

## BOARDING SCHOOL

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My parents sent me to boarding school shortly before my eleventh birthday. This was a predictable consequence of their earlier decision to live in the countryside; there simply was not much in the way of excellent schooling available within daily commuting distance. My sister, too, was sent to boarding school – although, in her case, it was as a weekly boarder, coming home on weekends. But, in any event, in those days it was quite normal for English families of a certain class to send their children away to a boarding school. The job of child-rearing was left to teachers and, far more dangerously, to other children.

From his diaries I learned that my father's first choice had, in fact, been a boy's school in not-too-distant Cheltenham – at which I could possibly have been a day student:

*13. xi. 1945* The Junior school at Cheltenham [probably, Cheltenham College] will not take Michael – they have no prejudice against Jews, but the position might arise when they would not have any vacancies for CofE [Church of England] as it is a CofE foundation! So that's that. After that long correspondence I imagined Johnston would swallow his prejudices and take the boy. Is a bit of a nuisance, but I suppose allowance must be made for the confusion of the times.

So, Cheltenham was not an option and my parents decided, then, to send me to Carmel College.

I still have a copy of a publication entitled Reflections<sup>®</sup> which was put out on the occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Carmel College's founding. It largely consists of reminiscences by previous students and staff. In one such reminiscence, the author writes "As you write ... you find that what you are doing is describing not Carmel but yourself." I find this a striking observation and it certainly feels true in my case. Another pithy saying which also resonates with me, attributed to Mimi Lutwak, was "In other schools I was taught; at Carmel I was educated." When I look back over my life, I tend to identify aspects of my boarding school experience as major influences which shaped me and my life, rather than the things I experienced in my first few

years of life – in spite of the knowledge that one’s earliest years are supposed to be the most formative ones.

### **CARMEL COLLEGE: A JEWISH PUBLIC SCHOOL**

The English secondary school system is, or at least was in my time, divided into two main types: the so-called public schools (which, despite their name, are privately owned and operated), and the secondary modern and grammar schools (which are run by public authorities). The public schools are primarily boarding schools, though some take day students or weekly boarders for children living close by. The secondary modern and grammar schools are day schools whose students live at home. The public schools span a spectrum from very old established schools such as Eton and Harrow, to relatively obscure establishments which strive with varying degrees of success to emulate the more famous ones. The more well-known of the schools have centuries-long traditions of clothing, behavior, discipline, academic focus and so forth. Many of them were founded with the intention of inculcating the students with Christian values – mainly protestant, but some catholic.

As is the case almost everywhere, there has been a strong strain of anti-Semitism in England (although England had also played a positive role, having welcomed Jews back to its shores in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, at a time that they were still being persecuted on the continent). Anti-Semitism was often implemented fairly subtly. The public schools – as the excerpt from my father’s diary above indicated – often excluded Jews with the argument that their founding charters obliged them to cater to Christians and they therefore had to make sure they had left room for Christian applicants. In connection with anti-Semitism, an extract from my father’s diaries is of interest:

*16.i.1940* Last night Freda and I had a discussion about the child's future having regard to the rising tide of anti-Semitism. She says she will not let him go to school where the boys have had their minds poisoned by all this fanatical rubbish and will make his life hell. I replied that, after all, every boy has to go through school and the tougher he gets, the better for him. But she thinks our boy will be very sensitive (what mother does not think that!) and she will not have it.

Carmel College was established in 1948 due to the vision of one man, Rabbi Kopul Rosen. He wanted to make a public school

education available to the Jewish community while offering an environment in which Jewish children could feel at home, get a religious experience and education, and develop social confidence. So, with what must have been a huge effort, he brought together all the ingredients for starting a new school.

It has to be admitted that the notion that Carmel College could fully be a public school in the English sense was wishful thinking. David Robbins captured this reality when he observed “at a proper public school if there was a fight, the non-participants would gather round and ensure the rules of engagement were observed whereas at Carmel the non-participants would separate the contestants and end the fight.” Then, too, the Jewish nature with its marginal acceptance of discipline, and the Jewish enjoyment of the comforts of life – food, a mother’s arms – were simply antithetical to the presumptions of English public school life.

There was, for example, the experience of the Reserve Officers Training Corp, or ROTC – a program run by the British army to initiate students into military life and prepare them for officer status. At some point Rabbi Rosen decided that the school should mimic public schools in hosting a branch of the ROTC. The Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, no less, set this up and a bunch of us were conscripted, given uniforms complete with shiny army boots, and taught to march in formation. My friend, John Goldsmith, whose uniform was always impeccable, was immediately identified as officer material and made squadron leader – but he suffered from not being able to march in step so his left foot would move forward in near-perfect synchrony with the two dozen right feet which followed him. I recall one exciting exercise in which we were shown how to launch grenades, and another in which was demonstrated how to camouflage oneself so as to be undetectable in the undergrowth. Alas, our competence and attitude did not match the army’s expectations and, perhaps more germanely, the advantages of being in the ROTC disappeared with the abolition of national service. So, the Carmel ROTC was disbanded within a few years of its formation.

In Carmel’s first year of operation there were only 22 students. Probably about an equal number joined the next year. I was

enrolled at the start of its third year.<sup>1</sup> Each student was assigned a number. Charlie Gale was number 1. His special skill was to improvise verse. He and Rabbi Rosen would, in public, extemporize very amusing alternate rhyming verses. Another public pleasure had to do with the declamation of a series of Edith Sitwell's poems, entitled *Façade*, which were set to music by the well-known English composer, William Walton. Malcolm Shifrin, who later returned to become the school librarian, learned many of the poems off by heart and would recite them at the drop of a (frequently fallen) hat. I, too, learned many of her verses by heart and have in turn recited several of Sitwell's poems to Lara and Liza over the years. In my teenage years I learned quite a number of poems off by heart and knowing and reciting them has been a great source of pleasure all my life.

Well, to return to the numbering of Carmel's students, each of us was required to have 'Cash's name tapes' sewn into all our clothes so that their owners could be identified after the clothes were washed in the school laundry. I know my school number because I have an indelible image in my mind of my name tags. They were commercially made with the lettering sewn in red capital letters on a white cotton strip, thus: 'MICHAEL GOITEIN 80.' So it was that I was identified as Carmel's eightieth student, which I mention only to emphasize how small the school was when I joined it in 1950. (In fact, the first housemaster had been superstitious, so there was no boy with the school number 13, and I was in fact the seventy-ninth pupil to be enrolled!)

## **KOPUL ROSEN**

It is inevitable that a description of Carmel College begin with a description of Rabbi Kopul Rosen. He *was* Carmel College. He conceived it, started it, and led it until his sad and premature death from leukemia, at the age of 48.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Under the category of seeking sympathy for writers of histories, let me mention that I have two authoritative sources for the initial number of students attending Carmel. One states that it was 22, the other, 31.

<sup>2</sup> After his death, an appreciation of his life was put together in the form of an interesting book, *Memories of Kopul Rosen* edited by Cyril Domb.

*[continued on the next page]*

He was born in London in a very orthodox religious family, and at the age of 14 attended a Yeshiva (an Orthodox Jewish seminary) in London and then, subsequently, one in Poland where he was ordained as a Rabbi. In his short life he managed to cover a wide swathe. He led congregations in Manchester, Glasgow and London. He interested himself from the beginning in the education and development of Jewish youth. He spoke and wrote eloquently about a whole range of Jewish and Zionist issues – never fearing to step on some toes as he elucidated his thinking. He was a strong contender for the post of Chief Rabbi when it became open, but withdrew when it became clear that his candidacy was contentious. The foundation of Carmel College in 1948 was the culmination of his dreams.

Rabbi Rosen defined the word ‘charisma.’ He was an imposing figure. *Very* tall (as seen through my young eyes), bearded and with a resonant and instantly recognizable voice. If he walked into a room, his presence was immediately felt. He was consumed by a huge appetite to teach, and he was a superb orator. He wanted to convey everything he knew to his pupils and, I guess, to the rest of the world as well. General knowledge, the Jewish religious experience, morality, musical understanding, sports – all these and more were his passions. He was a strong leader who craved being the center of attention. A quiet smile was rarely absent from his



8.1 Rabbi Kopul Rosen

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An authoritative history of the school, written by Jeremy Rosen, Kopul Rosen’s son and subsequently headmaster of the school, can be found on the Internet at <http://www.jeremyrosen.com/node/72>.

A detailed description of the physical plant and daily activities at Carmel is presented in an extensive article by Chaim Simons which can be located on the Internet at <http://chaimsimons.net/carmelcollege.html>.

face – except when some disciplinary matter or something which occasioned his disapproval came up, at which times he could be very stern. He managed to gracefully combine family life (he lived with his wife and sons in the main school building for many years), teaching, the duties of a school principal, and the many complex relationships with the outside world that the school necessitated. I doubt if anyone associated with the school could ever talk about it without his name coming up pretty quickly in the conversation.

He established in the school a consistent style of orthodox Jewish observance which was required of all students and Jewish staff. This was no mean task in the context of a religion which sports so many different flavors, from virtually non-observant liberals to the fanatical ultra-orthodox. He steered some sort of middle course of his own design; orthodox but not polemical. The style he set was challenged, both by students who thought observances should be stricter and by those who found them too strict, but neither group had a chance in the face of the force of his personality. The school's motto was 'Know Him in all thy ways' and this was the message that Rabbi Rosen preached and, I believe, wished to live out. A whole host of Jewish rituals was followed. Prayer services were held three times a day. Only kosher food was served, of course. No work was allowed on the Sabbath (the

definition of 'work' being traditional rather than sensible – lights could not be turned on or off, for example, presumably originating in a time when it really was work to trim and light a lamp). And on and on. In addition to observance, he also emphasized the teaching of Jewish thought and, for example, would lead discussions of the Talmud (the body of Jewish civil and ceremonial law and legend) with selected pupils.



8.2 Rabbi Rosen meeting with a group of students (prefects) in his study. I'm the second from Rabi Rosen's right.

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His moral teaching was probably his most important gift. He had a strong sense of right and wrong – and of the importance of doing right – and he conveyed this forcefully to all of us. I have never forgotten a little tale he told once at a school assembly. Twins were walking down the street, and one of them took hold of his brother and pushed him off the pavement onto the road, and then said challengingly “See, I’m taller than you. I’m superior.” And Rabbi Rosen’s point? That he would have had no problem with the brother had the two of them been walking on the road rather than the pavement and he had stepped up on the curb to make his statement. But, to push his brother down to a lower level in order to make himself feel superior indicated something approaching moral bankruptcy.

No detail was too small for him to pay attention to. For example, the staff common room, where teachers could go between classes to chat and relax, was situated in what had been the billiard room in an earlier age, and it still contained a fine billiard table on which the staff would play snooker in their free time. Rabbi Rosen decided that this game was undermining the atmosphere of the common room; teachers had become addicted to playing and watching snooker to the exclusion of any substantive conversation. So, not one to idly watch while something he disapproved of was taking place, he decided to get rid of the billiard table during one summer vacation while the staff were away. My mother got wind of this and, typically, offered to take it off his hands. Thus it was that Top Farm harbored a world-class billiard table. While this turned me into a semi-respectable snooker player, I am not sure that the transaction endeared me to my teachers.<sup>3</sup>

I do not think it is a stretch to say that, during the time I was at Carmel, Rabbi Rosen was a substitute father to me. During my nearly eight years at Carmel I spent considerably more time at the school than I did at home. And, where my father was a somewhat withdrawn ‘hands-off’ figure, Rabbi Rosen was engagement personified. He had favorites, and I believed that I was one of them. I felt anyway that our relationship was a very close one. I

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<sup>3</sup> David Stamler recalls being told that the billiard table had been a gift from my mother and that, since it took up so much room, it had simply been returned to her. It sounds as though Rabbi Rosen had woven a tale which shielded him from blame in the matter.

admired him and wanted his approval. But, most of all, I learned so much from him. As just one very minor example, as part of his program of general education of his pupils he would play classical music at the start of many school assemblies or after meals, and then talk about the piece of music and its composer. I will always be able to recognize a piece as being by Rossini from his description at one such assembly of how Rossini's music exhibits a kind of circular movement – like whorls in a turbulent stream. And 'Sewing Machine Bach' was not a bad characterization, if rather unduly deprecatory.

### **BEING YOUNGER**

I was a bright child and already at Glyngarth, as I indicated in the previous chapter, I was advanced by two classes, so that I was always about two years younger than my peers. As I look back, I see that this was the source of many lifelong problems. Such an advancement can be advantageous from an academic point of view. But it can be – and, I would say, usually is – highly deleterious from the point of view of socialization. And the problem is exacerbated many-fold in the context of a boarding school in which, instead of a day-school's manageable 6 hour periods for five days a week, mainly occupied with being taught, students are thrust together 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for months on end – in classes, on the playing fields, during free-time, in shower rooms and dormitories. In addition, being a teacher's pet, as a young bright child eager to please tends to be, does not endear one to one's peers.

If I had to sum up the consequences of being placed two years ahead I would say that they are twofold: On the one hand, one quickly and near-irreversibly learns to adapt to the wishes and whims of others and to fade into the background, becoming as nearly as possible invisible so as to avoid domination, both physical and social, by one's peers.<sup>4</sup> And, on the other hand, one

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<sup>4</sup> To this day, when walking along the street and being approached by someone coming towards me, I will instinctively move to the side to make way for them. I have observed over the years that women, in such a situation, also tend to make way and move over – and, in addition, they are very likely to apologize, murmuring "Sorry." as they pass by. I guess they have had strong experiences along the lines of my own.

looks for some area in which one can develop self-esteem (in my case, scholastic achievement) and to adopt and pursue it to the exclusion of virtually all other facets of a complete life. This is how one creates a one-sided, socially incompetent, individual.

One of my vivid memories is of the dormitory in which I was placed when I first entered Carmel College. Perhaps eight or so iron beds, covered by dull grey blankets, situated side by side with neither privacy nor protection. I was intimidated by most of my dormitory-mates who would secretly turn back the over-sheet of my bed making it impossible to get wholly into bed (which often happened embarrassingly under the eyes of a supervising master), or mess up my belongings, or taunt me. The one bright spot was Wolf Suraski, a large and imposing character, who undertook to be my protector. This, of course, was very positive, but our relationship was mainly made possible in the context of bullying by the others. My protector came from Istanbul and that city has seemed a wonderful haven to me ever since.

The story of how I got my nickname exemplifies a youngster's need to establish an area of acknowledged personal achievement.<sup>5</sup> It was during the course of evening dinner, soon after I had come to Carmel. Meals were noisy affairs with many dozens of children, seated several to a table, chatting away at full volume. The staff sat at a head table and, when some announcement needed to be made, the senior master present would clap for silence. Rabbi Rosen had done so, but I, no doubt caught up in whatever conversation I was having, kept on talking. "Goitein," he boomed out, "come here at once." – and up to the head table I went. "Goitein," he asked me, simulating amazement at my lack of compliance, "I just called for silence and you kept on talking. Are you stupid?" "No Sir," I spontaneously replied. "I am a highly intelligent person." At that, Rabbi Rosen roared with laughter and said that from then on he would address me by the initials 'H.I.P.' – and, so, 'Hippy' I became from then on.

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<sup>5</sup> It was extremely common for schoolboys, who were otherwise known by their surnames, to acquire a nickname which often stuck indelibly with them lifelong. I imagine that many of my fellow pupils who would recognize me instantly by my nickname, would not know of whom one spoke when one referred to 'Michael Goitein.'

Nor does it ever end. Years later, close to the time when I left Carmel, I was at home on holidays and Rabbi Rosen called up to let me and my family know the results of a national exam I had taken at the end of term. “I was very disappointed in the results of your Math exam.” he said to me sternly. My heart sank. “You got three questions wrong. How can it be that someone who can answer ninety-seven questions correctly can’t get all one hundred right?” How, indeed? Of course, he meant his comment as a joking compliment. But, it cannot have been all that funny given that I still remember the conversation – and, indeed, the exact spot where I stood during that phone call – over 50 years later.

Being a ‘good boy’ I was impressed into reciting by heart poems and suchlike at the end-of-year prize days. I recall memorizing and reciting a small part of Milton’s ‘On his blindness’ and still remember the opening lines. And, for a later event I recited John Donne’s memorable sermon For Whom the Bell Tolls. Such exercises, which seem burdensome at the time, can have a lasting benefit.



8.3 On exhibition at some speech day.

## THE PHYSICAL SURROUNDINGS

It may seem strange to say it but, from my perspective, the physical surroundings in which Carmel College was situated were probably the second most notable aspect of the school (Rabbi Rosen being the first). Carmel was originally situated in Greenham, overlooking the famous Newbury race course. The main building was a lovely mansion with, in particular, very attractive grounds. Large well-tended lawns<sup>6</sup> at the back of the

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<sup>6</sup> The garden with its generous lawns always put me in mind of a story told by my father of an American who, visiting an English country

*[continued on the next page]*

house led down to a small artificial lake. The lake could be approached along a path which wound through tall rhododendron bushes on either side. When these were in flower – which, in memory, was all the time – they made a gorgeous sight and gave off a pungent scent. I often walked this path, and the memory of strolling along alone, undisturbed, in a quiet and lovely place with its heady aromas in my nostrils remains vivid to this day. This was perhaps the strongest positive experience of my early school years.

Most notable was the large wood-paneled hall in which school assemblies and occasional entertainments were held. I had a couple of thespian experiences in this hall, both of which were somewhat painful for me and, I suspect, equally so for the audiences. The first of these involved my participation in French play given before an invited audience of parents. As it was a boys' school with no girls to take the female parts, the boys had to do so, and so it was that I got to play a French housewife out on a shopping expedition. I have never been sure whether the laughter that greeted my first appearance on stage was due to the very gay scarf that I had to wear tied around my head, or to the heavily-framed glasses that I wore which quite removed any hint of femininity. Then there was the play 'Hassan', written by James Elroy Flecker no doubt for somewhat more sophisticated audiences than we could provide. This time I had a lead role – that of Yasmin, a sultry widow, who was loved by the confectioner Hassan but only became interested in him when he was able to save the Caliph's life and was made rich. She then bribes a servant to let her into Hassan's bedroom. Finding her, Hassan enquired what she was doing there. I then had the hapless duty of replying rhetorically "Why does a woman lie in the bed of a man?" This was an incredibly exciting question to young boys. The line was taken up and memorized by the entire school and subsequently not a day passed when it was not mouthed in my presence, accompanied by taunting giggles.

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home, accosted the gardener who was just then pulling a heavy roller over the grass to say how lovely the lawns were and asked him how long he had been tending them. "Oh," replied the man, "about 400 years, Sir."

After five years in Greenham the school was compelled to move, due to the reactivation of an American air force airfield adjacent to the grounds, and it was relocated to Mongewell Park in Wallingford, near Oxford. The two locations often blur in my mind:

their similarities were greater than their differences. Both had imposing and attractive main buildings; both had extensive and attractive grounds; and both were situated in lovely countryside. The main building at Mongewell Park was a brick mansion, built in 1890 in the William and Mary style. It boasted a large separate



8.4 Carmel College in 1953 (Mongewell Park)

building housing a gymnasium and squash courts. It abutted the river Thames and there was a boathouse (which was strictly out-of-bound to us boys). As time went by and the school grew in size the campus was greatly enlarged.

I firmly believe that the beauty and country-setting of both school campuses were important, if subliminal, elements in each student's experience – certainly in mine.

## **ROMNEY COLES**

I have grown to appreciate that the quality of individuals is much more important than the tools they have at their disposal or the setting within which they operate – and, I believe that I learnt this initially at Carmel. I had a few outstanding teachers there and they have shaped my life more deeply than I imagine they could have guessed. To a schoolchild almost all teachers are 'characters' and I think this is amplified in a boarding school where students and teachers spend a great deal of time together.

In fact, at Carmel, many of the teachers lived in the school or on its grounds.

I have spoken already of Rabbi Rosen, and no more needs to be said. I owe him an enormous debt of gratitude. Not far behind him is Romney Coles who was my chemistry teacher and, I would say, effectively if not in name, the school's second in command. If Rabbi Rosen was my moral mentor, Mr. Coles was my practical instructor. They nurtured two sides of my character – and their influences certainly overlapped in the middle.

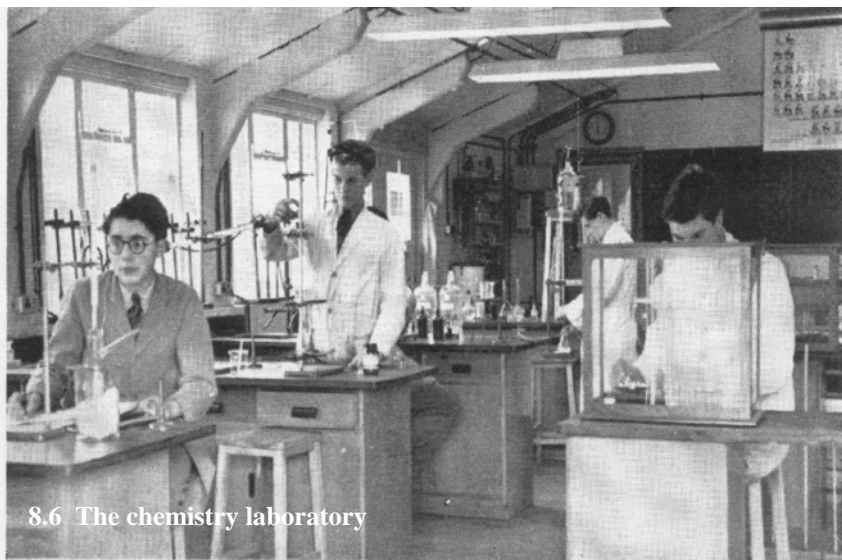
Mr. Coles was at one and the same time a punctilious man, devoted to detail and to doing things correctly, and a man of great enthusiasms and even, I would have to guess, passions. He taught me chemistry for many years and I learnt more, and more deeply, from him than I think I learned in any other subject or from any other teacher. His laboratory was a marvel of neatness and order and was equipped well beyond what one would expect of a school facility which spoke to the respect he was held in and which allowed him to expend the funds he needed to expand his empire without prior authorization. He was neat in his person; always well-dressed – generally in a waist-coated suit as I recall – with his hair slickly parted in the middle. Anything he did was well done. Over the years he had made wonderfully artistic and meticulous drawings of a large



8.5 Romney Coles

number of industrial and natural chemical processes – steel production, the extraction of quicklime from limestone, the formation of stalactites and stalagmites and so forth. These were published by Murray in 1948 under the title 'Chemistry Diagrams' and I still have a copy<sup>®</sup>. I have the conceit that the technical drawings and presentations which I have produced during my career are clear and well composed and, if this is even partially true, Mr. Coles can take much of the credit.

Romney Coles' lectures were models of clarity. His enthusiasm for his subject was infectious; the sheer legibility of his writing and grace of his illustrations were aesthetic inducements to engagement. I remember the laboratory exercises even more vividly than his classroom teaching. They were intellectual fencing matches. We performed quantitative analyses to measure such things as the concentration or pH of various solutions; and, most enjoyable of all, we were challenged to determine the composition of an endless stream of unknown compounds and mixtures. It was a battle of wits, with Mr. Coles dreaming up fiendishly difficult and tricky problems, and we amateur detectives tasked with unraveling the mysteries. He hoarded a special subset of miniature apparatus, mainly glassware, with which favored students could do micro-analyses, and I recall my pleasure in being able to use this equipment.



8.6 The chemistry laboratory

Another view of the chemistry laboratory. This photograph is of interest because two of the four boys seen, gained Major Open Scholarships to Balliol, Oxford in Natural Science. M. Goitein (first on the left) was awarded the Backenbury Scholarship 1956 and G. Mandel (at the back) the Domus Scholarship 1954.

We synthesized and extracted all sorts of chemicals (I recall eking caffeine from tea leaves, which required boiling the tea leaves in open water for what seemed like hours, and which cemented my dislike of tea for many decades). If one prepared an unusual chemical or some particularly attractive crystals he would ask to have a sample for his extremely extensive collection of such materials – to receive such an invitation was a great honor. He

encouraged us to make a similar collection of our own and for many years I kept on to the two trays containing dozens of sealed glass tubes containing all manner of substances which I had synthesized or extracted and which testified to my productivity at his hands. Many of these were pretty noxious, but I remember – and have their tantalizing smells in my nose to this day – synthesizing several of the esters which are the source of the odor of many fruits and plants found in nature.

It has seemed to me that there are three sorts of leaders (and teachers are the ultimate leaders). Those who lead from in front, drawing their followers along by example; those who push from behind, forcing or shaming one to greater efforts; and, finally, the few who can perform the trick of doing both at the same time. Mr. Coles was, I think, in the third category.

As well as his teaching of chemistry, Mr. Coles was a major architect and constructor of the school's infrastructure. He drew up the timetable of classes and other events – a very complex job. He organized both the school and national examinations (so-called O- and A-level examinations, set in our case by the Oxford and Cambridge examining board) taking great care to ensure that no cross-fertilization between students could occur. He organized occasional movies, shown in the assembly hall of an evening, and ran the projector for them. These films did rather reflect his own taste in movies, it must be said; Rommel Desert Fox, Henry V, Scott of the Antarctic, Passport to Pimlico and Great Expectations were examples, and I seem to remember one which featured huge warships steaming endlessly over troubled waters and firing their guns on the slightest provocation. Mr. Coles enjoyed the films he showed at least as much as we did.

But the centerpiece and pride of Romney Coles' operations was the system for ringing the alarms which signaled the beginning of classes and all the other major events of the day. This was a gleaming affair of steel and brass, housed in an attractive wooden case with a glass front which allowed the inner workings to be seen. At its heart was a clock whose long pendulum terminated in a weight whose position could be minutely adjusted – and minutely and frequently did Mr. Coles adjust it – to ensure extreme accuracy. The clock caused a set of brass discs, mounted on an axle, to rotate. Multiple threaded holes were drilled into each disc, located in concentric circles. Brass pegs could be screwed into the holes and when a peg reached a

pre-determined position it caused an alarm to ring. The holes were set probably 5 minutes apart and the concentric rings were for different days – weekdays, Saturdays, Sundays and probably more. Other than Mr. Coles no one, but no one, was allowed to touch this splendid apparatus under pain of a punishment too dreadful to be articulated.

Of course, the care with which he conducted his many responsibilities, and the pleasure he took in doing so, were in themselves enormously educational.

Mr. Coles was a kind and friendly man, once one got past his formality. He lived in Goring, a few miles from the school, with his very charming and attractive wife and two sons, Barry and Revel, of whom he was very proud. His house stood on the banks of the Thames and one year his home project was to build a small wooden boat – which he made with accustomed care and love. He invited a few of us for tea at his home from time to time, and I remember seeing and marveling at the boat on one of those visits. I visited him and his wife many years later during his retirement, staying overnight in their home in Oxford. They had moved to Ibiza, an island off the coast of Spain, for several years, believing as a number of English retirees did, that the lower cost of living and fine weather would facilitate a comfortable old age. They came back to England a few years later, disenchanted, having found themselves living not in the idyllic place they had hoped for, but rather in a compound of somewhat isolated hard-drinking wife-swapping English expatriates with whom they had little if anything in common – and with life being more expensive than they anticipated, to boot. They abandoned their Spanish dreams and came back to Oxford. It was very sad for me to learn that Oxford had its own disappointments for them. It seems that there was a high level of crime. They were acutely aware of the possibility they might be robbed or even physically assaulted and felt forced to live behind locks and bars, nervous even to go out for a walk.

Though in later life I have made almost no use of the chemistry I learned from him, I owe so much to this man.

## **SECULAR EDUCATION**

Carmel College was a young school when I joined it, with few pupils and no track record, so they were very keen to have some academic successes – mainly measured in terms of getting

scholarships to universities – especially so since academic success is particularly highly prized in the Jewish community. And there I was, a bright young lad, perceived I imagine somewhat as a foal with a promising future on the racecourse. As a result, my education was anomalously lopsided. In England, then at least, students were directed into either the humanities or the sciences at a rather early age, and being two years ahead of myself as it were, this choice was made in my case around the age of 11 or so. It was decided between my parents and the teachers – and without much input from me that I recall – that I was destined to specialize in chemistry, physics and math. The consequence of this was that I never learned any history, geology, biology, or philosophy. I did have English, Hebrew and French lessons as these were mandatory for all pupils. And I struggled with pitiful success to master Latin as this was a required subject for entry into Oxford or Cambridge and it was taken for granted that one of these elite universities was my destiny.

There was one bump in the road which slightly mitigated this extreme specialization. My parents (primarily my father, I am sure) decided that I should take the scholarship examination for Eton which was one of the most prestigious and oldest of the English public schools, having been founded in 1441. A scholarship would have been necessary for me to go there as they would not have been able to afford the full tuition. There is a brief entry in my father's diary on the subject:

*10.ii.1952* It is a nuisance but we have to decide whether to leave Michael at Carmel Coll. or send him elsewhere. We are to see the Principal on Tuesday. We think, perhaps, he should try for a scholarship at Eton. But - whether he is all that good??

Carmel, I think, was of two minds about this plan. On the one hand, they had a good horse and wanted to race him themselves. On the other hand, a Carmel student winning a scholarship to Eton would be a feather in the school's cap. In the end, they went along with the Eton plan. There was a catch, though. The compulsory scholarship examination subjects included history and Greek and I had studied neither. So, they put me in a history class half way through the year, and laid on some special tutoring in Greek. Neither of these steps was anywhere near sufficient for me to master the subjects and, in the event, I did not get offered a scholarship. I count this as a great stroke of good fortune. From

what I have heard and read of Eton, it was the last place on earth to which one would want to send a sensitive young child.

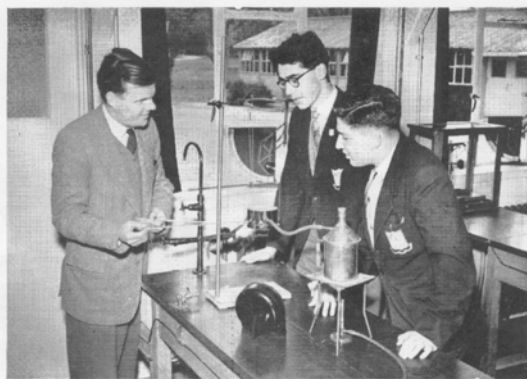
I remember my English lessons very favorably. For the 'O-level' national exams one had to read and analyze in depth two books. In the year I was to take the examinations these were Shakespeare's 'King Richard II' and a collection of Alfred Lord Tennyson's poetry. As a by-product, I could recite parts of Richard II by heart, and bits of Tennyson too. More than that, the process of studying texts in great detail was enormously informative and educational and these lessons stood me in very good stead. While we were studying the Tennyson, John Goldsmith was asked to read aloud a stanza or two of a poem describing the situation of a fair maiden. I will never forget his enduring embarrassment when he mispronounced the word 'rapt' and had the poet writing "So, raped, she stood...". At this, the class broke up. John tells me that this incident was greatly exacerbated for him by the fact that the teacher, Mr. Warner, who never laughed, could not help but laugh too. Such are the titillations which can enormously excite young boys. I was a very poor essay writer. My essays were stiff and boring beyond belief. By some fluke, however, I managed to pull myself together for the Oxford scholarship exams and I'll never forget Mr. Warner expressing to me in no uncertain terms his genuine astonishment at the report of my performance which made particular positive mention of the two general essays I had written. One of the essays, I remember, affirmed that I liked the music of Tchaikovsky in spite of his being dismissed by many as merely a popular composer. This was a stretch, it should be said, as I knew virtually nothing about the man and very little of or about his music other than having listened to quite a lot of it.

French lessons were also fun. Mr. Schlesinger was an excellent teacher and he managed to instill in us quite some knowledge of grammar and an extensive vocabulary while still keeping our attention. His instruction stood me in good stead during my exchange visits as a teenager with Maxime Schwartz (who, *ça va sans dire*, was French), during my year at the Sorbonne in Paris, and in later life in Europe. My French is now such that I can easily use it to converse with French people, although my written French is abysmal. However, I have realized that, when the French speak amongst themselves, they tend to pepper their speech with Patois (slang) terms which are

incomprehensible to me. This seems to be a particularly French trait. I think it is a semi-conscious safety valve for an otherwise overly formal language. The French try, in an uphill battle, to keep their language ‘pure’ and there is a body, the Académie française, charged with that task. They reject the Anglicization which many languages have resigned themselves to, inventing ‘French’ terms for new concepts so that for example ‘computer’ and ‘software’ are ‘*ordinateur*’ and ‘*logiciel*.’ It does not always work, however. Officially, when one wants to print out a document one should use ‘*imprimer*’, but the only verb I hear used by my French colleagues for this is ‘*printer*.’

Surprisingly, since I became a physicist, my experience of being taught physics at Carmel was rather mixed. There was a

succession of physics teachers which worked against continuity. I suspect this was in some part because Romney Coles was such a strong figure that his colleagues in science could not find their place. Laboratory



experiments were nowhere near as

8.7 Physics lab. The tall lad with glasses is me.

much fun as those in Chemistry and, all in all, I think that I mastered the work without greatly enjoying it. The contrast with my experience of Chemistry reinforces my view that the inspiration of a particular teacher is far more important than the nature of the things he or she<sup>7</sup> teaches.

Mathematics was another story. Here, too, I had several teachers over the years – Mr. Evans was the primary one – but nevertheless, it all somehow hung together and I enjoyed the subject very much. I was particularly drawn to geometry with its

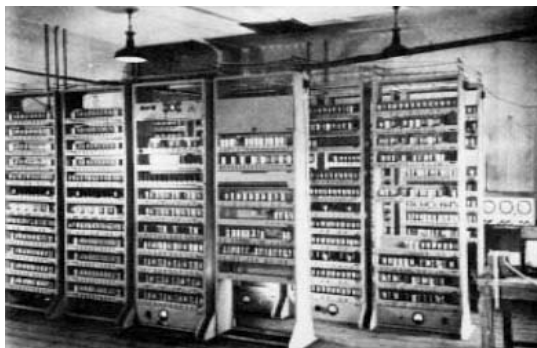
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<sup>7</sup> Having been politically correct in using ‘he or she’ in this sentence, I realize that I did not have any female teachers while at Carmel. I’m not at all sure why that was, it may well have been a pure coincidence.

so-satisfyingly definitive proofs. *Quod erat demonstrandum* (QED) is a term that never fails to thrill me (and even lies within the very limited sphere of my competence in Latin<sup>8</sup>). I spent many hours trying to invent a method for trisecting an angle using only an unmarked straight edge and a compass (bisecting is trivial, but I subsequently learned that trisecting an angle, which was a classic problem of ancient Greek mathematics, was proven to be impossible in 1837). I remember that one of the teachers had designed an attractive brass instrument which could accomplish the feat mechanically.

At some point, late in my time at Carmel, Mr. Landau (designer of the angle tri-sector) was my math teacher. He was an accomplished mathematician who, during school holidays, would go to Cambridge and work on their computer, EDSAC (standing for Electronic Delay Storage Automatic Calculator). He may have been interested in solving problems in queuing theory; I seem to remember his telling me about the problem of traffic bunching up on a busy highway.<sup>9</sup>

EDSAC was developed at the University of Cambridge and put into operation in 1949. It was the first practical stored-program electronic computer in the world, using rack upon rack of vacuum-tubes,



8.8 The EDSAC computer at Cambridge. (Wikipedia)

almost filling a whole room. These days it would be hard to find a computer with as little power as EDSAC but, if one could, it

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<sup>8</sup> I am reminded of a witty comment attributed to Brander Matthews which exactly captures my attitude towards the learning of Latin: “A gentleman need not know Latin, but he should at least have forgotten it.”

<sup>9</sup> Much later on in my life I used the scant knowledge of queuing theory that I had gained to model the problem of patients having to wait inordinately long to be seen by a doctor. This was published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* under the title ‘Waiting Patiently.’

would easily fit into the palm of one's hand if not on the tip of one's finger. Mr. Landau sent me the programmer's guide to the machine – a very slim document indeed which I still have<sup>@</sup>. He encouraged me to try writing a very short program for it which he offered to try out for me on his next visit to Cambridge. Oddly, although I have some notes about the program I wrote, I have no memory of whether it worked.

I had another brush with computers in their very early times. Mr. Coles invited two of us to accompany him to a science teacher's conference in London. It had a large exhibition area in which we spent all of our time. (One exhibit tested one's hearing and I turned out to have the highest frequency range of anyone of the entire conference – of which I was proud until I realized that it was purely the consequence of my being a youngster amongst adults.) In one booth they were showing a new modern computer, the Bendix G-15, which was refrigerator- rather than room-sized. I got to write a program for it, too, and I still have its manual.<sup>@</sup> Years later, as a graduate student at Harvard, the Cambridge Electron Accelerator laboratory had an identical computer and I used this old friend for some serious scientific computing.

Starting with these early brushes with the technology, my professional career has spanned pretty much the entire computer age up to the present time. Computers have been my stock-in-trade and, at one time or another, I have used almost every possible type. I used to think that I knew at least a little bit about almost all aspects of computers and computer software. But, computers have become so sophisticated and complex that I do not believe anyone could make such a claim today – certainly not me, who these days has to cry for help with almost every glitch I encounter. Notwithstanding the gradual evolution of my ignorance about them, computers – and especially the interactive graphics which they provide – have been a treasured tool of mine and I have had much pleasure in exploiting them.

I had the impression that, overall, I was a good student who did well on tests and in examinations and who generally satisfied his teachers. But recently I came across some of the end-of-term school reports from Carmel which I had kept together with a mass of other unread material and it was with some surprise that I found myself exposed to a somewhat different set of opinions. Many could be summarized as expressing the opinion that “he could do better if he applied himself more diligently.” I guess my teachers

believed more in the stick than the carrot. (However, their words were gentler than David Stamler's comment on Leonard Laurier's performance in coming in something like 19<sup>th</sup> out of 20 students: "If you had tried harder you could have come bottom of the class.")

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

Religion in various forms permeated all aspects of school life. There were compulsory orthodox religious services three times a day in the morning (before breakfast, no less), noon and evening; Hebrew and bible lessons (I read large sections of the old testament while at Carmel); celebrations of the high holidays (I particularly remember Rabbi Rosen blowing the shofar – a trumpet constructed from a ram's horn<sup>10</sup> – on the Day of Atonement); rather tasteless kosher food in the dining hall; the singing of Hebrew songs at the Friday evening meal, and so forth. The songs were an important element. They played, perhaps, the counterpart to the central role of the songs that scouts and girl guides learn round the camp fire or the drinking songs learnt by young Germans. Written mainly in a minor key, they were on the melancholy side as befits the songs a people subject to persecution. Notwithstanding, I have hummed and sung them all my life. I still have the book which the school put out of the religious songs sung at Carmel.®

Praying is a central aspect of all religions, and certainly of the Jewish religion. The more orthodox pray in Hebrew – although at the less religiously educated end of the spectrum they may be able to read but not understand the language. It is customary that the

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<sup>10</sup> In my initial draft of this book I referred to the shofar as a 'cows horn' and was corrected in this by several readers. What interests me about this is that I knew it was a ram's horn – but simply did not recall that fact when I first typed up my manuscript. I do not mind not knowing something. We cannot know everything and I have no patience with people who think that there are facts so important that anyone who does not know them must be considered fundamentally ignorant. But, knowing something and yet not being able to recall it, that disturbs me. This happens to me fairly often in my battle to learn German. I will ask my conversation partner for the German translation of some English word, only to realize on being told the translation that I 'knew' it all the time. This seems neurologically bizarre to me; on a par with the mystery of self-deception.

one who prays sways back and forth rhythmically, reminding one of the mesmerizing quality of tribal dancing, or the church services of Southern Methodists. At the morning prayers orthodox Jews wear a number of ritualistic objects: a prayer shawl (called in Hebrew a “tallit”) and phylacteries (called in Hebrew, “tephillin”). The prayer shawl is a large scarf with tassels at its four corners and with a variety of black or blue stripes woven into it – made either of wool or, for the more affluent, of silk. It was comfortable and even sensuous and, to this day, I look fondly on the feeling of being wrapped in this garment. The phylacteries are another story. They are a pair of leather objects which look like nothing so much as thongs which might be worn by bondage freaks. Each consists of a small box, said (but rarely if ever verified) to contain extracts from the bible, attached to long leather straps. One is worn on the head, with the box resting on the forehead, the other is strapped onto the bared bicep of the left arm, with the long end of the strap then wound a prescribed number of times (I seem to recall that the number is seven) around and down the arm before being tucked into itself around the palm of the hand.

As with many religions, there is a coming-of-age ceremony which, for boys, is called the Bar Mitzvah and takes place when they reach the age of 13. The Bar Mitzvah involves two typically Jewish and, it seemed to me, equally prominent aspects. The first is ceremonial in nature: the initiate is required to read a portion of the Torah (the five books of the Old Testament bible) and a section from one of the books of the prophets, both in a traditional sing-song voice. The second is also ritualistic: a party is held at which the initiate is given presents. Loads of them. Somehow, in my time, the giving of expensive fountain pens was traditional and many of my school friends returned from their Bar Mitzvoth with not one, but many Parker pens prominently sticking out of their blazer pockets. My Bar Mitzvah took place in London, hosted by the Oppenheimer family. The present which I treasured the most, was not a pen, but a handsomely put-together complete collection of the plays of Bernard Shaw. I would read these at night, by the light of a torch under the tent of my bed-sheet. (Quite why this subterfuge was necessary is no longer clear to me. It probably had to do with a curious parental belief that children need a certain - usually large - amount of sleep. I think, rather, that it is the parents who crave a rather large amount of time undisturbed by the children.) Anyway, George Bernard Shaw was my hero for a long time, and I still admire his work and intellect. I kept this

volume carefully over the years and eventually gave it to my nephew, Rafael, for his Bar Mitzvah, something like 40 years after mine.

Interestingly, at Carmel in my time there was almost no public mention of Israel, or Zionism in general. I had thought that this was deliberate. Sending their sons to boarding school was already a big stretch for Jewish parents. The idea that the children might be encouraged to emigrate to Israel would have been lethal. However, David Stamler assures me that this was not a considered policy, just an oversight. Harder to explain was the strange fact that no mention either was made of the holocaust – the systematic killing of millions of Jews by the Germans in World War II. And this in spite of the fact that probably most of the students had lost family members in the holocaust, and we had at least one holocaust survivor on the school staff whose prisoner number was indelibly tattooed on her arm.

My knowledge of Jewish culture and religion came primarily from being exposed to its practice by committed believers on a daily basis, rather than through formal lessons and, as a result, was the more deeply felt. Although, as I mention later, I dropped all religious observance in my late teens, I do not in any way regret my exposure to a religious education. It was, I believe, a critical element in my moral development.

## **THE SPORTING LIFE**

Sports are the backbone of the English public school system, intended to instill team spirit. By contrast, sports do not figure prominently in Jewish culture, to say the least. Nevertheless, attempting always to emulate English educational methods, Carmel College inflicted sports activities on its pupils. My memories of sports in the early days are mostly of cross-country running. We were regularly woken up extremely early in the morning and forced to go out in the cold and wet and run *en masse* to the end of the school's driveway and back. And almost weekly it seems to me, at least in memory, we were obliged to run several miles across field and stream – with a hated enforcer at the most distant point marking one's name off to ensure that one could not illegally abbreviate the run. We played football, too, on a distinctly rough field – though not so rough as that of one school whose team we played on their home ground which consisted of a sloped field covered with still-steaming cow pats left by the recent

occupants. My prowess in football can be gauged from my position: reserve goalie for the junior second eleven.

As the years went by the sports program became more elaborate. Cricket, field hockey, rowing, athletics and more were added to the list – in all of which I was required to participate in spite of a stunningly obvious lack of talent. For the sake of sport, the school was divided into ‘houses’ and great efforts were made to give their members a sense of competition with the members of the other houses. The extreme limit of inappropriateness came when I, lacking the slightest skill, was made head of one of these houses (shamefully, I have forgotten which one). I recall energetically egging on the members of my house from the sidelines, unable to suppress a sense of the absurd.

The election to head a house arose as an inevitable consequence of my gradual progression through the ranks. English public schools instigate a quasi-military hierarchy of students who are supposed to aid the staff in the enforcement of regulations and to act as mentors (if one is to take the kind view) for the younger boys. Carmel could do no less, so I was in turn a sub-prefect, a prefect, and finally ‘head boy.’ All pupils wore uniforms: grey trousers, short for juniors and long for the seniors,<sup>11</sup> a purple blazer with



8.9 Me, looking unusually neat in the school blazer and prefect’s tie.

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<sup>11</sup> In the early days, my knees were always streaked with green and brown stains from being scraped over the grass while at play. I used to wonder how it was that the knees of the seniors’ long trousers were not similarly streaked. I still do not quite know how that came about, we can hardly have stopped playing on the lawns all of a sudden as seniority swept over us, but my long trousers, too, while hardly impeccable, looked much better than my bare knees had looked previously.

the school shield emblazoned on the breast-pockets, and a school tie. Sub-prefects got to wear a differently colored tie and prefects yet another. As I recall, my appointment to head one of the sports houses came as a consequence of my being promoted to head boy. All my life I have felt less mature than is appropriate for the roles to which I have been assigned or which I have won, and I think I can trace this to these early advancements.

Not all sports were formal. At the back of the school was a concrete slab on which we would play deck quoits – a game involving a hard rubber ring which is sent spinning and/or tumbling over a net into the opposite court where it has to be caught before it touched the ground and returned by an opponent. We put together *ad hoc* teams for this, and I got quite good at the game. Then too, there was Diabolo, an activity I enjoyed in which a two-headed top is thrown up and caught with a string stretched between two sticks, and which could be tossed between two players, much as kids throw a ball amongst themselves. And, strangely as it now seems to me, the school allowed me to take riding lessons, perhaps thinking that I could compete for the school. My instructor was an ex-military man with a very rigid and quite strange idea of how one should sit on a horse, and I had to work hard to unlearn his instruction when I returned home in the holidays to the much more traditional pony club.

I learned to row at Carmel. Our coach, Mr. Hooper, would ride precariously along the towpath on his ancient bicycle, risking life and limb as he looked sideways at us rather than ahead to where he was heading, all the while shouting instructions through his hand-held megaphone. My only sports trophy is a small bronze medal (sadly, not inscribed) which we won at a



8.10 The victorious rowing team. From left to right: Garry Borrow, John Goldsmith, David Solomons me and Johnny Hertz.

local rowing regatta at, I believe, Reading.

In spite of my very evident lack of talent for sport, I have surprised myself over the years by some inner urge to take exercise. When home at Top Farm on holidays I would run a measured mile along the farm lane practically every morning. My father was a great walker. He would happily take off over the countryside for several hours, and his pace was such that I would not have been able to accompany him, even had I been asked – which I was not. Thanks to Gudrun, I have discovered my walking legs in recent years and now happily get some exercise on them.

### **SLEEPING ARRANGEMENTS**

A third of our school lives were spent in bed, so the sleeping arrangements were not without their importance. The standard unit was the dormitory, generally holding from six to ten beds (and, hence, boys). I'm not sure quite how they were selected, but probably primarily by age – except in my case as I was generally placed with classmates who were older than me. They were equipped with very bare bones furniture: a steel bed with a creaking net-like set of springs supporting a not-very-comfortable mattress and covered by a prickly standard-issue grey blanket, and a small side table-cum-cabinet in which to keep toiletries and other personal belongings. In my very first year at Carmel this cabinet was the locus of a very strange occurrence. I was very fond of a particular really delicious coffee cake made at a small tea shop, the Bindery, in Broadway. Knowing this, my mother on one occasion smuggled in one of these cakes to me. Both the cake and the visit from my mother were highly illegal; boys were not supposed to hoard food, and parents were not supposed to visit their sons except on the very infrequent designated parents' visiting days. However, my mother was not one to be stopped by such trifling regulations. I stashed the cake in the back of my bedside cabinet – and never touched it! At the end of term it was discovered: uneaten, hard as a rock, and covered with a green mold. Since I really liked this kind of cake and would normally have devoured it at one sitting, this was all very odd, and it must have had some strong significance, but to this day I do not understand what that might have been.

In later years I graduated to living quarters in a World War II era 'temporary' building on the school grounds.<sup>12</sup> Because the building was a bit isolated, only more senior, supposedly 'responsible,' boys were assigned to it and, bliss, we were only one or two to a room. The rooms were Spartan, and we were allowed to decorate them ourselves. On learning this, my mother went into action. During the holidays we picked out some wallpaper and matching material for curtains which she sewed, and bought a second-hand red leather-covered arm chair which I kept for many years. The paper and curtains were white and patterned with colorful foxhunting scenes and the whole effect was very bright and pleasant.



8.11 The homely touch, courtesy of my mother.

Even later, when I was considered to be even more 'responsible,' I was quartered with a couple of others, John Goldsmith being one of them, in a house on the school grounds, together with a few of the masters. I have three strong recollections of this living arrangement. The first involved one of the masters, Mr. Phelps, a pleasant man who smoked like a chimney. What was extraordinary, and gave me a lifelong insight into addiction, was that he would set his alarm for the middle of the night to wake himself up in order to have a cigarette!<sup>13</sup> The

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<sup>12</sup> During the war Mongewell Park had been the Head Quarters of No 2 Group RAF of Bomber Command who planned and carried out numerous bombing expeditions, including the famous 'Dam Buster' mission which used highly specialized bombs to destroy Ruhr river dams in Germany.

<sup>13</sup> David Stamler passed on to me another smoking story that gives great insight into the machinations that observant Jews can go through to get around religious regulations. Smoking is not allowed on the Sabbath – for some reason it is considered to be work and is therefore not

*[continued on the next page]*

second involved one of the masters introducing John to the music of Wagner. For some reason I have never forgotten watching them listening, enraptured, to the Flying Dutchman. I found the opera ‘silly.’ I mainly felt that the use of the *leitmotiv* was too simplistic a trick. Finally, on the last day of term, a highly illicit bottle of Cognac appeared as if from nowhere and three of us knocked off the entire bottle in one night. I was heartily sick the following morning, and to this day instinctively flinch when offered Cognac.

## FRIENDSHIPS

I’m going to say some things about friendship in a later chapter, so I’ll be brief here. While I knew almost everyone in the school and was on reasonably good terms with many of them, I had few intimate friends at Carmel. Being younger than one’s peers makes individual friendships hard to come by, since a two year gap is a very big one to overcome in one’s early years. In the advanced sixth forms (which included three successive levels), and in which I took almost entirely science subjects, we were down to three students in my class, so small was the school at its beginning: John Goldsmith, Anthony Rau and myself. George Mandel was a year ahead of us and, as he constituted a class of one, he joined some of our lessons and socialized with us. I was closest to John; we visited one another’s homes during the holidays on a couple of occasions and we have made contact again in the last few years. One of John’s notable characteristics was that he was always (and still is) impeccably dressed. His trousers have pleats in them, his jackets hang straight, his hair is neatly combed. Such could not have been said of me. George, John and I were at Oxford concurrently, and we would see one another from time to time, but I could not say that we were all that close in those days. I think that the most accurate way to describe our relationships is that we were comrades in arms. (Oddly enough, one of the Oxford English Dictionary’s definitions of friend is “a

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permitted. Mr. Landau was a smoking addict and this prohibition was purgatory for him. So, he got hold of dozens of capped but empty milk bottles and spent an hour or two on Friday afternoon smoking furiously and blowing smoke into the bottles. This, then, he could inhale at will on the following Sabbath day.

person who is not an enemy or who is on the same side.” I guess that, by that definition, I had a whole lot of friends.)

There were a few others with whom I socialized; David Keller was one of them. He was a bit of a loner himself and was, I think, in inner conflict. *Vis-à-vis* me this showed itself as ambivalence. I recall that he had the custom of making his hand into a fist, with one finger bent so that its knuckle protruded, and then pounding me with it on my upper arm – which hurt like the dickens. Nevertheless, we would go for long walks together of a Saturday afternoon – a time of great freedom as no work was allowed then and it was not possible to fill the whole day with prayers.

One aspect of being in a boarding school for boys was that the absence of girls left us rather untutored in the art of friendship with the opposite sex. Of course, the too-short holidays provided opportunities for being with girls, but I think the lack of uncomplicated contact with them at school was undesirable. On the so-called sports day parents were invited to visit their children, and to watch a cricket match with them. Very occasionally a family would bring along their son’s more or less attractive sister. When this happened a large fraction of the boys would gravitate to where the damsel was standing in order to ogle her, and they would sidle around the field with her, should she change position. One had the feeling that the entire playing field tilted down towards the girl, much as a ship tilts if all the passengers shift to one side to view something of interest. Along the same lines, I vividly recall the time that an attractive junior matron’s helper was due to leave the school. On the last day of term, she was rumored to be willing to kiss selected boys and as a consequence a long line of boys, myself included, formed outside her room. Alas, Phillip Refson (who was otherwise a good mate) was ahead of me in the line and hogged all her available time (or energies), so I never got to receive my eagerly anticipated osculation.

Towards the end of my time at Carmel I had a meeting with David Stamler, the vice-principal and Rabbi Rosen’s other right hand. He had decided out of the blue to have one-on-one talks with each of the senior boys and, in the course of our chat, he asked me who were my friends. I, thinking certainly in terms of intimate friendships, replied that I did not really have any. I will never forget his reaction which, I felt, was one of shock, and carried the implication that this was a serious defect in me. “How could it have happened?” he wanted to know. And I, silently to

myself, asked “How could it happen that you learn this only now, where were you all this time? And, “If you find that it was so terrible, why did you do nothing to help me?” From recent correspondence with David Stamler I think I may have misjudged his attitude. He tells me that he had been concerned about the possibility that, due to my age-ability gap, my social relationships might be problematic and had discussed this with my mother – who agreed that this might be the case, but added that my father was not worried about this. His concern had more to do with whether I was being bullied – which he felt (and I largely agree) was not the case.

## **COURAGE**

Boarding schools do not necessarily breed courage in their students; avoidance of conflict is more their forte. But, nevertheless, some students manage to nurture this virtue and, in this connection, two incidents have lodged in my memory. The first took place at a time when the school was invaded by an unusual number of starlings whose prolific droppings were both unaesthetic and, probably, unhealthy. One of the masters acquired a shotgun and went outdoors, intending to decimate the flock or at least persuade them to find more hospitable quarters. One of the boys, who clearly felt deeply about animal rights, ran out, flung himself in front of the armed master, and cried out “Shoot me first, Sir.”

The second incident had to do with a comment that Rabbi Rosen made, on some strange impulse, to a few students about one of their number (who was not present when he made the remark). The comment was along the lines of: “He is a vegetarian, a pacifist and an animal-rights fanatic. Wouldn’t it be funny if he turns out also to be a homosexual?” The boy in question heard about this tasteless remark and demanded – and got – a public apology from the principal.

I learned about courage from these two incidents.

## **ON LEAVING CARMEL COLLEGE**

I left Carmel in 1957. A succession of principals followed Rabbi Rosen after his death in 1962, starting with David Stamler and then one of Rabbi Rosen’s sons, Jeremy (who, as did two of his brothers, also became a rabbi). The school’s facilities were greatly expanded, and a girl’s section was added. However,

eventually a combination of factors – the marginal economics of public boarding schools, the emergence of some good alternative Jewish day-schools and, of course, issues of personality – forced the school to close in 1997.

Carmel provided me with a rich world, and a very consistent one, from which I greatly profited. Every aspect of life was guided in some way, so that a child's need for order was very fully satisfied. Quite how we knew all the myriad rules I do not know; I do not recall them having been written down. There was a tone, at once moral and sensible, which permeated everything. And, there were a number of teachers whose styles, personalities and quirks were hugely responsible for our education in the broadest sense.

Having said all that, my experience of boarding school was such that I would take great pains (and did) not to have to send my children to one. I think the continued contact with one's parents, and particularly with the love that only they can provide in those early years, is more important than whatever advantages a boarding school might offer. On the other hand, I have to admit that there can be exceptions to my rule that one should shun boarding schools. John Goldsmith tells me that Carmel "saved him," allowing him to escape the attentions of a too-dominant father.

Sadly, an event occurred on my leaving Carmel which left a bad taste in my mouth and was responsible for my never returning to visit it as an 'Old Boy.' Soon after leaving the school, I wrote a short letter to Rabbi Rosen from home. I do not recall precisely what I said in it, but the purpose of the letter was clear: it was a signal that I wanted to continue our relationship, but on a somewhat different footing now that I was out in the world. So, after quite some deliberation, I started the letter using his first name – "Dear Kopul". Never before had I addressed him so, it was always "Rabbi Rosen", but I had overheard a few ex-pupils who were close to him use his first name and probably felt that it was a right of passage to do so. There was no reaction for a couple of weeks, and then a letter came from David Stamler. He wrote that Rabbi Rosen had been shocked and disappointed in my letter and that the use of such a person's first name came only after years of acquaintance and was a special privilege which I had certainly not been granted. Recently David Stamler has told me that Rabbi Rosen was truly furious about my letter and had even wanted to insist on personal apologies from both my parents and

me. After many days of argument, Stamler persuaded Rabbi Rosen to allow him to pen a letter to me, feeling that this would be the best way to minimize damage while satisfying Rabbi Rosen's need to react.

I was totally cast down by Stamler's letter, both because of its message and for the fact that it had not even come from the man himself. Why on earth could he not have guessed at, and appreciated, my motivation in so addressing him? If he wanted to keep our appellations on a more formal footing, surely he could have conveyed it more gently. It would have been easy for him to reply, expressing warm sentiments but adding something along the lines that he would be more comfortable staying with 'Rabbi Rosen' for some time, until we had got to know one another better as adults. But no, he had his aide slap me down, and made no personal effort to contact me thereafter. Having had what I had felt was a very close – almost parental – relationship with him for almost eight years, this put-down was devastating to me at the time. I still remember it with some distress after more than half a century has gone by. What I had thought was a warm two-way relationship was, I had learned, only so in my imagination. I said earlier that I was something of an intellectual racehorse, being trained to win prizes for the school, and I guess that once racing days are over, there's no more sugar for the horse. I have had similar experiences since then in my professional life which highlighted how little use people have for one, as soon as one is of no longer of use to them. Time has softened the hurts, but not entirely effaced them.

## **POSTSCRIPT**

After writing this chapter, I sent copies of my draft to a couple of friends who had attended Carmel, inviting their comments. This quickly mushroomed as the draft got more widely circulated and, in the end, I had some eight 'reviewers' who got back to me with their comments and with whom I had, in some cases lengthy, exchanges of letters. These were most interesting and illuminating. Several things were clear. First, that Carmel had been a very important experience for all of them; one which they were eager to share and explore. Second, that they had the highest regard for the school, many members of the staff and, in particular, for Rabbi Rosen. Nevertheless, my recounting of my experience of being put down by him after leaving Carmel touched a deep

nerve in many of them. It was clear that most of them had also seen a darker side to him (“Svengali-like grip” on people was one comment), and several of them had experienced disappointments in their relationships with him. I was far from alone in this. I will try to give a sense of what I gleaned from them. Their assessments fall into three main categories.

### Rabbi Rosen could be petty and unfeeling

As one correspondent put it:

“He could be very cruel. He had a great gift with words and sometimes used it to humiliate people in public. I remember him doing that once to [a student]. I don't remember the details but it was an egregious instance of someone punching well below his weight.”

“The provocations never seemed to justify the punishment. They were usually things that were trivial by most people's standards but had somehow got underneath Kopul's skin.”

“Kopul was capricious and temperamental, and couldn't help being so.”

“Kopul had hardly any friends because anyone close to him had to be a disciple, and it isn't easy to be both a disciple and a friend ... The only person ... who managed the feat was Stamler.” An anecdote illustrates how David Stamler walked this fine line. He once gave Rabbi Rosen a book entitled ‘The Gentle Art of Making Enemies’ and inscribed it “To Kopul, who excels in all the arts.”

### Charisma has its flip side

Almost no one who talks about Rabbi Rosen fails to mention his charisma. One of my correspondents introduced me to the ideas of the sociologist Max Weber who has written about charismatics. Weber points out that the basis of genuine charisma "lies...in the conception that it is the duty of those subject to charismatic authority to recognize its genuineness and to act accordingly. [This requires] complete personal devotion..." And, "The charismatic leader ... treats those who resist him [as] delinquent in duty ... It is men's duty to listen to him and follow his commands or his example." Weber explains that a charismatic need constantly to assure himself that he was the star, the centre of attention, and he could not tolerate any competition in this field.

All this explains Rabbi Rosen's lack of self-confidence and need to assert his dominance.

Mr. Warner (he who so-doubted my creative writing abilities) was responsible for organizing periodic chess matches. He explained once that he tried to schedule the annual match between boys and staff on a day on which he knew that Rabbi Rosen would be out of town. Otherwise he would be on the masters' team and would probably lose, and then he would hold a grudge against the boy who had beaten him.

### Rabbi Rosen could be inconstant in his affections

Rabbi Rosen had his favorites. I believed that I was one, and several of my correspondents reinforced this view. But, as my experience demonstrated, he could quickly turn against one, and for the most trivial of reasons. In one case, a favored pupil believes that he lost that status because he had bested Rabbi Rosen in a public supposedly-friendly verbal sparring match.

He would sometimes promise much but, apparently thoughtlessly, not follow through on the details. On one occasion a student had arranged to visit him and had bicycled a long way to do so, only to find that Rabbi Rosen had gone abroad without alerting him that he could not make the appointment. I think the most egregious instances of failed promises lay in his assurances of paternal guardianship. These constituted oral contracts which many students, myself included, believed to have been made either implicitly or, often, explicitly ("Think of me as a father.") but which he did not always make good on. More than one of my friends suffered a change of his attitude upon their leaving the school. I think he may have irrationally read one's departure from the school as a personal abandonment.



In summary, I have to say that I learned a lot from my exchanges with my friends – about Rabbi Rosen and, indirectly, about myself. In a nutshell, I learned that he was human. Like all of us, he was fallible; imperfect. Like all of us, he was capable of childish and hurtful behavior. But, he was also a great man who achieved great things. His flaws do not detract from that greatness, they give color and credibility to it. Moreover, appreciation of them can engender sympathy for him. He was a man who had his own demons and, I imagine, must have struggled

with them or at least suffered from them. A couple of my friends gently chided me for including critical material in describing Rabbi Rosen. “One should not speak ill of the dead” they said or implied. I understand this sentiment, but profoundly disagree with it. We can only fully appreciate someone when we know the whole person. If then he or she still seems remarkable, flaws and all, then indeed that person was remarkable. Rabbi Rosen was remarkable.

And, about myself, what did I learn? That, despite all I had learned there, I came out of Carmel socially naïve and immature. I accepted people uncritically at their own valuation of themselves. I took Rabbi Rosen on his own terms, and did not question them. I idealized him and expected him to act ideally. No one can live up to that standard, and one cannot have a deep and honest relationship with someone whom one idealizes. It has taken me over half a century to learn those simple lessons. They, too, were part of my Carmel education.