

Chapter 23 - Dick Has Disappeared

School resumed in September of 1948 and the Brighton class of 1952 had suddenly grown larger. New kids had joined us from the Allen's Creek School district. Their grade school was located in Pittsford near the borders of Brighton and Penfield, and upon graduation, the students were eligible to attend Brighton High. And many of them did.

The next two years are a blur. I was a good B student. I didn't push myself and tried to stay under the radar. If you stood in the middle of the herd at Brighton, and did nothing to call attention to yourself, nobody paid much attention to you. I made no trouble and my parents, as far as I knew, were not concerned about me. I had some friends but school wasn't my focus. I played no sports nor joined any of the after-school events or organizations. I was not a self-starter like Brother Jim and nobody came forth to be my guide or mentor. I was just putting my time in, punching a mental time clock when I left school and not thinking much about the next day. I could have been working on an assembly line or serving in the army. At least then I would have gotten a paycheck for my efforts.

In September of 1950 I returned to "the Hallowed Halls of Brighton" as they used to say. I had had another wonderful summer at Camp Joncaire living in my alternate world of reality and I was busy adjusting to my reentry and returning to my routine. About a week or so into the new school year I realized that my friend Dick Feldman wasn't there. He has disappeared.

I don't remember how or when Dick and I became friends. Perhaps he does, but I am trying to build this memoir just on my memory. We were complete opposites. Dick was a very tall, skinny kid who had problems with asthma and with his health in general. Bright and talented, he played the piano, painted and was an excellent student. I was none of those. About the only thing that we had in common was that neither of us was a part of the student mainstream. We also both had a good sense of humor and perhaps that was what had brought us together.

So where was Dick? Was he sick again? I called his house and he answered. A good sign. He told me that he was no longer going to Brighton High and had been at Harley School since the beginning of the school year. I was surprised, and as I thought about it, somewhat envious. Harley School, a place where I hadn't spent any time since my kindergarten days but knew much about. Cliff Whiting, Joncaire's owner and Director, was Head of the Upper School there and also taught Chemistry. So was Bruce Davidson, Joncaire's Associate Director, who taught

American History, a favorite subject of mine. I knew many of Harley's students because we had spent summers together at Joncaire. High on my list was that Cousin Andy and my friend Kermit Steinberg had gone there since Eighth Grade. And, as you now know, I didn't like Brighton and felt like I was just treading water there.

It all seemed to make sense. I told Father and Mother that I wanted to go to Harley. I recall that it cost about \$800 a year - a considerable sum at the time. To put that in proper perspective, Google tells me that in 1950, the average cost of American car was then about \$1,500 - about twice the cost of my Junior year. There were no questions or any discussion. If that's what I wanted, I could go. Perhaps Father and Mother were aware of my unhappiness at Brighton although I had tried to be stoic about it. That was a Cohen Family trait that I think I had inherited from Mother. I was quickly enrolled in the Eleventh Grade and soon joined Dick and Andy as a new classmate. While I didn't know it at the time, my life had begun anew.

Harley was a small private school located on Clover Street in Brighton. You may recall that Clover Street was the old Indian path that once led past the edge of our neighborhood and then eventually down to New York State's Finger Lakes region. In good weather I could ride my bike to school, about a mile, retracing a route that Louis Thomas de Joncaire might have also traveled. Harley could have been called a "prep" school (short for "preparatory"), but we didn't think of it that way because it differed so from the well-known prep schools of the day like Andover and Exeter. Harley was co-ed, there were no dorms or other living facilities and just about everybody who went there lived in Rochester. "Country day school" was a more appropriate reference. The students came from typical middle-class families; their parents were often business people or professionals. They were generally not a part of Rochester's social class.

Founded in 1917, Harley was a part of the "progressive educational movement" of the time. Classes were small, ranging from 10 to 25 students each. We called our teachers by their first names - Cliff, Bruce, Lanny, Emily.... We enjoyed that as it made us feel older, and it helped our teachers get to know us better. It made our discussions with them easier, more comfortable. We could often speak our minds because the barrier between student and teacher has been loosened. And that closeness allowed our teachers to know when we weren't living up to their expectations.

Harley's school motto was, and still is, "Become What Thou Art." The school's job was to see that we did.

I had taken two years of French at Brighton High. Mrs. Brown hadn't been able to teach me much. Learning a foreign language was another skill that had come to me in a very short supply. I was able to perfect a nice "Franch hackcent" and enjoyed using it when I mangled English the way Danny Kaye did. But not much more. When I transferred to Harley I thought that my Gallic days were over; my parents thought otherwise. "French was the international language of the day....French would prove invaluable later in my life....Three years of the language would look good on my college applications." I joined Madame's French class.

Madame was one of the few teachers at Harley whom we didn't call by her first name, which was Dinah ("Dee-na"). Dinah Windholz. She was a charming, elegant woman, about 50. Pure French. She had met her husband, Harry, when he was an American "doughboy" serving in France during World War I. She came to Rochester with him as his war bride and then to Harley to teach her native language. Despite her more than 30 years in America, she retained her French Èlan and her lovely "hackcent."

Harley graded on a six-week cycle and a few weeks after I arrived, I got my first report card. It was pretty good, especially considering what a tough school Harley was supposed to be. One exception - a "D" in French. I was shocked. I had never gotten a "D" at Brighton, nor many "C's" either. I asked to talk to Madame and we met one afternoon after French class.

I told Madame that I was surprised to have gotten a "D" from her. She gave me a sweet, but not condescending smile, and told me that I shouldn't have been as I wasn't working very hard. Nothing else. She was right, of course. I tried harder and finished the year with a B or B-. Madame and I were both satisfied. The 1952 "Comet," Harley's year book, was dedicated to Madame. She autographed her page for me with the following:

*"To Johnie that I enjoyed so very much even
though his French was not always "epatant".
Tres affectueusement.
Dinah Windholz."*

For those who were lucky enough not to have taken French - "epatant" means *amazing, splendid, ripping*.

Many years later Roz and I are in St. Remy, in the Provencal region of France. We are

visiting Mike and Susan Feinstein, Rochester friends who have a house there. They are having a dinner party for us so that we can meet some of their local friends. The guests arrive and I find that most of them don't speak English. Mike is fluent in French and Susan is more than just proficient. Roz had four years of French in high school and still speaks it as she, unlike I, has a knack for foreign languages. The conversation flows freely in French. I sit there quietly. As it progresses, I find myself understanding enough of it so that I generally know what they are talking about. My Harley French that has long been buried deep inside me begins to percolate. I think to myself, "Merci, Madame."

Harley prepared me for college. Unlike Brighton, we were given our assignments in batches of time. We were told what would be covered in the coming week and it was our responsibility to be prepared for what would be discussed during each class. That's how it would work in college and we learned how to do it. Sometimes, however, I was not always successful at it.

We were to read Thomas Hardy's "Return of the Native" in "The Boomer's" English Literature class. It was a long book and we would have enough time to plow through it before our class discussion and a test on it. I put off starting the novel. I was not interested in Hardy (knowing nothing about him, of course) nor in mid-19th Century rural England. The time was getting short and I finally began. It was slow going. Sunday morning, the day before the assignment was due, and I still had many pages to go.

I retreat to my room, settle into my easy chair and read. And read. The hours drag by and the end of the book isn't yet in sight. Thomasin Yoebright and Diggory Venn are no Scarlett O'Hara and Rhett Butler, nor is Egdon Heath as exciting as is Civil War Atlanta. I keep checking to be sure that there is a last page. I have a quick supper and resume my solitary reading. Around midnight I finish. I am exhausted, but I have learned two things - I don't care much for Thomas Hardy and I am a procrastinator. I vow to do something about the latter. Sometime.

As my Junior year progressed, I learned that Harley was a school of “inclusion.” Because of its smaller student body, just about everybody participated. I served on the student council, sang in the school choir and acted in “Date with Judy,” our Junior year play. I also chaired the Supply Committee, the group responsible for seeing that every Harley student had the necessary pens, pencils, notebooks and other educational materials. An exciting challenge! I wrote for the SHRDLU, our school's occasional blab sheet, thus beginning my lifelong experience with trying to master and tame the written word. (In case anyone is wondering, SHRDLU was half of the nonsense phrase - “*Etaoin shrdlu*” - it was used by typesetting machine operators to mark the spot when they made a mistake in setting the type for a newspaper story. (Courtesy again of Google.)

The world of sports accepted me. I joined the soccer team, coached by “The Boomer.” He had been born in England and, like many English boys, had learned to play the game as a child. He was a stocky, solid athlete who could pound a soccer ball from mid-field to the goal. Hence the nickname “The Boomer,” which was openly used only by a select group of athletes who were his stars. Our team did well and I had enough game time in my senior year to win my letter “H” in the sport.

I also played basketball - Junior Varsity as I still hadn't grown much since my growth hormone pill days. We had just enough players for a full squad and a few on the bench. I had some time on the court, but only scored once during my two years. I haven't forgotten that moment. As we move up the court, someone passes me the ball. I see an opening and dribble somewhat clumsily towards our opponent's basket. When I am stopped by one of their guards the ball almost instinctively comes up and out of my hands. Swish! Two points. We lost the game, but I got into the score book.

And then there was baseball. It was nothing like our pickup games on the Victory Garden lot. Hardball and fast. The best I can say about my performance is I was included in the team photo for the yearbook. Photographed for posterity.

Time moved so much faster at Harley than at Brighton. It was as if I had been able to extend my Joncaire days into a yearlong event. My senior year began and Donn Dickason, a Harley junior and fellow transfer from Brighton, joined our circle of friends. He was an interesting mix - street-

smart, casually but carefully dressed in a manner that would become popular in the 1960's, quiet and perhaps not particularly happy about being at Harley. He was muscular and an easy, natural athlete. But there was something else there - a keen intelligence and a self-confidence that he had not yet learned to effectively manage. We become casual friends.

Donn had access to the family car and he proposed that we hang out together some weekend evenings. There was one problem, however. In New York State then, as now, you couldn't operate a car at night until 18 when you became a senior driver. Neither of us was; Donn was creative, however. Once the sun has set, he could legally drive at night as long as there was a senior license holder in the car with him. He told his parents that I had a senior license; they took his word. I did not volunteer to show my license, nor was I asked about it.

Friday night comes and Donn and his father pick me up at home. We drive back to his house and drop off his father. Donn takes over the wheel. We round up the rest of our gang - usually Andy, Kermit and Jud Patterson, one of Donn's classmates - and go cruising. Two in the front, three in the back. Donn cranks up the radio and we sing along with The Four Aces - "Just a Garden in the Rain" or with Kay Starr - "The Wheel of Fortune." Les Paul and Mary Ford have just revolutionized the popular music world with their multiple track recording of "How High the Moon?" and we also join in with them. We are looking for something, but don't know what. We stop at Don and Bob's drive-in for coffee, a coke and a burger or hot. We avoid the bars and the cops. There is talk about looking for girls, but find none. Midnight comes and Andy, Kermit and Jud get dropped off at their homes. Donn and I go back to Donn's and his father gets in the car. He and Donn drive me home.

I don't recall how many times we pulled the subterfuge. Donn's father never learned that I wasn't old enough to make Donn's driving legal. As a father of two active teenage boys he probably didn't really care. Donn was a safe driver and it got Donn out of the house for the evening. It was probably a good trade-off.

Senior year we had the right to the "Smoking Room." It was in the basement of the "old barn," a classroom building next to the main school building that looked somewhat like a large barn because it had once been one. The room was decorated with college pennants and a few

posters and was filled with old beat-up, discarded furniture. There was a radio/record player and some records left behind by earlier classes. Elegant it was not. But it was ours exclusively - For Seniors Only.

Ash trays were scattered throughout the room. It was the only place in school where a student could smoke. Only a few of us had started. I tried it a few times, but learning to inhale didn't come easily. Perhaps a pipe. Father had a rack of them in the sun parlor and I borrowed one after a consultation with him. It didn't fare any better. I spent most of my time with the pipe wasting matches and trying to look sophisticated. While Mother and Father both smoked, it didn't appear to be in my genes, and I was spared the experience.

You had to earn the right to use the Smoking Room. If your grades fell below a certain average, you could no longer have access to it. If you couldn't qualify or had lost the privilege and you had a free class period, it had to be spent in a study hall. And here's the most interesting part. If you could use the Smoking Room and you had some free time during the school day, you could leave the school grounds. While that doesn't sound so unusual now, sixty years ago that was unheard of in public school education. If you had managed to get the family car for the day, you could go wherever you wanted, so long as you were back in school for your next commitment. You were treated and trusted like an adult. I don't recall anybody who ever abused that privilege.

My two years at Harley seemed to fly by. My only regret was that Dick hadn't disappeared earlier. The Class of 1952 graduated on June 13th. Nineteen of us received our diplomas - five boys dressed in white dinner jackets and fourteen girls in long white gowns wearing white gloves and carrying red roses. Cliff Whiting gave the commencement address. We were not yet fully formed but Harley had put us well on the road to "Becoming."

