event. The place would have gone up in a puff of smoke--vaporized. It cannot be explained. you had to be there. We were Sinatra junkies and the Campus was where we went to get our fix.

And that was the routine: golf with Alan Baer, pool with Sam arena and drinking at the campus--and there was one more: swimming with Jack D'Amico.

Jack also attended UB. He was an English major. I was an English major. But here the resemblance ended. Jack had grades. He was a brilliant dude--Phi Beta Kappa. He was a year ahead of me, attending grad school. We shared an interest in writing and there were many long conversations discussing the literary hotshots of that time--Mailer, Bellow, Styron, James Jones.

James Jones wrote *From Here to Eternity*—a book read when I was 13 and may have been the book to plant the seed in my head to be a writer.

There was an interesting story behind this book. Jones grew up in a small town—Robinson Illinois. He was a small town boy who wanted to be a big town boy. He

wanted to be a writer—and a particular kind of writer. He wanted to be a Thomas Wolfe kind of writer. Wolfe—another small town type—had a taste for the 900 page novel—less of a problem for the reader in those days before the invention of TV and the VCR—and suffered from an acute form of adjectivitis. It was Mark Twain who said of the adjective: when in doubt—throw it out. Wolfe said: the adjective be damned.

But they were good books—written from the heart. They had power. I read them myself—*Look Homeward Angel*, *The Web and the Rock*, *Of Time and the City*. Those were my college years when I could hole up in my room and knock off a 900 page novel in three days.

Jones was self taught as a writer. He never attended college. War broke out and he was drafted and , four years later, returned to Robinson. He started work on a book—Eternity. There are three problem with writing:

- 1) the writing itself.
- 2) getting published
- 3) selling books

One is by far the easiest.

He banged on the book and at some point sent a few chapters to an editor at Scribners named Maxwell Perkins. Maxwell Perkins was the editor of Thomas Wolfe—also Hemingway--and a legendary figure in the

publishing world. Jones had never met Perkins, had never corresponded with Perkins, had never talked to Perkins on the phone. He did not exist for Perkins. But he sent the manuscript to Perkins because in his enfeebled brain he, James Jones, was the next Thomas Wolfe.

What are the odds of an unsolicited manuscript submitted

by some mental case from a town called Robinson Ill working its way out of the slushpile at the office of a major New York publishing house like Scribners and landing on the desk of a man like Max Perkins who actually proceeds to start reading this thing, and to like what he is reading, and to like it well enough to mail off a letter to the mental case encouraging him to continue work on the book?

The odds are high—astronomical

But there you have it. He writes Jones a letter and if Jones had one quality—beside a similar taste for the use of the multiple adjective acquired from Thomas Wolfe—it was a capacity for work.

Perkins was aging and in poor health and at some point, halfway thru the book, Jones was turned over to another editor—Burroughs Mitchell.

The writer/ editor relationship is critical and fragile. Writers are difficult people. They are loners, they are neurotic, they are obsessive. They are a pain in the ass. In addition, many of them lack talent.

Jones had the talent but was otherwise a splendid example of the breed—a stubborn cuss who considered the words

golden and getting one of these types to delete a single word, let along a paragraph—or chapter—is like pulling teeth. Its an endless struggle—exhausting. But Mitchell had a gift for nursing these people along. He was a class act—a gent. He was kindly, forgiving, *patient*. He was the man for this job.

The book got finished—a hell of a book—flawed in ways and badly overwritten in places—but it had the one thing that no other thing can substitute for—that irresistible thing that grabs the reader and keeps him glued to the page. It had that power. You started this book—all 300,000 words—and once started you finished it. That’s writing.

And the timing was right. The war was still fresh in everyones mind and the publisher were desperate to get their hooks into the writer of the great novel of World War 2—the blockbuster they knew was out there and being written at that very moment.

That book was *From Here to Eternity*

There is a famous picture of Jones—in front of Scribners Bookstore—on Fifth Ave in New York, the mental case from Robinson Ill, self taught, a loner from out of nowhere, the reader of Thomas Wolfe, and behind him, filling up the display window of Scribners, stacks upon stacks of copies of *From Here to Eternity*.

He was 31.

This is called happiness.

Back to Jack. Jack was a high school swimming champ. He swam the Niagara river. I was with him. He swam it and I drove across the Peace bridge in the car to Fort Erie and picked him up on the other side. It's a ballsy stunt. The current is treacherous. It's a mile across and closer to two when—and if—you arrive. There are speed boats and water skiers and fishing boats with trolling fisherman and they are all hammered from drinking and the last thing to cross their mind is being on lookout for some mental case trying to swim the river. Also: the falls--Niagara Falls. There they are 12 miles downstream. You could get a cramp and be swept under by the current and over the falls and take a header onto the rocks--followed by the whirlpool, a hazard of no consequence since you are already dead.

I crossed the bridge in the car looking down at the river and there he was, this bobbing chunk of flesh in his Jantzen's stroking steadily towards the opposite shore.

On the other side is Fort Erie, a collection of souvenir shops, fish and chips stands, the Fort Erie Motel featuring "siesta" rates and a sliver of beach. He wouldn't come ashore at the beach. The current would sweep him downriver. There is a steerage road that parallels the river and services some residential beach front property—some beautiful homes.

I parked on the road and waited for him to appear—hoping he would appear—a greaser in a pair of Jantzens with his balls hanging out--an inviting snack for someone's Rottweiler.

There he was scrambling over a hedge. He walked up the road. He had this manic grin. He was pumped.

He said: a piece of cake!

It was Disraeli who said: there is no happiness without action.

I graduated. Now what. I could get a job. What kind of job. I was an English major. You can do everything and nothing. I did nothing. I thought of applying to grad school but 4 years of hour upon hour in the library spent banging on unspeakable novels by the likes of George Eliot, Samuel Richardson, Jane Austen, etc had induced a spectacular case of literary burnout.

I still wanted to write. It never occurred to me when I decided to be a writer that being a writer and making a living were two different things. Now it occurred to me.

I farted around—drinking at the Campus. One night I ran into Bob Battaglia. Bob was a neighborhood guy from the west side. He went to Ohio State and majored in business. He learned about money while I read books by George Eliot. Now he was in New York—working for Union Carbide. He came home from time to time. He said: you have to move to New York. Its not happening in Buffalo.

Its happening in New York. If you cant get laid in New York youre a mental case.

Bob told me a good story. There was a girl in Buffalo—Francine. She was a high school cheerleader type. Bob was a high school cheerleader type. That's how they met—cheerleading. He had been trying to bang her for years. But it was no dice.

He left high school and went to college and went to New York. In Buffalo he couldnt get laid and in New York he had three girlfriends. His sex problems were solved. One day he is walking down the street and coming in the other direction is Francine. They go for coffee. They catch up on each other. She got married and had a kid and now is divorced. She is living in New York. The conversation proceeds and as it does it becomes apparent she wants to get together. She is lonely. A single mother in new York--a difficult situation Now the shoe is on the other foot. Bob has all this action--and none of them are divorced with children.

I said: what happened?

He said: Im still considering it.

Meanwhile I lived at home. Home was OK. It was rent free, meals were included, also laundry service. My father was never around and I ignored my mother unless I needed money.

I was an only child. This was the good part. The bad part occurs later when you get married and expect this kind of attitude to continue.

I farted around. I did this and that. I worked for a newspaper—entertainment type throwaway called *The Nightowl*. You found it on your doorstep in the morning or at the laundromat, the lobby of the neighborhood movie theatre, etc. I wrote restaurant reviews. Not a bad job. I liked the job. I met some characters—chefs and owners—and ate some amazing meals. There was one problem: no salary. I got paid in the free meals sprung for by the restaurant for which I was writing the review.

That was the job—an English Major type job. There are

two kinds of jobs. There is the English major kind—writing restaurant reviews for a throwaway paper and the other is a job like Bob Battaglia had with Union Carbide—a real job that pays a salary and benefits and there is some kind of pension or stock option program in place and you put it all together and it spells a word called “future”, etc.

I farted around. I played golf, I shot pool, I killed an amazing amount of time at the Campus Lounge--trying to get laid. Getting laid was a problem. If I got laid once for every 20 hours I spent at the Campus the pussy would be coming out my ears. I had seduced one or two of the neighborhood girls who I could generally prevail upon to give me some action when I became desperate--most of the time.

There was Gloria--who weighed 190 lbs. It was embarrassing. But—pussy. What could I do?

There was Marge who wouldn't fuck me but typed my English papers.

And there was Louise. I met Louise at a basketball game. I was 15. I tried to fuck her but it was no dice. I tried a year later--at 16. Same thing--no dice. I tried at 17, 18, 19. No dice, no dice, no dice,

One night I took her to the drive-in. The movie was *Some Came Running* based on the novel by James Jones, the book after he wrote *From Here To Eternity*. Here he made his mistake--to write a big book--another Eternity. It cannot be done. The critics are waiting--to hammer you. Why? because the first book was too successful. You are too happy—not to mention rich. You must be made less happy--returned to reality. And this occurred. He got murdered. It was brutal. And there was nothing to be done. He could have written the Bible and the results would have been the same. He should have written a small book--something light and frivolous to catch them off guard--a childrens story or something along those lines. this would have foiled them. But--we live and learn.

Meanwhile there I was at the drive in with Louise. The movie wasnt bad. Sinatra was in it. It was Sinatra, Dean Martin, Shirley McClaine and a woman named Martha Hyer. Martha Hyer plays an English professor Sinatra is in love with. Sinatra is a writer. She loves his work but not him. She wont bang him. She wont bang anybody. She is a virgin at age 32. Its a long story. Too much literature has

made her goofy. She is going in circles--a hopeless neurotic. Sinatra does his best but, desperate to get laid, involves himself with Shirley McClaine who never read a book in her life but loves to fuck.

That's the story. This was a theme I could identify with--a writer who cant get laid.

But now something happens--I get laid. Me and Louise are thrashing in the front seat of the car which could be done in those days before the invention of the bucket seat and the giant counsel unit that went between the bucket seats and a gearshift sticking up to whack you in the balls during a crossover.

We are thrashing in the front seat and I have my finger up her pussy and now she wriggles out of her panties and out comes my dick and she jumps me and suddenly--5 years later--I am in. It was a miracle.

I did some writing. What do you write about at age 22? At age 23 three Philip Roth wrote *Goodbye Columbus* and won a National Book Award and he was on his way. But that is the exception--in my view. In my view writing occurs later in life. You can be a musician or a painter at an early age and produce good work--even great work. But with writing--no. Writing is different. Good writing derives from experience of life and at 22 you are still a little wet behind the ears. You need to get out there and get cuffed around a bit--have your heart broken by a women, get fired from a few jobs, develop some hideous disease. These are the things that add flavor to the work.

One night I got a call from Teddy Shavers. I hadn't seen him for a while. It was January, 5 above zero—fahrenheit—with a wind chill factor of ten below and we were suffering the usual off season golf withdrawal symptoms. There was talk of driving down to Pinehurst for a week to play the north course—a championship layout.

He said: you wanna hear the new Lenny Bruce album?

I said: whos Lenny Bruce?

There was a pause and I could picture him at the other end of the line with his eyeballs disappearing into the backs of the sockets.

He said: hes a comedian. Buts its a new kind of comedy. come over and I will explain the whole thing

Teddy lived on Sheridan drive. Sheridan drive is in Williamsville--the burbs. The first dreaded symptoms of a phenomenon tagged by the sociologists as "white flight" were beginning to occur. A new word--the mall--was added to the vocabulary of commerce. Ten years later downtown Buffalo—a quadrant with the Main St/Chippewa axis operating at the center—the movie theatres, restaurants, clubs, stores, pool halls, strip joints—and the Alibi Room, Leonardos, Nate Seebergs—and John Saccos bookie operation--were gone. It was the heart of the city—now in failure. And it stayed in failure. It dropped dead.

But Sheridan was convenient--a major traffic artery that fed into the Niagara Expressway that took you to the Peace Bridge you crossed into Canada and 5 minutes later you arrived at Erie Downs--the track

An apt reflects the tastes and character of the person who inhabits the space. Teddy was neat--anal. My mother was anal. I took after my father. A girl once said to me: you aren't a slob Jack; you're just dirty.

Teddy was a Jew. The design gene is Italian. Later, when I worked in New York in the ad biz and hooked up with the guinea art directors—a guy named Gene Calogero and another one--Ralph Ammirati—I learned about the Bauhaus look, the 30's modern look, the 40's neo-Italian look, a few other looks.

Teddys pad featured the horseplayer look. The word non-descript means nothing to describe. That was the pad. He had what he needed—a few chairs, sofa, floor lamp. Plus he was never there. He used the place to sleep and have orgies with Dave Horn. Up on the walls was a poster—of the track at Hialeah in Miami, a framed photograph of Thelonius Monk, a print of the generic Impressionist landscape type.

There were a few books—4. The titles were were: *A Stone for Danny Fisher* by Harold Robbins, A golf book--*Groove Your Swing My Way*, by Sammy Snead, *The Collected Jokes of Henny Youngman*, *Word Power—How to Win Every Sales Pitch*

I read the Harold Robbins book. It was an early work- the book they write when they still think of themselves as artists—before they hit the big time. Then they hit the big time. They write blockbuster novels and sell the movie rights and the money starts rolling in. The artist concept begins to fade. They aren't artists--they are businessmen. And they are right. I learned this later. It is always better to be making money

The only item occurring in the room that might be called thematic was the stereo system--in those days known as hi-fi—and a vast record collection. He had a passion for music--the great swing bands of the 30's and 40's and the vocalists who derived from that era—Sinatra, Mel Torme (the Velvet Fog) Joe Williams and a guy named Johnny Hartman who became a big favorite of mine when I moved to New York. Johnny Hartman made one of the great—and great under-listened to--records of that time—a collaboration with John Coltrane. This was the record I used to seduce my second wife.

I visited him from time to time to listen to music and talk about this and that—music, golf, women—the big three.

He said: whats happening? you getting laid?

I said: no. It was painful. I was jerking off and visiting hookers--with the money I got from my mother. My father visited hookers. It all comes from the parents.

Teddy said: you will get laid. Dont worry about it. These things go in cycles. You go through these dry spells when nothing is happening and then suddenly you are in this

other mode when you have more action than you can handle. Its a deluge.

This was something I couldnt imagine--a deluge of pussy.

He said: the way to get laid is to always have a girlfriend. I mean this: having a girlfriend gives you confidence and having confidence--besides doing wonders for your golf game--is what gets you laid. Also: the pressure is off. You are getting laid from the girlfriend. There is no pressure to get laid by some other woman. If it happens—fine. If it doesnt you still have the girlfriend. Do you follow me?

I said: does this concept apply to marriage?

He said: it does according to Dave Horn.

Teddy and women. He had his ups and downs. He had been married twice. His first wife was a yenta and the second was a hooker. You can marry and divorce for the first time and it is no reflection on your judgement or the caliber of your instincts because anyone can make a mistake. The point of a mistake is to learn something from it. Then you marry and divorce for the second time. You have repeated the mistake. You have learned nothing. Now you must ask yourself a question: are you a loser?

That was Teddy --a two time loser. Later he made it three. His first wife was a *yenta*, the second was a hooker and the third was Willie--a Jamaican. They were all different but the result was the same. He had a girlfriend at this time--Jody. Jody was hot. She was a fox. She had a terrific

ass. Give me a good ass. I beat my meat many times thinking about that ass.

Jody was Jewish. There are many jokes about Jewish women. Here is one: Man goes to see the Rabbi and says: I think my wife is dead.

Rabbi: why do you say that?

Man: well—the sex is the same—but the dishes are starting to pile up.

That wasnt Jody--the girl in the Jewish joke. Jody liked to fuck. The girl in the jewish joke was Ellen. Ellen never met Alan. She met me—in New York. We were in my apt, screwing, with her on top, and she looked down at me and said: I don't think were compatible.

I said: do you mind if I finish coming?

We listened to the Lenny Bruce album. That was his other passion—comedy. He had every comedy album known to man, by the likes of Redd Fox, Jackie Vernon, Shecky Greene, etc, the Vegas lounge act types. And that was Teddy—the Vegas lounge type. He was a funny guy—hilarious. He missed his calling. In Buffalo he worked for a radio station selling air time. He would have been perfect for the lounge or in the main room, opening for a star of greater magnitude. Later, following retirement, he could have joined the Friars club in LA , sitting around with people like Shecky Greene and Alan King, etc and playing gin rummy and exchanging telephone numbers of hookers.

And this is why he liked me--because I laughed at the jokes. It is impossible not to like the person who laughs at the jokes. (That is how you know the marriage is finished.

When they stop laughing at the jokes.)

It was at Teddys apt that I listened to these people, including a Mel Brooks album called *The 2000-Year-Old-Man* that made me nuts. I listened to this album so many times I could repeat it word for word. I can recite from memory to this day large chunks of this album. I was in my imitative phase. I imitated writers and did take offs on

comedy albums by the likes of Lenny Bruce and Mel Brooks. Lenny Bruce wasn't Mel Brooks—or Henny Youngman. He was a Jew and a comedian but you were a long way here from the stage of Grossingers Hotel in the Borscht Belt cracking up all the 7<sup>th</sup> Ave types and their *yenta* wives. It was junkie humor. He wasn't a junkie—not yet. that occurred later. But the junk virus was present, in residence and if your choice of profession is doing standup the material will be skewed in a particular way—in a junkie way—perverse, nihilistic, scatological. It doesnt lend itself to a wholesome or re-assuring point of view.

Also he was a mimic—a brilliant mimic. Its my contention the great comedians must have that gift, to slip perfectly into another voice not their own—very far from their own. They are actors.

We listened to the album—*The Sick Humor of Lenny Bruce*

It was funny—very. I connected at once. That’s why I liked Teddy—he was the first guy in Buffalo to dig Lenny Bruce.

Some years later I was visiting Jack D’Amico in Berkeley. I was living in LA and went up to see jack from time to time. Bruce was playing at a jazz club in North Beach, Basin St West, and we decided to catch the act.

He was well known by this time and having some well publicized problems with the law. The act was getting busted. the issue was obscenity—a few inadvisable “motherfuckers” here and there and quaint references to priests bugging altar boys. Today its quite tame. A few years later Richard Pryor could walk out on stage and do a 20 minute routine on eating pussy and no one would bat an eye.

But it was a period of rigid censorship and Bruce was an easy target—a jewish comedian with the junkie virus .

And now he did a dumb thing. The act was getting busted and it was frustrating--the emasculation of his art, etc--and he decided to vent his frustrations, to defy his common sense, what little he had, not too much—but a very hard head, brilliant combination--and he filed suit.

Of the many ways to go broke the all time best way is to produce a movie. In second place is visiting Las Vegas a la Mario Puzo and third is to involve yourself in multiple lawsuits with the federal govt on the other side.

Two years later he was dead. The law suits sucked him dry, the junk virus lying dormant sprung to vivid life and they found him one morning curled up in his underwear on the bathroom floor of a hotel in North Beach with the needle still in his arm

Meanwhile the act had changed. He had abandoned the satirical bits—on religion, racism, politics, culture--that had launched his career. He was doing a semantics bit—a philosophical bit—an inquiry into the nature of language, the meaning of obscenity—if there is one—and if there is one is this a subject designed to engage the attention of people who have paid a \$20 cover and two drink minimum.

4 miles away on the other side of the Bay BRidge was UC Berkeley where lectures in philosophy—*gratis*--were occuring on a 24 hour basis—or you could give one of your own.

But--he was Lenny Bruce. The gift hadnt deserted him.He was still funny. His timing and masterful skills as a mimic were intact.

Jack and I were driving back.

I said: hes become a jailhouse lawyer type. Its a crusade. Its forensic comedy.

Jack said: I enjoyed the show. He is still funny. but you are right. Hes lost his way. Hes become his own worst enemy

in this one. His instincts have failed him. Shakespeare said it: leave the music to the musicians.

Amen.

Time passed . I moved to New York. I got a job writing copy for an ad agency that specialized in industrial products—abrasives: sandpaper, files, grinding pastes. It was a long was from Harold Robbins selling the movie rights to his novels and banging starlets on his yacht. But—New York. It was like Bob Battaglia said: if you cant get laid in New York youre a mental case.

In Buffalo I was wet behind the ears. By the time I arrived in New York this condition had somewhat resolved itself. I had a girlfriend, another on standby, and a few others who came and went on a hit or miss basis such as the one I met at a party and we left the party and cabbed it to my apt and fucked each other and got dressed and went downstairs and I hailed a cab for her and I never saw her again or knew her name either because we were both so hammered all night long introductions never occurred.

My Buffalo friends went their separate way. Jack D'Amico was teaching at Berkeley. Sam was married with two kids and a third on the way. Shelly was in jail. Teddy had left town. I heard about this from my dad. I don't know the details. He owed money—not to the bank. This was a problem—not a new problem—that would always be with him—owing money. An obsession is something that makes it impossible for you to think of anything else.

That is the definition of the word. In other words, you cant have two obsessions. Teddy had two obsessions: golf and the track. It's a tossup if he was more obsessed by the golf or the track or vice versa. He was obsessed equally by both. The difference is—you can win playing golf.

He moved to California—Los Angeles. He had a brother there. He married for the third time—to Willie—the Jamaican. I knew Willie. She lived in Toronto and met al while visiting a girlfriend in Buffalo who was banging Dave Horn. Willie was great—a wonderful girl. She had her hands full with Teddy.

He got married and farted around in LA, doing newspaper sales. They adopted two kids. People like Teddy should never have children. Why? Because they are children. I wont labor this one. My father was the worlds most self-absorbed human being and in second place was Teddy Shavers. There was something else: the age factor. I leave it for you to figure out for yourself if it is wise for a 50 year old man—of normal habits, not Teddy Shavers—to adopt two small children whose teenage years will coincide with his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday.

They moved to Las Vegas. Willie had been offered a good job and they made the decision to relocate.

But in Vegas something happened. He got lucky. He got a job doing public relations for the Sahara hotel. It was a good job for him—perfect. He was a great guy--bright and funny. He liked people—and vice versa. He was a Jew. Being a Jew can hurt you in some places but Vegas isnt one of them. There was something else. Teddy was stage

struck. Happiness for him was chumming around with some show biz celeb and the magnitude of this persons fame was not too important. I will give you one example: Julius LaRosa. That is the name that first comes to mind. Julius La Rosa was a nice Italian boy with the worlds least offensive voice--a Perry Como type. He was a Perry Como type. He achieved stardom--or semi-stardom on the old Arthur Godfrey TV show--a 50's variety type format. The show eventually cancelled and La Rosa banged around here and there on the nightclub and dinner theatre circuit before accepting the inevitable: Vegas. Vegas gets them all in the end. it could be worse. You have the weather, the golf, the hookers—and the stage struck types like Teddy to provide company and a supportive boost to the morale when required.

That was his job at the Sahara--to cater to these people--the “talent” and tend to their comforts and arrange whatever diversions were required during the booking.

A frequent diversion was golf. The hotel had its own course, a championship layout. So there he was playing golf with the likes of Julius La Rosa--for free--on a gorgeous course.

He had died and gone to heaven.

That would be a good place to end this story--with Teddy in Heaven--and not where it did end--in a creepy ward in a VA hospital in Salt Lake City dying of heart failure compounded by diabetes, divorced by his wife and none too fondly remembered by his children. I could end it

either place. But I will end it in another place--the last time I saw him.

I was living in Los Angeles. It was 1986. I was 48. Teddy was 63. He was living alone. He and Willie were separated--or divorced. He saw his kids from time to time but, as I say, this relationship was never great--esp the boy who had problems right from the start. It was the usual--no male role model.

But there I was in Vegas with a friend. I rang him up and over we went. I said to my friend: prepare to meet a strange human being.

The apt was a few blocks off the strip in a complex—wings of units grouped around a garden—with a pool, tennis, game room, etc the usual—pleasant

Inside it was the same apt he had on Sheridan drive. The difference was—an improved stereo system and another 200 records added to the collection and up on the walls row upon row of Teddy pictures—Teddy with Shecky Green attending a show in the main room, Teddy with a girl from the Sahara line, Teddy with more girls from the line, Teddy with the three Jackies: Jackie Vernon, Jackie Gayle, Jackie Leonard. Here was Teddy playing golf with Sinatra.

I said: you and Sinatra?

He said: it happened in this way. I was with Buddy Greco. Remember Buddy Greco?

I remembered. Buddy Greco was the poor mans Sinatra. There we were in Buffalo waiting for Sinatra by some miracle to book himself in for a date at the Town Casino—the big room in Buffalo. The miracle never occurred. Instead we got Buddy Greco.

Teddy said: I am with Buddy Greco and Sinatra was playing in front of us. I asked Buddy to ask Frank if he would pose for a shot. He was very nice about it.

Did you talk to him?

You don't talk to Frank. He talks to you. He had three guys with him that looked like they moved safes for a living

What about the golf? Can he play?

Can you sing?

My Sinatra days were behind me. He was pushing 70. The voice was gone and he hadnt punched a photographer in years.

My other question was: What about Willie and the kids. Where were these pictures?

He looked good--for an old man. A little of the enthusiasm had dimmed but he had so much to begin with there was still plenty in reserve.

Some things had changed--the divorce and also the job at the Sahara--no longer. A change in management had occurred and there was a purge of the old timers. Vegas is

a small town—very small when it comes to cushy PR jobs with a major hotel on the Strip. He caught on at a place called Sams, across town, that catered to the family trade--as opposed to the sporting trade--and featured a western motif--the buckboard/horsecollar/banjo-picking look--very cornball—and no golf course.

We sat around and rapped. With Teddy--as with my father—there was only one subject--the subject of thyself. Nothing had changed in this dept. He was in a world of his own. He was always in a world of his own. But that world was getting smaller.

It was back to the good old days at the Sahara when he was living it up and friends came to visit--from Buffalo or LA and everything was “comped”--complementary, on the house, free.

We talked about golf. I hadn't played in years. It was too time consuming. I didn't miss it. I played enough as a kid to last the rest of my life.

He had seen Dave Horn—out on a junket for some musicians labor union convention. Dave had aged—all those late nights drinking and smoking—and banging chippies—until 5AM had taken a toll. There were health problems—a bad knee that was making him nuts. He couldn't play golf. He was thinking of a knee operation. They take out the old and put in the new. I had a friend in LA who had this operation—and said there would never be another. The operation is followed by six months of therapy—and my friend was 43—not 63.

He said: every time I went in for these physical therapy sessions I had to drink 3 martinis.

Dave was still married—a grandfather. The pussy gene was in remission. No golf and no pussy. Tough.

Teddy said: I wanna show you something.

I had noticed this thing—a device bolted to the wall. What kind of device? Two giant leather pads resembling catchers mitts driven via some sort of crank operated levering or cam mechanism.

Teddy said: its for golf—a training aid. I got it thru a golf magazine.

It was a device designed to prevent head movement—very important. This was something the golf magazines were always hammering you with--head movement. It was the first commandment of golf: thou shalt not move thy head.

You spread the mitts and inserted your head which was locked into place via a few turns of the crank and you were in business—with a vengeance. Your head was welded to the wall. An earthquake could occur and the entire house collapse and you would still be standing there with your head fastened between the pads of this device.

He demonstrated. In went the head, between the pads, the

pads levered tight and he takes a swing. His head didnt budge--not a centimeter. Now his feet were all over the place.

When I stopped laughing I said: you look like a retard.

And this is where I will leave him--not as good as the Sahara--playing golf for free with Julius La Rosa--but good enough--with his head installed between the leather pads of the golf training device, at age 63, still trying to shave a few strokes off the handicap.