

JOE

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Everyone will remember the wonderfully informative paper given at our outing last June by Richard Hait. It was entitled “Jose.” I’m not offering a paper called “Joe” because I thought you were unable to translate.

What would I like to count as a beginning? Perhaps the horoscope of my genome, if I could read it, or the skeins of my DNA, woven by Clotho and Lachesis before I was born, if I could unravel them. The ministrations of my parents, maybe the vicissitudes of bedroom and bathroom, mapping my libidinal life, if I had not forgotten them. Or perhaps I should count those three or four seconds when I was eight or nine, and the setting sun gilded a window on a hill above the line of trees, and I decided to try to make something of myself. But tonight my subject is the kind of beginning we make when, looking back, we cut a slice more or less arbitrary, and say, “On the far side of that I was a boy, on this side of it I became as much of a man as I am likely to be.”

I make the slice in my case on a sunny morning in June 1958 when I left college and headed west on the New York State Thruway for the shore of Lake Ontario and my first job that could possibly have been permanent. I had been hired to edit a weekly newspaper in a village a bit north of the New York State Barge Canal, on the alluvial strip some six miles wide lying between the canal and the lake. The chief artery was no longer the canal, of course, but U.S. 104, the so-called Ridge Road, tracing the lake shore as it was before the last ice age, running parallel to the canal a mile or so on the north side of it, the side towards the lake—a two-lane road slipping through hamlets like Ridgeway, with apple orchards tumbling away on either side of it.

I was headed there because, so far as I had been able to discover, there were only two places on the eastern seaboard where a job was open for a newspaper editor and a second one for a Latin teacher. And for reasons I’ve forgotten, this choice seemed the better of the two. The woman I was to marry that August had majored in classics and was languishing in presumably chaste expectancy several hundred miles to the east, while I had borrowed her car. I owned no car, of course, having lived without much money from the day I went to college, my only real asset being a fairly large number of books, which my college had judged to be the best library in student hands and had honored by adding ten books to it.

The only job I had ever thought about was editing weekly newspapers. When I was in the eighth grade, I caught the mumps, and my mother, who had worked as a secretary, lightened my quarantine by teaching me to type. By the time I was sixteen, I could type very fast. I was sixteen in Clifton, New Jersey, fifteen miles from Manhattan, a city of some sixty thousand but without a center, divided among mills and truck farms and older and newer concentrations of mostly single-family homes. Clifton half-circled

around Passaic and adjoined Paterson, cities of a certain longevity, which each had a daily newspaper, the one published in Passaic being a staple in the homes of Clifton. In the years after World War II, a man named Augustine LaCorte had launched a daily paper for Clifton, the Leader. But the competition from Passaic and Paterson was insuperable, and the Leader quickly lapsed into weekly publication. Half of it was given over to gossip columns written by high-school students. No ex, no adultery, just lists of boys and girls nourishing crushes that they had foolishly supposed to be secret. Students bought this harmless rag, and I suppose parental interest in it was also green. I wrote Augustine LaCorte a detailed letter, showing signs of a moral fervor unhappily unexhausted with this particular expenditure. I told him there were more constructive practices at Clifton High School than hand-holding and asked whether he might not be betraying the heritage of Horace Greeley. Augie craftily offered me a job. For \$10 a week I was to write his newspaper.

This was never quite literally true. A short, always spiffily dressed man with a graying, neatly trimmed moustache, Augie would meet me when I came in after school on Mondays and lay out what he wanted me to do—what meetings he wanted me to cover, what question he wanted me to ask for the Inquiring Reporter column, and so on. I was left to my own devices for feature stories. He had an active insurance and real estate business and practiced law and kept the weekly editorial in his own hands. The rest was up to me.

The first months, there was actually another editorial employee, and for that first period he gave me my assignments. The last survivor from the daily, he introduced a quiet despair and melancholy into my sixteen-year-old working-class life. His name was Lester Nash and he was African American, the child of a large Clifton family, and his father laid carpets. Les was tall, good-looking, still young, and very lame. I never found out how he came to be lame. He lived now, not in Clifton, but in Greenwich Village, from which he commuted, and where he drank, it seems, with Maxwell Bodenheim, the poet and novelist from the south, who would publish My Life and Loves in Greenwich Village a year later and be shot to death that year. Les left on his desk one day a handsomely illustrated hard-bound copy of Sacher-Masoch's Venus in Furs, which gave me my first experience of elegant pornography. In the months before he disappeared, I read with admiration that graceful, degagé prose of his weekly column. I think I sensed even then that the odds in life against him were very long. He was the first person I ever met who wrote well.

So it was to gratify an urge towards newspaper work that I was heading west on the Thruway, an urge created by my year writing the Leader and unsatisfied by my part-time job in the public relations office at my college or my work at the same time, to make ends meet, as a stringer for the United Press, The New York Times, and the Utica Observer-Dispatch. It is a sad fact of my life that there have been few urges that went away disappointed. I had spent senior year daydreaming too much of editing a weekly. It's another sad fact that there were not, I think, many daydreams of my impending marriage.

So I was headed for Lyndonville. To zero in on Lyndonville for you, it is closer to Rochester than to Buffalo on the sixty mile stretch between them. To narrow the focus further, on the twenty miles of barge canal between Lockport, where Joyce Carol Oates grew up, and Medina, it is only half a dozen miles north of Medina, where Charles Carothers spent youthful summer days, as we heard in his recent budget paper. Those of you who are American historians may know it with gratitude, for this village raised and educated Lyman Butterfield, who edited the first five volumes of Jefferson's papers and spent the last twenty-one years of his working life as editor-in-chief of the Adams Family Papers. Any one of you may have noticed Lyndonville briefly in 1985, when by some accounts more than a hundred people came down with a condition later called Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. They seemed unable to go to school or work. This drew the attention of Time magazine. By the count of Dr. David Bell, a Lyndonville pediatrician who was the chief researcher in this outbreak, by 1987, two years later, two hundred fourteen adults and children were ill with the Lyndonville mono, as it was called. Now only nine hundred fifty-three people lived in Lyndonville at about that time, and about that many in the surrounding rural township. Illness on such a scale would seem to have been catastrophic. By other accounts, however, only one family was ever ill, and the mother happens to be Dr. Bell's office manager. I pass over this anomaly in favor of apples.

Lyndonville was a company town, and the company, sweetly enough, made applesauce. Lyndonville grew up athwart Johnson's Creek, named for a British Indian agent. The creek was dammed up with wood in 1836 for a mill that ground wheat for more than a hundred years. By 1958, the dam was a proper concrete one, some three acres of mill pond next to Main Street were bordered by a park and elementary school, and apples not wheat were the chief commodity. A few hundred yards off Main Street, out of sight from it, the Lyndonville Canning Company in its forty-second year of operation occupied a hundred thousand square feet of plant. Two New York City brothers had invested in the plant for a canner named Will Smith, who had devised a system of long tanks, with conveyors and paddles, for cooking applesauce continuously. I remember in front of the plant immense cones of apples, taller than the cannery itself, the old varieties of Baldwins, Macintoshes, and Cortlands, most of them now replaced with apples grown vineyard style, on trellises, easier to pick, like Galas, ladders no longer required. There is an acid in the soil around Lyndonville imparting a particular taste to the apples grown there, the people there like to think. The cannery operated just to or three months a year, but worked long days to process the apples before they ripened too far, turning out sixty-two hundred cases a day, saucing ten million pounds of apples a season. The workers were simply the women of the village and farms around, who slipped back into the community after the short season to collect unemployment. The granddaughters of the founders had brought husbands home from college who were now officers of the company. Still youthful, they lived in modest homes in the village and turned up on boards and in church with the druggist, the doctor, and the man who owned the hardware store, and became my friends. Another officer was an architect, who had been sent up by one of the investigating brothers to keep tabs on the other brother, who by rumor was a playboy. This officer had a home with a wide lawn that ran down to the mill pond, where he had a boat house. The comfortableness of this family company, this company town, was periodically summed up for me when the boathouse doors would

open on a summer's day and Harold would emerge at the wheel of a long and glistening Chris-Craft, sporting a yachting cap. Two or three turns around the mill pond and he would back his shining boat out of sight and close the doors behind him.

In Lyndonville, I found a room until August as the sole lodger with an elderly woman, a widow for more than twenty years, who by chance was a distant relative of mine by marriage, her late husband and I both having descended from an Allen Breed, who was in Lynn, Massachusetts, in 1656. The windowless library in the center of her gray brick house at the edge of town was also much the center of her life, for she had an appalling number of interests and was an exact reader in all of them. She had merry eyes behind silver-rimmed glasses and a weak chin that rapidly became double. Whether she was agreeing with you or disagreeing, she would screw her eyes closed, smile, and give her head a vigorous shake. Since this narrative is as much about prose style as anything else, I should point out right away that she had an excellent one, clear and eloquent. As an editor, I invited half a dozen people in the village each to do an essay on what their religion meant to them. Here is Ione Breed on why she was a Methodist: John Wesley, she wrote, "was so deeply moved by the presence of God that his whole life was changed. He inspired all who heard him and opened their hearts to God. He went directly to those most in need, men and women who never entered a church, who were heavy burdened, and who had no hope here nor for the hereafter." If I had had a trace of humility, I would have stayed at home to vacuum the carpets and asked Mrs. Breed to go up the street to edit the newspaper.

The office of the Lyndonville Enterprise, where I was to spend the next year by myself, was a white frame cottage on a quiet street around the corner from Main Street. The paper had once been printed there, and the first floor was dominated by a large disused flatbed press. At the head of a narrow stair, under the roof, was a small office, paneled in pine, separated from the stairs by a half door. Over my typewriter I could look down through a small window in the gable through the willows to the slow brown movement of Johnson's Creek.

And so we come to the publisher of the Enterprise, the one wholly generous person in this story and thus deservedly its eponymous character. Joseph Giampapa when I met him was a tall strong man in his mid thirties, comfortably but not excessively padded around his middle, with curly dark hair, a smallish face, small eyes behind rimless glasses, and a high, somewhat husky voice. His grandfather on his father's side had been apprenticed at age nine to a baker in New York City, but was called to the Mafia when he was twelve. The grandfather, involved with gambling, was ultimately made a consigliere, ranking at the level of sottocapo, or underboss, in one of the families, of which there were five in and around New York City in the 1960s, when Joe Vallachi testified before the McClellan committee of the Senate. The grandfather was allowed out of the mob in later life to return to baking, and of his four sons who had been Mafiosi, three also got out, including Joe's father, who came to own a large bakery in Newark and then several bakeries. Joe was born in Newark, one of eight children, but during the Depression grew up in Passaic. By coincidence, I had come five hundred miles from Clifton only to go to work for someone from Passaic.

From first to last, Joe was a printer. He dropped out of ninth grade, but by that time he already had a little press, on which he did business cards. At thirteen he wrote the White House asking to print the invitations to the wedding of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt's daughter Anna, who was being married for the second time, and received back a pleasant letter telling him that, unfortunately, the invitations had already been printed. At the age he was writing the white House, he was a pick-up man for the mob. He dealt with collectors, people in the numbers racket. Their customers filled out slips with three numbers that guessed the last three digits of the total handle that would be bet that day at a Brooklyn racetrack. Joe as a boy went unsuspected as he ran the slips and money from the collector to the controller or bank and then ran any winnings back to the collectors.

In Lyndonville, I never had a crime to report. Joe's environment in Passaic was a little different. The numbers racket there came to be overseen by Willie Moretti under Frank Costello, the most famous racketeer in America. Possibly because Moretti was viewed by the mob at large as weirdly garrulous, whether before a congressional committee in ad hoc press conferences, he was killed in 1951 in a New Jersey restaurant. Suspicion naturally fell upon the Genovese family, where Vito Genovese competed with Costello for influence. Someone in the Genovese family had evidently contracted with the Mangano family for Moretti's execution, since a soldier in the Mangano family was eventually identified as one of the four men who hit Moretti. To provide himself with an alibi, Albert Anastasia, a friend of Moretti's but also a Mangano soldier, had made an excuse to borrow Moretti's car and chauffeur the morning Moretti was killed to get his back X-rayed at St. Mary's Hospital, Passaic. St. Mary's was where I was born. One was never very far from mob violence. Our home while I was in Clifton High School was part of a sedate crescent of small Cape Cods not two hundred yards from a dairy farm. One year, a Mrs. Spallina, a widow, together with her three quiet, pleasant adult children, moved into the house next door. Her husband had been shot dead in his store, the weapon a shotgun, traditional in executions by the Sicilian Mafia.

Boy printer, boy bagman, at eighteen Joe rented a store in Passaic and turned out letterhead, invitations, and raffle tickets until he went into the army in 1943, where he served in Europe as a sergeant in the military police and earned a Purple Heart. At war's end, he married his childhood sweetheart, and in 1949, having always wanted his own newspaper, he bought a printing company in Lockport and the newspaper that came with it, the Lyndonville Enterprise. Economically, it was always thereafter a struggle. A Democrat in a Republican area, he had trouble bidding successfully for legal advertising. In the year or so I knew him, to support his wife and three children, he was a private detective on the side, spying chiefly on errant husbands. By choice or not, he never really left the Mafia. More than once, as we were getting ready to put the paper to bed of a Wednesday evening, a call would come to him from downstate, saying that the sources of printing there—the sources for numbers slips or sheets for baseball pools—had dried up temporarily. And Joe would have to stop whatever he had been doing, print what they needed, throw it into his station wagon, and head east on the Thruway to meet someone near Syracuse or Utica who had come up from the city. People would wait for the

Enterprise every Thursday morning in the confectionery store and other places around town; and if they ever noticed a slight delay in its arrival, they never said anything.

It also worked the other way around. When somebody owed Joe money and had skipped town, I would see him consult a small notebook and make a call to a member of “The Hand” operative in Chicago or Davenport, Iowa, or somewhere else. A gentle and affectionate father, he was determined that his three children would go to college. Only a few years after I had left Lyndonville, Joe started losing weight, and in November 1964 went into a VA hospital in Buffalo. He was dead of stomach cancer by January. He was thirty-nine. All three of his children in fact graduated from college, his two sons are lawyers, and his oldest grandson is also a lawyer, having graduated from Amherst and Harvard.

This is a story, you see, of a city and a village five hundred miles apart—Passaic, even grimmer today than it was then, and Lyndonville, still ninety-eight percent Caucasian, sweet with apple blossoms, living off apples.

Beyond my mistakes and shortcomings as the editor of Joe’s newspaper, which I’ll get to soon enough, there was also, sometimes, simply bad luck. I had been on the job for only a week or two when I discovered from the police blotter that the sheriff had intervened in a fight between two gangs of boys, one from Lyndonville, one from Medina. Above a brief account, I wrote the headline “Police Nip Rumble / At Edge of Town.” The day after the paper was out, a large pie-faced man in suit and tie appeared in the office and identified himself as Francis Rumble. He was standing for reelection as County Clerk and wanted a retraction. I told him I was new to the town and regretted I hadn’t heard of him, but there was nothing to retract. All people had to do was read the story. He said many people only read the headlines. I ended the conversation by telling him, in effect, that if he didn’t stir it, it wouldn’t stink.

Some mistakes I learned from quite easily. For example, I learned the beauty of the phrase, “In a speech prepared for delivery . . .” The director of veterans affairs for Orleans County told me one Tuesday in an interview that he was giving a speech the next night denouncing the Board of Supervisors for their total lack of support. In his paraphrase, he ripped the Supervisors up and down: they were blind to the needs of veterans and had cockeyed priorities. And he would conclude the speech by resigning. I reported a speech that had been given, since Wednesday evenings we printed the paper. On Thursday, as you can already imagine, he called to inform me that what little he’d said the previous evening was nothing like that, he certainly hadn’t resigned, and his mother, who read the Enterprise faithfully, was in precarious health. He inquired in a vague sort of way whether I was up on the law of involuntary manslaughter. Of course he did get a correction. Too lengthy a one, I thought afterwards. I’ve learned that small pills go down the easiest.

My prose style—which is to say, in some sense, my character—was no matter of a simple blunder this first year; not simply a mistake I made and learned from. In The Great Gatsby, Nick Carraway describes himself as having been “rather literary in college-

-one year I wrote a series of very solemn and obvious editorials for the Yale News . . .” Mine were not that good. My style was best when I was simply reporting, nailed to people and places too concrete to give me space to worry about how I was writing them up. There was the country doctor, for instance, still practicing at seventy-eight, practicing more out of his office now, which was his home, since he’d had a heart problem a decade earlier, saying he would go on as long as he could pull his coat on. He’d been doing it since 1901, when he’d spend all day in his buggy, seeing poor farmers who were sick and by themselves, sometimes milking the sick man’s cows before he left, going by one of the man’s neighbors, telling the neighbor that the man needed help. Or other times deep in the country, delivering the baby of a poor woman, being unable to leave without first sewing some sort of clothing for the newborn. It’s hard to go wrong with that sort of material. During the year, I am satisfied there was a good deal of straightforward reporting, including a series on the hundreds of migrant workers who came to the country each year to pick the apples and cherries and harvest the onions, beets, and potatoes on the muck, as land south of the ridge was called. I concentrated on their housing conditions, the windows without screens, the rents they were paying, until word started trickling in to Joe that there had been just about enough of this, didn’t he think?

It’s not the reporting but the editorials and columns that I blush about so often “that now I’m braz’d to it.” I was all right as the reportorial bee, generally wretched as the editorial spider. “. . . The question becomes all to this,” say Swift, near the beginning of The Battle of the Books: “Whether it is the nobler being of the two, that which, by a lazy contemplation of four inches round, by an overweening pride, feeding, and engendering on itself, turns all into excrement and venom, producing nothing at all but flybane and a cobweb; or that which, by a universal range, with long search, much study, true judgment, and distinction of things, brings home honey and wax.”

I could read this newspaper after more than forty years because it had been preserved in two places. The Lee-Weedon Memorial Library in Medina had microfilmed the entire run, from 1906 until publication ceased in 1962. The only gap, I was chagrined to discover, is the first six months of my editorship. But in 1958 I had put my parents on the subscription list, and some years ago my mother sent me what she had, yellowed of course, the staples removed that had been there for mailing, all of it bound up with red ribbon. The last six months of my year was missing, however. So two readers, five hundred miles apart, both had trouble, apparently. One, it seems, couldn’t bear to get started; the other evidently had had enough after six months and thrown the papers away unopened. This is a particularly stinging indictment, since one of these readers was my mother.

My mother had clipped only one thing out, and I can tell from the hole on the editorial page of this issue in August that it was a column I wrote the week before I headed east to be married, and it was about the woman I was going to marry. I think my mother clipped it to add it to my baby book, God bless the mark, but she may have had the prescience to make sure it didn’t survive. I remember Joe had a few words to say about this column while we were together at the printing plant, dealing on and off with

the two other employees there. One of them was a hardbitten, aging Valkyrie named Vi, plying the linotype with her nicotine-stained fingers, dropping slugs with typos in them into the pot of molten metal at her left hand as if she were consigning males to perdition. The other was a stocky, bespectacled printer of Polish descent named Walt, who did make-up, and with an amused truculence would occasionally sabotage the aesthetics of my newspaper by filling out inch-high gaps in columns on the editorial page with messages like “Quick Service on Rubber Stamps.” Joe would tell me war stories as we worked, I reading proof, he lifting stacks of slugs from linotype trays into the formes on the composing table, surrounded by presses in a twilight room redolent of printer’s ink. On this occasion he paused. He had read this column on my wife-to-be. He told me quietly, “I wouldn’t know this woman if I met her on the street.” This was simply the most devastating piece of literary criticism I have ever received. And I don’t remember whether I also understood it for what it may have been and certainly ought to have been: a caution about the marriage itself.

What I find least credible as I read my old editorials is the unabashed Christian apologetics in them. How’s this for a sentence in a village newspaper? “Where government has been instituted to permit and promote the development of men in certain respects, God demands total development and exists as the source of all blessings . . .” Or this, in the course of an editorial appeal for the donation of a car to get migrant children to summer school? “[Maybe] someone has a vehicle standing out back which he uses so little that he could afford to spare it for the purpose of ‘suffering these little children to go unto [Jesus] and His Word’ for this brief summer.” My editorial during Easter week celebrated the Resurrection, lightly disguised as a seasonal description.

Self-righteousness is probably worse than apologetics and it certainly played a part in my most consequential editorial. I had somehow come into possession of a letter sent out by the local Knights of Columbus council announcing a raffle. The letter began as follows: “Over the years our Council has always had the willingness to promote more Catholic Action, particularly in the field of Youth, Charitable, and Educational matters. As you know, our funds have been limited. With the many demands on the generosity of our membership ‘The Columbia Sweepstakes’ has been presented and adopted by our State Council to assist us in carrying out the program of this Council. This can now be done without requiring additional per capita assessments or increased yearly dues . . . We are enclosing one book of twelve tickets, each ticket calling for a donation of \$1. The seller of a book returns \$10 to the Council, the two remaining tickets are the seller’s bonus . . . What easier way is there for you to assist your Council in attaining much needed funds.”

Now it’s unfortunately true that I ended the editorial that I had begun by printing this letter with a pharisaical allegation that the Knights had—and I regretfully quote—“brought dishonor to themselves and disrepute to their Church by permitting the lovely word ‘generosity’ to become involved with personal gain.” But sanctimony aside, there were also certain facts. Gambling, including lotteries, was unlawful in New York State at the time except for bingo under certain circumstances. Sellers of the tickets were invited

to take a seventeen and one-half percent commission. And sellers of winning tickets would get an additional two hundred fifty dollars. I pointed all this out.

The effects were strenuous. Joe came by the office the Monday after the editorial had appeared. He had spent part of the day as usual making the rounds of stores and firms that advertised in the Enterprise. It seems that my editorial had been posted in the Medina meeting hall of the Knights of Columbus. Since Thursday, the sweepstakes had been canceled statewide. And as Joe had made his rounds, observant Catholic that he was, merchant after merchant simply threw him out. I remember his mentioning a shoe store that had advertised in the Enterprise for years. The owner had personally shown him the door. Our revenue that week fell thirty percent.

As Joe sat in the side chair up in my small attic office and recounted his day, he was obviously mortified. There we were, publisher and editor, with five hundred fifty-two paid subscribers between us, in a little frame building next to a creek, each of us living more or less hand to mouth. Finally, he spotted a pile of second-class mail on my table that I hadn't gotten to yet. He banged his fist on the table and ordered me to open the damned mail. And then he went home. What knocks me out now as it did then is that he never told me not to do it again. Somehow, this ninth-grade drop-out, this child of the Mafia had apprehended one of the glories of newspaper work as a calling, one of its great responsibilities and its privileges. I mean the independence of the editorial room from management.

No doubt some two or three of you are quietly asking, there were nine hundred fifty people in the village, about that many in the surrounding township. Say, nineteen hundred men, women, and children all told. How could you possibly have had a paid circulation of five hundred fifty-two? Well, for one thing, I immediately got a high-school student to write a gossip column. Also, of course, the world was both smaller and larger then. Smaller, because there wasn't CNN to draw every village into the global village. Larger, because the village itself was closer to being everyone's world, and they wanted to know what was going on in it.

I also ran a couple contests. The first was conducted through the high school, for the best essay on New York State history. I had arranged for a towboat company to take the winner for a ride on the barge canal. The second I had not thought through so carefully. It had to do with who, by a certain deadline, came closest to predicting American League standings at the time of the All Star break. The winner would get to see a Yankees game. Come the All Star game, I had not worked out the details of the prize, something of a challenge, since there was no money.

The winner was a boy about twelve whose last name was Breeze, a quiet towhead, son of a school custodian known universally as Breezie, who had somehow lost most of an arm. In the event, I packed the winner in my car, still my wife's car, which was this time broken down on the Thruway. Once we had gotten to Clifton, the winner and I slept side by side in twin beds in my old bedroom. On the day of the game, because I had to see about a car repair that would get us back without mishap, my father battled the

George Washington Bridge and Bronx traffic and went to the game with the boy, who would have emerged from a stairwell as I once did and been stunned by that vivid and incomparable green. Our editorials may have been portentous, but our paper had a personal touch.

That my editorials and columns, as I have already said, lacked charity and fellow feeling and at least once were flatly racist saddens me now even if it shouldn't surprise me. It's the more grievous that more than once I found Joe reading the newspaper I had written for him, innocent in some respects as Thoreau's woodcutter, contentment on his face, taking obvious pride in the printed word. Lyndonville held a referendum on legalizing bingo, and here is a sentence from my editorial as the vote drew near. I am describing a scene in Olcott, a lakeside community not far off where bingo had already been legalized. "Whole rooms of women sit with glazed expressions in a state bordering on hypnosis, while their children run at large through the amusement parks across the street or remain neglected at home." Here are a couple of sentences from an editorial on schooling in America: "Present-day teenaged Americans . . . orient themselves not to the realm of thought and things as it actually exists but, rather, to a gauzily sophisticated world [that] the average parent permits (indeed sometimes encourages) them to fictionalize as an adjunct to their temporary freedom from the dullnesses and drudgery of adulthood . . . The net product is, for the most part, so many sham adults . . ." A month or so earlier I had written this sentence: "Although Lyndonville is lucky in having less than its share of young punks, there remains in evidence a smattering of the sort of kid who rouses himself each day in time to bare his chest to the noonday sun, hold up a post over by the millpond, then grease up for a long evening of comparable loitering." The factitious smartness of these sentences is bad enough; but worse, I write as if I am reporting from a zoo. As opposed to Terence's great sentence, that nothing human is indifferent to him, I write as if I had no part in any of this.

Style is the person, in the famous aphorism. And the proof of this is the coincidence of so much pretentious and otherwise bad writing with a massive failure in sympathy. After Nelson Rockefeller had won the governorship of New York in November, I wrote to the campaign and asked for press credentials to the inauguration, figuring that a junket to Albany would make a pleasant break. The credentials arrived promptly. Shortly thereafter, however, I received a letter withdrawing them. I had always attributed this to Republican retaliation for my hard-hitting series on migrant housing. I have lately come to believe, however, that the Republican campaign had now sampled my prose style and was simply afraid I might write something.

There was, perhaps, glacial improvement. I think my editorials improved from interminable to prolix. And in at least one editorial, I think I got the tone right and kept it right for more than a sentence or two. On this occasion, the body of a woman had washed up at a hamlet a couple miles north of Lyndonville. As I remember, the body was officially estimated to have been in the water for eight days and may have floated over from Toronto. In any event, it was not a figure that invited urgent attempts at resuscitation. This notwithstanding, the sheriff went flying down the main street of our village and another police car a little while thereafter, past the elementary school on the

left and the high school on the right, and I wrote this: “Villagers were unanimous last week in their disapproval of one of the more conspicuous details involved in the discovery and subsequent identification of the body of the unfortunate Canadian woman. En route to the Shadigee beach, the greatly excessive rate of speed with which the Sheriff’s Patrol and one of Lyndonville’s own unmarked police cars went through Lyndonville and Yates was generally conceded to be both highly dangerous and unusually foolish . . . The ambulance from Medina has torn through settled areas, its siren wide open, on nonemergency calls. And there have been reports that our own Fire Department has, at times, returned with unseemly haste from the scene of a fire.” A couple of weeks thereafter I was pulled over by a deputy sheriff, and we discovered together that my driver’s license had expired. When I was settling up with the judge in Medina later on, he told me that they had been out to get me. And I was gratified to think that an editorial had come to a little something, and this time without a thirty percent drop in our revenue.

To move towards a conclusion of sorts on something of a poetic note, I’ll quote for a last time, and here from a column I published forty-four years ago, come the day after tomorrow: “October! Rouged like an aging courtesan, she breathes a smoky must of change, death and hopeless vitality. Her acrid perfume cloaks her rot and she is flecked with brown . . . The birch’s yellow is reflected in the fat of her neck. Her creamed skin beads for a last time with the passionate languors of Indian summer, and surfeited beyond pleasure, jaded past desire, she fills her throat with a liquid coolness sweeter and more inevitable than that for which Aesculapius was offered sacrifice. With the yew tree upon her like a bedcurtain, she takes a final lover, whose kiss alone dries wounds which Time forgot—the central wound, made by Time itself . . . October! A man straddles it ‘like a Colossus,’ one foot in dusty September grass, the other in November’s first wet snow.”

Now this, of course, falls a good deal short of Swinburne on the worst day of his life. But nevertheless, that one line at least—“The birch’s yellow is reflected in the fat of her neck”—I don’t entirely repudiate. I can actually imagine someone saying at the time, “That lad has his moments. What he needs is a good editor.” Well, of course, that was the problem. I was the editor.

I think the pretentiousness of my style was actually a symptom, and like some other symptoms, perhaps, the worst part of the disease. In fact, I missed the academy—what people on the outside call aka-deem. Because of another fact as well, that at the end of a year as editor I had a baby son and couldn’t support us on sixty-five dollars a week, I had to take a job teaching school in Lyndonville. When a high-school student I knew heard I was going to do this, she said, with disappointment all over her face, “What a comedown!” And of course in some ways, it was. In any case, over the next two years, the Giampapas and I saw less of each other, and then after I had gone off to graduate school, I never saw Joe again.

I did, not long ago, visit with his wife and Tony, his older son, in Tony’s law offices in Clifton, close as always to Passaic, where they had returned under hard conditions after the

disaster of Joe's death. Josephine had been remarried for a quarter century now. Joe's sister was there, too, who had carried letters back and forth between Joe and Josephine when they lived on opposite sides of the street and were twelve and thirteen. It was they, not I, who brought up the Mafia and talked about it at length, as one of the long and not tragic threads running through their family. Dead husbands and fathers sometimes get mixed reviews. Joe doesn't. Other sons, from other families, look all their lives for a father figure. I suppose I must count myself one of those, for Joe was the first of a line for me, and hardly the least worthy.

Joe entrusted me with his newspaper when I was twenty-two. No dailies covered Lyndonville. For a year I was the imperfect mirror it held up to itself. The village was porous to a newcomer despite all the families that had been there forever and interlocked. When I stopped back for an afternoon not long ago and exchanged memories with someone I had never known, she said, "Well, it's always fun to come home!" She couldn't have meant me, or at least she wouldn't have been entitled to, since I lived there for so small a fraction of my life. But in fact it was a community then and may be one now, and sadly enough, the only one there is for me to go back to.

As you probably know, peoples in many times and places—from the Greeks of the fifth century B.C.E. to the Kwakiutl Indians of the northwestern America in this century—have emergence myths. Oedipus, his father, and grandfather, for instance, all had names saying that they were lame or their feet were swollen because the Greeks wanted to believe that each of us is self-sprung like a plan and has that sort of autonomy, free of such kindred as parents. "It is a universal characteristic of men born from the Earth," wrote Claude Lévi-Strauss, "that at the moment they emerge from the depth they either cannot walk or they walk clumsily."

In 1958, the clay was still heavy on my feet and ankles. Like the protagonist of every Bildungsroman, I had dragged up with me into the light the moral binarism of adolescence. I found myself autonomous, but I used that autonomy uneasily and awkwardly. I had begun, nonetheless, making myself felt in the adult world every once in a while. That is to say, I had begun. Each of you, perhaps, has made such a cut as I make about June 1958, and you too have thought, perhaps, how here on this side, just on this side you can read all the elements that will explain the rest of your life. This was the cut that I make.

(This paper is for Tom Gephardt.)