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## Scene

**My Other Life With Kathryn**

From April 1975, when I'd first met her at the Actors Lobby in Washington, and for the better part of the next three years, much of my life outside politics was spent in the company (at times only through the mails), of the actress Kathryn Grody. As with Ann, my time with Kathryn had a significant long-distance component which generated correspondence in both directions. I have Kathryn's end of that correspondence as well as copies of two informative letters of my own. As a writer working from a documented record, this stack of forty odd letters is a source nonpareil for framing those other worlds I traveled in beyond politics, and for stimulating memories of the players who inhabited them during a period about which virtually nothing – saving photographs - is recorded elsewhere.

I was a person who easily entered the world of others, Tod's personal circle, for example, but now Kathryn's universe which was considerably wider, but for me less deep, and embraced slices of both Hollywood and New York Theater. Tod was already a great patron of the theater, and, while I took in fewer shows, and more selectively than he, I can count attendance at the finest productions of the era on my own resume. I was particularly drawn to any revival of O' Neill's work, and whatever of Tennessee Williams' that came to Broadway. It's was probably in Tod's company that I saw Andre Gregory's production of Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* in what a *New York Times* critic described as an attic over Ratner's restaurant on Second Avenue, a stone's throw from where we both had our apartments. That play, not least the actor Gerry Bamman's Hamm, was a revelation to me, and embedded a fragment of Beckett's biting humanist world view deeply and forever in my own gestalt.

I have already commented on the power of David Rabe's theater pieces that dramatized key aspects of Vietnam's impact on its soldier's, having seen both *The Basic Training of Pavel Hummel* and *Sticks and Bones* when they were first staged at Joseph Papp's Public Theater. Now, as Kathryn's companion, there was hardly a weekly round that did not bring me to the Public where she would also appear in several productions. Just month before we had met, in a play I did not see, Kathryn had appeared at the Public in Michael Weller's *Fishing*, along with Tommy Lee Jones and John Heard, a play with a relatively short run, but which had established her as a viable New York stage actor following her run at regional theaters in Louisville and Florida.

For more ready cash Kathryn did a bit of piece work for Joe Papp as a reader summarizing plays in manuscripts that flooded over the impresario's transom. A good chunk of Kathryn's income came from unemployment, an entitlement covered by her dues to Actors Equity; she avoided taxes by filing her IRS return as a one-crop farmer, a dodge many struggling actors could depend on to avoid income tax, and to husband every penny to sustain themselves between paychecks, until a role that paid union scale came around and made the manna flow. This was the difference between a working actress, and a person who, say, waited tables but still only aspired to that trade.

Kathryn was a working actress. Much of that first year we dated found her in Los Angeles, working or looking for work, and sharing a house with her two brothers in the San Fernando Valley, inherited from their parents who had died in early middle age, a tragedy that stunned the Grody siblings and bonded them together like orphans. Kathryn's parents remained a strong presence in her life and she spoke of them often. It was a Jewish family, my impression from Kathryn's many anecdotes, a unit of individuals permitted to speak their minds to one

another – somewhat obsessively perhaps – over a range of family issues that would not have been remotely possible in my family. I admired this capacity in Kathryn, even if it was well beyond my own stunted emotional range. This made me as mysterious to Kathryn as she was to me.

Among her other talents Kathryn was an entertaining raconteuse. I suspect that few who get to know her for any length of time have not been treated to the morality tale she freely shares about an incident involving her father, Irv, a lieutenant colonel serving overseas as a staff officer during World War II. Irv had a buddy, a fellow officer and a Christian, who one evening drew him aside to confide a shocking secret. He had discovered there was a Jew in their unit, but hadn't been able to confirm the man's identity. Which, of course, cued Irv's next line, "It's me," presumably elevating his shamed and sheltered interlocutor with an "object lesson" (Kathryn's term), while bequeathing his daughter a parable to probe thereafter the dense complexities of diversity.

I get it now, I got it then. This form of familiar otherizing between Jews and gentiles is probably most common in locales like Los Angeles and New York where, owing to populous Jewish communities, the two opposite camps are most likely to interact. In just such a demographic pool I have been touched by the belief that a satirical insight once spouted by the social comedian Lenny Bruce's applied to me: "Even if you are Catholic, if you live in New York you're Jewish." The concluding end of that quotation, "if you live in Butte, Montana, you are going to be goyish even if you're Jewish," suggests that, outside a heavily Jewish population center like New York, Jewish and gentile contact stands at a greater distance.

In fact I had a great many more Jewish connections in New York, a lover here and there, some budding friendships that over time grew close, a ton of movement comrades, two

successive partners of my elder sister, than I did with any other of New York's major ethnic or racial minorities. Although, until Kathryn, my closest ties were among fellow Catholics and paradigmatic WASPs like Tod. Now, with Kathryn, a true child of the Diaspora, an internationalist who looked on all dispersed members of her tribe as, if not *mishpucha*, than landsmen for sure, I had joined an inner circle of America's premier other, a welcome refuge for an alienated square peg like myself. Kathryn could not enter the shop of the most bedraggled purveyor of the rag trade down on Orchard Street without proclaiming her kinship to the bewildered owner who smiled and made appropriate obeisance to a potential customer. Of course, it is also the case that among even my closest Jewish friends over the years, none wish to have a goy remind them they are Jewish, and would prefer if that reminding only came – and often - from the opposite direction.

Kath and I shared that love of strolling around the Lower East Side, Sunday brunches at the Spring Street Café in SoHo, with a bit of gallery hopping and, for Kathryn, serious study of the inventory in any number of high-end boutiques. If a friend's birthday loomed, and without consultation of her checkbook, Kathryn would spring for a top draw present that overdue bills from Con Ed or Ma Bell would help subsidize. At times while crossing the fringes of SoHo, we'd stop by an apartment over a dinner on Prince Street where a young actor friend of Kathryn's named Bryan Gordon was shaping the early stages of his own career in 'show business.'

There is one image from such a visit that happily persists in memory. Bryan, tall and well-made, and pleasant looking, could affect a clueless, schlumpy persona that played well in a couple of national TV commercials for Raisin Brand and Brill Cream, and delivered residuals to his mail box for as long as they aired. Bryan's hobby was to film videos using a very bulky hand

held camera of that medium's earliest generation. He sat at one end of his Formica kitchen table eye stuck to the view finder while conducting an improvised interview with his friend across the way, the actor Peter Riegert, who'd wrapped his head in a dish towel and was channeling the voice of Yasser Arafat. I guess it had struck me as a particularly witty bit of improv. Meeting young actors became a staple in Kathryn's company, and I was immediately fascinated in hearing her friends talk about their craft, and then watching their development in workshops and productions. What hooked me I think was seeing, not only how committedly, but in a good many individuals, how intelligently they approached their work; they were hardly mere puppets being feed lines by dramaturges.

Within little more than a month after meeting Kathryn, Tod and I were off on our first trip to Portugal. Kathryn wrote [always eschewing the upper case] to her "engaging, hamishe, yankee irishman" in Lisbon of having been cast for a play at the Public, now in rehearsals. Having received a letter of mine, a reply from her soon followed taking note that I "sounded very engaged," a comment in which the slightly less out of touch person I've become might now read a note of disappointment. I had been brief and factual, and failed to strike the appropriate heartstrings; in any case the play had been delayed, she'd suffered another "humiliating audition... unemployment was a mess," and she was "broke." She pined for my "coming home to her," and soon thereafter left for an extended stay in Los Angeles. In the months we were apart, and since long distance rates were steadily dropping, we often spoke by phone. But there was a special pleasure in the art of correspondence which we also shared, although our letters differed greatly in substance and mode of expression.

I was just then writing steadily on the subject of Portugal, and no doubt sending letters to Kathryn in my fashion. Kathryn made the rounds of auditions, but the main purpose of this trip

was to vacation in Mexico with her brother Michael, who I had not yet met. Letters came from places en route to the border, descriptive of the beauty of the desert and, once in Mexico, “from the land of sunshine and illusion.” The latter may have possibly referred to Hollywood; it’s often hard to track continuity in Kathryn’s letters, which, moreover, were seldom dated. If she was in an emotionally charged mood, the prose could be flung across the page in a kaleidoscope of impressionistic non-sequiturs. Always clear in her subtext was a deep sense of longing.

Going off to Mexico with her brother Michael was a mutual act of longing I suppose that only the two of them could share. I’m hardly an expert on such matter, but I think Kathryn and Michael were about as close as any two humans are capable of being. Their relationship was also an encounter group in perpetual motion, where a gut check to challenge a false note would be followed immediately and mutually by knowing smiles of intimacy and recognition. Somehow it was all caught up in an unfinished dialog with their parents who died through a cruel and random act of coincidence within six months of each other before adulthood had firmly set in for their children. Psychologically it played like abandonment and the anger must have been unbearable for two such decent and right thinking people as Kathryn and Michael Grody.

By mid-August Kathryn was back in New York, and I was clearly besotted with the events in Portugal, but when she returned to LA a month later, I registered her leaving in a letter which offers for those times a rare view of my inner life. The language was only modestly wrought, nothing as convoluted as the communiques I once wrote to Safe Return’s clients in military custody in which I attempted an uplifting message embedded in the manifesto idiom of defiance and resistance. My tone in the late September ’75 one-sheeter to Kathryn was begun on a note of self-awareness and submission. “I feel like some pathetic character in a bad Victorian romance. No sooner than you’re gone, every strong positive thing I feel about you surged to the

surface.” I confessed a shocking moment of realization about “the love and comradeship” her leaving made me feel for her, adding, “I’ve been very conscious of some blocking of late, some detachment... It makes me feel lonely.”

Detachment was an understatement, a guilt-driven topic much discussed with the shrink I was seeing twice a week, which Tod, incidentally, didn’t think was enough. Tod, a true therapy junkie, would have gone everyday if he’d had the time and money. Kathryn too was in therapy, episodic since her long term shrink lived in LA, where in the months ahead she was again able to see her regularly. I’m sure the therapy in all our cases was more useful than not, especially if you believe that endlessly combing the same ground will tease up a few self-discoveries and expose the less buried bits of self-deception. We boundlessly narrated, to our shrinks and among ourselves, the woes of our angsts and bitter memories of unresolved childhood grievances. We were of a generation literate in certain classic works of Freud and Jung, drawn to the Gestalt method of Fritz Perls, disdainful of the inspirational texts of R.D. Laing, readers of Norman O. Brown, aware even of the lunatic Wilhelm Reich and his Orgone Box, but not - Tod and I at least as self-identified materialists – much brushed by the mysticism of Castaneda or spiritual relativism of Ram Das. Otherwise we blithely went about our psychological bumper car lives as usual.

At some earlier stage in my life I had become a brooder, only vaguely aware of the consuming self-doubt that ailed me. Adding Vietnam to that pre-condition of hiding from my truer self had at least loosened the coils where anger was trapped, and an all but asphyxiatingly intense immersion within a radical political milieu gave scope to that anger, but did little to illuminate the other dark, unsettled corners of my psyche. I was uncomfortable in my own body, and Kathryn with an actor’s attention to character, had the range on mine and was always

checking in and asking if I might be feeling better about myself. The same theme pervaded the sessions with my psychiatrist, a man who'd seasoned his residency at Einstein Medical School with two years in an ashram, and witnessed session after session how I would repeatedly self-recriminate but never get to the real stuff. But, if I was hard on myself, then this was the inevitable source of a lifelong tendency to be hard, especially when cornered, on everybody else.

As for loneliness, was that sufficient motivation to bind Kathryn and me in a committed relationship? It was not a question I ever brought to mind at the time, and therefore did not ask. What seemed to matter then, as I rhapsodized to Kathryn in this rare flight of emotional enthusiasm, was her place as "my favorite playmate." I called her "a free and happy bird who'd brought song and brightness to my life," which doesn't sound like my way of talking, but clearly I was now operating within Kathryn's unique psycho-emotional aura; for her part she wrote, "I am unquestioning in our foreign friendship." On its flip side that "foreignness" also caused the abruptness of our recent departure, and flagged the places where we did not gel. But that dance, by the fall of 1975, was only just beginning.

After Kathryn wrote with news of getting six weeks of work on a film, I indulged in a bit of theatrical behavior, and, as she herself was wont to do for any friend on an opening night, sent kudos via telegram to my "darling companion." It was an affectionate turn of phrase I'd long admired from a song by the Loving Spoonful. This aimed to please, and it did. Both our distant hearts now grew fonder, and our missives ever more plighted with words of endearment. Kathryn often wrote her letters late at night with tales of how she's passed the day. She wrote of having spent an evening at "Hol's concert." We had been with Holly Near at Jeremy Rifkin's Counter-bicentennial rally in July. And Kathryn was also spending time with Holly's elder sister Timmy Near, her class mate in the theater program at San Francisco State, and just then one of



several “hearing” actors with the National Theater of the Deaf. At the concert, and disturbed perhaps by an excess of bitter talk aimed at the Y chromosome, Kathryn found herself “wondering why I don’t feel high on sisterhood.” Women had their own tensions in the ranks of Second Wave feminism, and Holly, who had a boyfriend at that point, would soon come out as a champion for Lesbian rights and separatism.

Joined to the chronicle of her comings and goings Kathryn now added the Hollywood reporter with a ringside seat. She wrote of her first day “on the lot with Carol Kane memorizing the idiot script” for *Harry and Walter Go to New York*, the film she’d been cast in which starred Diane Keaton among the principal actors. Included in a subplot that was increasingly cut as filming went on were Kathryn, Carol Kane and Jack Guilford. When shooting started, Kathryn spent days with her back to the camera, and the canny Guilford taught her a melody from an old Yiddish song to quietly hum as actor’s stage business to ground her silent character. The work was humiliating, but even these under-scripted parts only went to established actors who had the necessary chops when called upon to show them. But the work was decently paid, and, with the engaging and egalitarian manner that made her popular with fellow actors and crew members alike, and caused all and sundry to confide in her their doubts and woes, Kathryn attended the task of expanding the network that was essential to her profession.

There was one account of her lunch with cast members Kane and Keaton at “the Aware Inn,” a name for an LA eatery any fiction writer would be thrilled to have invented, with “red flowers on the wall and silver sparkles and victorian lamps good salads with seeds of all kinds and many stares of hollywood folk... feel relieved and fine that they were not at me.” If the other two actresses had the attention of the dining room, Kathryn had the attention of Kane and Keaton, “talking about art and work and workers and the fifties... a reminding that I do know

some things. Carol and Diane were very supportive,” she wrote, “of my ability to communicate with people, to find out about them, an ability I take so much for granted and negate.” That she might often not get back near what she gave was a form of investment Kathryn was willing to risk.

I’m not certain if she had already known Diane Keaton before this film. If not they became chummy very quickly. And I can testify from any number of meaningful encounters over the next two years that Diane Keaton was delightful company, and almost hygienically natural, not to mention neurotically insecure about her acting skills. Her fame in that moment at least was in her look as much as her looks, and in her coy directness. She outfitted Annie Hall as Diane Keaton, and set a fashion style widely imitated. Kathryn retails a couple of events she and Keaton attended, like a sauna where, the first time Kathryn had gone there, “women with mounds of exhausted flesh called me pet.” Under this warning label, it was perhaps not surprising that, when invited for a companionable spritz, “Diane was very shy.” In the Broadway production of Hair Keaton was decidedly among the actors who chose to stay clothed in a scene where others voluntarily stripped nude.

A year earlier Kathryn had appeared in a TV movie as the wife of Eddie Slovik, the only American soldier to be executed for desertion in World War II, and, in the process, she became friends with the movie’s star, Martin Sheen and his wife, Janet. Kathryn would occasionally baby sit for the Sheen children. And now I learned in a letter that Janet felt close enough to Kathryn to discuss her endangered marriage when Martin’s dalliance with Linda Blair, the co-star of another recent TV movie, had hit the gossip columns. This was Kathryn’s world, and now, at least at a vicarious remove, mine as well, and one in which I moved smoothly enough on the status one enjoyed then as a radical politico. We “fulltime activists” saw ourselves as stars in

our own right, and we gossiped within our community with at least as much relish as Kathryn and her actor friends did in theirs.

That fall leading up to the holidays, as I have already described, was a time of intense commitment to writing and agitation around Portugal. Somehow I managed to slip away in the middle of December to join Kathryn in California. While there I spent a block of time working with Carl Borack on a couple of spots for amnesty which featured child actors, about which more ahead. One important logistical chore brought me to the Motor Vehicle Bureau near Kathryn's home where I found it surprisingly simple to get a Californian driver's license, trading in my expired license from D.C. and, without the requirement of a driving test. Kathryn's film was ready to wrap, and one afternoon I joined her on the lot, hanging out in Diane Keaton's trailer and, while walking toward the sound stage to watch one scene that featured Michael Caine, brushed near the film's other two stars, James Caen and Elliot Gould, who were loudly passing a football between them, and shot me disdainful looks that read, 'nothing here for you chump.'

I suppose we did some face time with Jack Guilford, a very nice man who served as a kind of Jewish uncle for Kath, and who we two had already seen socially after the Washington Lobby. I would have occasion to venture onto movie sets several times over the next few years, and was typically reminded of army life where hurry-up-and-wait far outstrips productive activity. In a period where sensitive young people were motivated by principles and authentic experiences, it was easy to understand why so many idealistic and artistically inclined actors like Kathryn and her circle craved real time theater work over film or TV, but readily, sometimes guiltily, took paydays in those other media to support their less remunerative attachment to the stage.

On one afternoon we paid a call to the Malibu home of Martin and Janet Sheen, overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Sitting in the spacious living room we were treated to some magic tricks by Charlie Sheen, a sulky preteen about eleven at the time. Martin was deeply opposed to the Vietnam War, and so our exchange around Safe Return's political program was likely animated. My contact with the actor persisted through Kathryn, and led to featuring Martin in several TV spots for Agent Orange when Tod and I became involved in that issue two years later.

I had first met the Sheens the previous July in New York where Martin was cast in a revival of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. With Kathryn I had attended two performances, including a Wednesday matinee, where George C. Scott as Willy Loman demonstrated, not only his spellbinding skill as an actor, but also a flash of his reputed high temperament, and here highly justified.

Women of a certain age made up the majority of the audience at matinee performances, not infrequently having ventured to the city from the surrounding suburbs where they formed theater clubs for such occasions. At a particularly dramatic moment in Scott's final scene which had Willy in his basement searching for a length of rubber hose to attached to the tailpipe of his car, all his self-delusions having led him to self-destruction, the actor moves through the space wielding a flash light in the darkened theater. At which point the barely muted conversation between two blue coiffed female seniors who occupied seats at the edge of the stage in the round, had infiltrated the silence. In full character Scott wheeled suddenly toward the chattering duo, and froze the beam of his flashlight in their faces. Holding for a good three beats, he then slid off to finish leading Willy to his tragic end. After the performance, Martin and Janet invited Kathryn and I to join the cast for lunch at '21,' the legendary hangout for theater luminaries. I

was well down the long table from Scott, well under his radar, but not too far to enjoy the voluble recitation of his well-executed shaming of the two distaff club ladies.

With Christmas looming, Kathryn and I likely left in time to be home by the 25<sup>th</sup>, driving across country in her very sketchy Datsun along the southern route to minimize winter road conditions. I was somewhat versed in the Woody Guthrie mythos, and so we made a pilgrimage to Okemah, Oklahoma, and tracked down the worthy troubadour's grave after driving through side streets past a house where one local said Woody had grown-up, and, as a boy, had joined his mates topping outhouses as a prank for Halloween. There were cheap cider block hotels along our route east, and the image of one in particular still brings a memory of stench to my nostrils. In the Ozarks we stumbled on a town where women turned out quilts like pancakes, cheap enough that we both bought several – Kathryn spotting a true bargain and ideal present, quite a few – and so the protocols of purchases for seasonal giving were attended to well before we crossed the Hudson and came home to Manhattan.

Kathryn was now at least semi-permanently in New York, so there's little in the way of documentation to plot our relationship during most of 1976. I did not journal, nor did I refer much to my personal life in work related correspondence. The early part of the year saw Safe Return's transition from work around Portugal, and a last ditch ramping up of amnesty advocacy in what was a presidential election year, as well as a deepened commitment to the campaign for a military union. But life outside the office for me was now primarily in Kathryn's company. We did not cohabit, nor can I recall that we ever seriously considered doing so. We were certainly not together every night, but always in close contact, checking in by phone any number of times during the day. When we shared a bed it was usually at her apartment in the West

Village. I had not been happy with my East Village digs on 9<sup>th</sup> Street since Ann moved out. Nostalgia for Ann may have played on my buried emotions, but it was mostly because the place was too great a climb for so little comfort. Kath's place, her own version of a city crash pad, was at least a bit more airy and open.

At some point, maybe as recently as the holidays, I would have introduced Kathryn to my family, probably at my parents' home on Long Island. I recall no more talk about poor odds for "mixed marriages," a bit of folk phobia my mom had expressed when I brought home my first Jewish girlfriend not long after returning from Vietnam. By the mid-seventies my sister had a long time steady who was Jewish (and well regarded by my parents). And besides, the old shibboleths that had once rifled the city's ethnic ghettos with mutual suspicion had steadily dissolved in the homogenizing suburban culture where New Yorkers like my parents had settled in the thousands after World War II. A Noah's Ark of diversity, European branches only, had beached in our neighborhood, with the distinction that the pairings were just as likely as not to be across ethnic and religious kinds. Nor was Kathryn devoid of the actor's skill to beguile and charm; in my family she was an instant success.

Kathryn by day, and many evening as well, was certainly as busy as me. But my non-traditional 9 to 5 had a fixed address, whereas Kathryn made an actor's rounds at a seemingly casual pace that belied the tactical complexity of her search for a paying gig. The ratio of energy Kathryn invested to build and tend a network among professionals at every level of the trade was exhausting to behold, but to stay in the game there was no alternative. And of course the craft itself, when not exercised on stage, required constant tuning and polishing. For this Kathryn studied at H.B. Studios in the Village, having won admittance by audition to a master class taught by Uta Hagen, Desdemona to Paul Robeson's Othello on Broadway in the early 40s, and

blacklisted by Hollywood for her close association, not only with Robeson personally but presumably with his politics; in that debate Kathryn's own sympathies naturally inclined her toward those on the blacklist.

With Kathryn back east, I was again hanging out frequently with actors, but always in character as a leftwing politico and intellectual. Kathryn's friend Bryan, when searching for a word to describe me to his own satisfaction, hit on "thinker." I suppose this was true in that my mouth was always full of some analysis to capture and explain the political moment. I was happy to impress Kathryn's friends in the heroic posture of the uncompromising radical, and with what to them was Safe Return's exotic track record. But I was genuinely drawn to the magic in their world, and content to walk in it at a respectful distance, all the more since I was being treated to so many superb productions for which Kathryn was being comped when she had a friend in the cast, and after which a visit back stage was a theater ritual.

Being back stage was interesting for its entry into the world behind the curtain, where actors were reconstituted as the people they are. That backstage experience often occurred at the Public Theater, but on one occasion, shortly after we had met in April 1975, the ringside seat was in the audience at the final tech rehearsal for *A Chorus Line*, two days before opening night, when the composer Marvin Hamlisch stomped onto the stage and stopped the action to give a note about something that dissatisfied him. He had the face of a nebbish but the manner of a macher.

Diane Keaton was one of a number of high profile film stars who preferred to live in New York over LA, albeit uptown, and Kathryn saw her frequently. With her ample cash flow Diane seemed to replace her wardrobe on a short cycle, and Kathryn would at times return to her apartment after the two had been together with a giant suitcase full of Keaton's hand-me-downs,

barely worn, if at all. After selecting a few items for herself, Kathryn would then distribute among her other struggling actress friends the remainder of the booty. Kath was wired to spread good will, as I have said.

I should not be surprised, I suppose, that while our comings and goings as a couple throughout 1976 are so under documented, Kathryn's mentorship in the realm of grand emotions sweeps generally over the amazing renaissance in theater we experienced together in these years. Certain plays had a formative effect on me, although I would be hard pressed to quantify their influence. Yet I can still for all time, from the stand point of wide eyed theater aficionado, not critic, conjure the intensity of certain actors set in motion on the stage – taken at random, Jason Robards in *Long Day's Journey*, Christopher Walken in *Sweet Bird*, the two black South Africans in *Sizwe Banzi is Dead*, Meryl Streep as the *Shrew*, Coleen Dewhurst in *Virginia Woolf*, Raul Julia as Macheath, and dozens more if I were to tax myself to recall them. And that's just the theater; we shared seminal moments as well viewing experimental productions and performance art (Meredith Monk, Mabou Mines, Einstein on the Beach) and the dance (Cunningham, Pilobolus, Twarp).

In the absence of fact, what else do I remember? Well, for one, Kathryn's Datsun would become a player in our urban lives as albatross on two occasions a year apart that bookmarked our remaining time together. Why exactly on that hot summer afternoon in 1976 I was driving the Datsun on E. 1<sup>st</sup> Street toward Avenue A, other than presumably headed to the lot where Kathryn had it parked, I can't reconstruct. The best I can offer is that if you have access to a car in the city it can be tempting to use it on some routine errand. Or sometimes it was just fun to drive around different neighborhoods, especially downtown. Anyway, I was crawling up the



street, the sidewalks and curbsides teeming with local residents, mostly Hispanic. A fire hydrant was open, which is a kindness the Fire Department allows on the most steamy summer days, and kids of all ages were running in and out of the heavy streams of water. Approaching the hydrant, I made sure my curbside window was tightly shut, as I crept ahead at about ten mph ready to take a bath, and mindful of so many people, and of how they had taken occupation of the street so that car traffic had to bow to those conditions, weaving along slowly. Suddenly there was a thump, and a kid bounced off the Datsun's right front side.

I immediately stopped and got out. A middle aged guy was screaming something, and said he was the boy's uncle. I told him to get the boy in the back seat and I'd go immediately to the nearest hospital. I could see that fortunately the boy was not seriously hurt, just shaken up and maybe a bit bruised. As I concentrated on driving the twenty blocks up First Avenue toward the hospital, the uncle had launched into a monologue that was worthy of a ghetto ambulance chaser. I was pretty shaken up as well, but I felt no liability in the accident. The kid, about nine or ten, was a darter and didn't bother to look before shooting through the water and into the street. He was lucky I was barely moving. Now I just wanted to make sure he was alright. The uncle might have easily read in my expression that I found him pathetically unconvincing, though otherwise I did not engage with him.

As I waited outside the emergency room, a couple of beat cops approached to take my version of the incident, which they bought pretty much verbatim. They certainly acted like I was giving an accurate account, but they also expressed contempt for *these people*, Dominicans in this case, and the guy was not the kid's uncle at all, but a kibitzer who thought he could shake down whitey for some guilt money. When they told me the kid was unharmed, I split, still upset but somewhat relieved. I drove off reflecting that, so now it was just a reflex for white guys of

the New York constabulary, like these two cops, guys with my kind of ethnic roots, but city not suburban bred, to be and to act like racists with no shame, and treat this wave of immigrants to the same lack of sympathy their own forefathers had received maybe three generations back. Even if I hadn't been in the right, and hadn't acted responsibly toward the kid, aka the victim, those cops would have let me slide.

Any attempt to fix Kathryn's response to this episode is impossible. But her 1976 presence enters very clearly in a more prosaic memory, one bearing on matters of domestic comfort, for a well-timed phone call late one afternoon in November about a spacious apartment available on E. 4<sup>th</sup> Street, a tipoff her attentive ear had captured in the anteroom chatter awaiting an audition. The phone was still rattling on the receiver as I rushed downtown from the office to see the place, and was happily astounded to find that this gem just east of Avenue A was in the possession of the staff of *Liberation Magazine*, about to fold after more than twenty years. Michael Kill, one of the last to edit the magazine, said the place could be mine for key money in the amount of \$2,250. I agreed on the spot. This was standard practice, at least downtown in Manhattan where the housing market traded informally, and where for a truly desirable pad, the departing tenant, in connivance with the landlord, could demand a fee for "general leasehold improvements."

I had the money because I was in the habit of adding regularly to savings, especially during the period I was in graduate school at NYU under the largesse of the Veterans Administration. In addition I had a small bundle I'd come home with from Vietnam, essentially the combat pay I'd accumulated while there and had so far never spent. I had probably put aside in excess of twelve thousand dollars by then, so the key money was there and willingly parted

with. What added to my delight in securing this space, was not only its association with the magazine that had been founded by the likes of A.J. Muste and Dave Dellinger, but the fact that the building on its first and basement floors had once housed the *National Guardian*; a catwalk still surrounded the front section of the first floor and had once overlooked the large web press on which the radical weekly was printed. I felt my residence in the building had been sanctioned by history.

In my grandfather's day, born and growing up in this same neighborhood in the early 1880s, moving day took place when all leases expired throughout the city on the each year on the first of May, and – new horizons or lower rents being sought - the streets burst with horse drawn carts to haul belongings from one place to another. I moved within New York City four times between 1969 and 1978, and I couldn't say with a proverbial gun to my head how those feats were accomplished. I can attest that those of us who lived in buildings without elevators got used to carrying heavy and bulky furniture, not to mention, as my library grew, multiple boxes of books, up all those worn and narrow flights of stairs. Otherwise I have no recollection of how I organized friends or vehicles to cart those belongings from the old pads to the new ones.

The E. 4<sup>th</sup> Street apartment occupied the entire fifth floor, with a spacious living room and working fireplace. The Liberation staff had partitioned off two additional rooms, one I used for sleeping and the other for storage, and both of which also had fireplaces, although I never bothered to see if they were functional. Spaced across the ceiling were five glorious leaded glass skylights of the tenement era. The gallery kitchen was adequate, an electric range it's only deficit and hard to get used to after cooking anywhere else I had ever lived on gas, but hardly a great inconvenience for someone who primarily ate out. Kathryn and I entertained my family and our closest friends at Christmas, artificial logs blazing behind the hearth, and a gaily

decorated tree that included clip-on holders for lighted candles. This freaked out my otherwise cool headed brother, Tom, then finding his way in the city as an engineer with Con Ed, who saw the revival of this continental tradition as a certain fire hazard, and asked to have the candles extinguished when his two young daughters were on the premises.

1977 was the watershed year in my relationship with Kathryn. My work calendar was crammed in the early months, and I will have to assume that Kathryn's was as well. But we managed to peel ourselves away in April for two exotic weeks in Morocco. In retrospect, the trip seems so improbable, I can't begin to fathom why that destination was chosen, unless it was a return inspired by my early visit there with Tod. Thanks to a street urchin attached to us the duration of our stay in Tangier, Kathryn and I were escorted to a funky hotel deep within the souk, in the vicinity of which I rashly consumed some skewered chunks of lamb from a street vendor. Kathryn wisely eschewed this treif, which, for me, brought on a bout of dysentery lasting two days. This was karma. Déjà vu. The same thing had happened to me in Paris with Ann years before, except that the tainted food in that instance had actually come from a left bank charcuterie.

Recovered, we then traveled internally on rickety buses over dusty roads, and in Marrakesh, Kathryn went off for a bit on her own, returning in the company of a young British couple from Manchester. Jennie was an artist with a lucrative day job in fabric design, and Anthony, her husband, a newly minted solicitor on a career trajectory to become a judge. That, of course, still resided in the future, and they were just then beginning family life, with Jennie very pregnant, the unborn child irreverently dubbed 'Boris.' We went on with them to Fez, a place I will forever associate with succulent Valencia oranges and soft spongy macarons, and

with an incident involving a scene of physical impatience by an American aboard. It began innocently enough in Anthony's quest for postage stamps for dispatching a stack of postcards. And ended with me grabbing a hotel clerk by the lapels and pulling him across the counter. We did get the stamps, but the dots connecting the two poles of this recollection have faded long ago.

Over the time we were in Rabat, I turned 33. Watching me in bed, Kathryn composed a note. Even so many decades later, it's painful to re-discover. "Sometimes you look so much younger when you sleep – the boy finally at some peace. But tonight between your brows a furrow and I wonder where you are now and where you are bound for... I am sorry that you can't take those feelings through your skin." Perhaps we both imagined our trip would help rekindle intimacy. It didn't. "And yet," Kathryn concluded, "I have no regrets about Morocco."

The second unwelcome cameo for the Datsun brought Kathryn and I back to where we were when she'd first returned to California two years before, almost to the date. And again, by some explanation that does not reveal itself, I have a copy of my letter, dated August 9, 1977 which tells the tale. I quote at length:

"Dear Kath," it began. "Last night, David said: 'You have trouble saying goodbye.' His words stuck a distant chord, were vaguely disturbing. It was the end of our session. I haven't explored his insight... but the thought rolls around my tongue and my body and covers me like a thin film. It lets in light but not clarity.

"I told him this story. It was a bad parting. Bad for friends who love each other to have parted this way. As I drove out the airport exit, I wondered, would I cry? Not then. Not yet. Remembering a separation from Ann, driving blindly down the Mass turnpike, tears streaming. It was more flight from feeling than feeling; more self-pity than self-awareness.

“I chose the Van Wyck [Expressway]. Still a couple of miles to decide. Back to Manhattan or up to Westport? Check out the clutch. It was already beginning to lose torque. I didn’t want to hear that. Got to get out [of town]. Turn off for the Triboro, up to Conn. By the time I got to White Plains, the obviousness that the car wouldn’t make it displaced my anger, and my mind took control, careful, perfect, systematic. First an exit, cross over, pacing, easy. It’s dissipating quickly. Please let me make it back to the city. Pushing energy through the narrow slits of my eyes. Lasers of determination. Crossing the Third Avenue Bridge; leaving the Bronx behind. Milestone. Home boro. OK. 130 more blocks and the length of the island. No more torque. Sheer momentum of the engine; my mind the transmission. Got to get off the FDR. Dangerously slow. Motorized hostility. I have been naturally selected, but the news didn’t sink in. 116<sup>th</sup> Street. Got to get off. Second Ave better chance.

“No way. It just won’t survive another stoplight. Not that I’ve been stopping for many of them. Just past 99<sup>th</sup> Street, east side, an institution sits, giving the neighborhood an undeserved air of stability. Figures: New York Mental Health Clinic. A parking place, harbor for me, car. “I swear to God I’m going to leave this fucking car right here. Let the fuckin’ ‘ricans pick it clean.” Feeling the ‘swell,’ white suited gringo in Spanish Harlem. Unfriendly stares. Hot, hot sun. It is 1 pm.”

The drama suddenly shifts. A pay phone must have been near. It had not been trashed. I had the proper change, and I called Carjohn, which I guess was the shop Kathryn used for work on the Datsun. They said they’d send a truck right away. Then I called Pam and she told me the crew, Tod, Jack, and herself, was leaving on the 2:05 from Grand Central for Marjorie’s place in Connecticut. Just leave it she said. But I can’t. I write Kathryn that I can’t let her down, as if

she weren't real to me. That the connection between us is too strong and I cannot just abandon her car. So I tell Pam I have to wait for the tow truck. Then suddenly, still on the phone, as I recount in my letter, "Several words have disappeared before I realize I am crying from some deep place and I cannot stop there on 99<sup>th</sup> Street and 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. I am saying good bye to you, exactly three hours after I left you at the airport."

The ordeal did not end there. I managed to get myself up to Marjorie's place by train. Marjorie's lifestyle had exploded from the pampered comfort her various partners had provided to the margins of affluence, largely through a newly discovered talent for high wire speculation in commodities futures. I recall someone telling me, probably Tod, that she'd been bankrolled to the tune of ten grand, and from there Marjorie embarked on a roll that eventually crashed, but during which a small fortune allowed her to live grandly. In addition to her duplex at UN Plaza, she now had a country estate as well.

"I finally made it up to Marjorie's by six," I reported to Kathryn. "At seven I went to take a brief nap, they were planning to go to a restaurant at 9:30. Then it happened, one of my attacks which lasted several hours. I don't remember falling asleep. But I woke up around six-thirty feeling mostly mended. For the next day I genuinely relaxed and experienced myself opening and expanding. There's still a lot to say to each other, before there can be a real leave taking from the roles we imposed on each other. Underneath that is a strong current of something. I discovered that as I cried on Second Avenue."

I'm intrigued by that reference to a "white suited gringo." Since I'm positive I was not thus coutured, I can only imagine I'd fished the image from the movies, the gringo archetype in the southern tropics with the rumpled white linen suit. After my year in Brazil as a college student, I always thought that when I returned there I would also own a white linen suit. As for

“one of my attacks,” it was a migraine, the kind that ravages all systems of the body, and makes it excruciating to bear even the slightest noise or beam of light. In the treatment of this malady I was also indebted to Kathryn for a referral to the best doctor who ever treated me, Stubbsy Forster of Central Park West, hands on healer and physician to the stars.

Kathryn’s reply dated the 12<sup>th</sup> crossed mine in the mails. Apparently her trip west was only intended as a brief one, but now she was delayed by “\$ possibilities” that would not be decided for at least ten days. She was full of “big reflections, sick, unable to breathe, etc.,” and from a novel she’d been reading quotes the narrator who observes to her husband, “how rare it is that two people so suited find each other.” It’s clear in the general sparseness of her words that Kathryn was in a state of emotional exhaustion, but with enough presence of mind to share an interesting adventure. “I went to a small memorial for John Howard Lawson, one of the unfriendly ten – first to shout back. Always respected him. So I read about it in the paper and went – not packed, but all old, mostly jewish, bolsheviks, blacks, ex-newyorkers. Alvah Bessie & Lester Cole were there. Something inspiring about being there. Thought of you a lot.”

Kathryn had been off to a Baja California beach for the weekend when my letter arrived, and it was there to greet her return to LA on the 19<sup>th</sup>. It had been a month with “no communication,” her reply began, which wasn’t the case, but what it felt like when one counts the days. It made her angry to think I’d been too busy “with Citizen Soldier work” to write. But she also hesitated to open it, “scared it would be a goodbye letter... But instead it was something much finer... a letter from your heart and I am grateful for it.” At the end of the first page the writing broke off suddenly with an enigmatic, “I don’t,” as if the words that ought to have followed were suddenly poured over an elliptical cliff. Days later when she took the letter up again, she said she’d been trying to borrow a typewriter, since “bound am I to a machine in



expressing myself. Then I thought, no, maybe that's an excuse to distance all the feeling I had to your extraordinary letter." And, with "I don't" still dangling on page one, eight fresh pages followed in longhand.

These two letters, hers and mine, form the Rosetta Stone that reassembles our fragmented story into a dramatic whole. We were living inside a play of our mutual creation. To accept the "literalness of no communication," Kathryn had written, would have been "so much simpler than who we are. I love you Michael. I don't have any idea what shape I want that love to take." Neither did I. Had the ending not come through betrayal, it might have been a lifelong friendship.

Well, "betrayal" may suggest intention for what was merely impulse. In either case this episode requires - as preamble - a digressive riff. There was much talk in the sixties and seventies about 'free love' to describe the emancipation of the sexes. In radical circles a more precise anthropological term, non-monogamy, was preferred, and both Tod and I would have espoused this position on principled grounds as a legitimate blow against the sanctity of bourgeois property relations, including property in marriage. In practice Tod took an uncompromising non-monogamous stance with every woman he ever dated. Tod seldom had fewer than two intimate partners at any given moment, and often three. He was up front about this his entire life, and it was the source of endless conflict because the women he was seeing with few exceptions eventually - and inevitably - demanded exclusivity, a battle Tod always won even at the expense of breaking with women he truly loved and desired. He simply refused to surrender his chosen prerogative to accommodate anyone of them, and would even resort to couples' therapy as a platform to defend himself.

It's who he was. And I admired him for his consistency and hard headedness. For me non-monogamy was an abstraction, an ideal, which I was incapable of applying to my own life. I was far too possessive, and tended toward what has been called serial monogamy. I was emotionally bound to the one-on-one arrangement that had been modeled, not only in my own upbringing, but enshrined in at least Western history. And yet there was little in my makeup that suited me for marriage. However attached I had been in my longer term liaisons, Katie, and Ann and my college age sweetheart, Katie, before her, I clung to them as love objects, and never truly contemplated except in the shallowest fantasies what it would mean to be actually married to them. I could not put myself in that picture, and, at least unconsciously, reacted much the way Macheath does in the Three Penny Opera when Polly rhapsodizes in song that, after they are married, "I will go with you everywhere," prompting from Mac the aside, "Then I won't go anywhere."

I could say in my defense that, beyond the realm of radical politics, I didn't know who I was or what I wanted, and never had, qualities that had been both exaggerated and mitigated by the Vietnam War. In the political context that followed from my war experience, genuine partnership, as with Tod, was totally within my ken. And since neither of us was homosexual, this partnership never threatened to become sexualized. I must therefore admit that I approached women as either partners for sex or partners for friendship, but not for both – and the crossover between those two choices is what had often gotten me into trouble. Since both Kathryn and I met each other on the rebound, I can see now that it would have been more genuine if we had pursued friendship over romance. At the same time, there is no doubt of our deep emotional involvement, and when we said we loved each other that also had its own truth.

Clearly I had no idea about what to do with that kind of love. By early September, Kathryn had found a typewriter, and a long letter followed. In the wake of the “letter from my heart,” I had apparently reverted to a newsy report in my follow up, and Kathryn wrote complaining that, “It has been a month now and we have been separate and I would like to know some details.” My latest correspondence made her feel “discounted,” and if that is what I intended, to “please let her know that.” It was a request, she said, not for “grand definitions, just a little communication.”

Then her letter wandered. It was not a bad time there she added, although “the work situation remains tenuous.” She had read for a dramatized version of Sara Davidson’s *Loose Change: Three Women of the Sixties*, “and the same routine as always. I sit among a bevy of classic beauties and get greeted as a ‘real person...very difficult to remember the meaning of all this to me.” No doubt her discouragement was compounded by the fact that two of her closest friends in the acting community had won top Oscars earlier in the year, Dreyfuss in *The Good Bye Girl* and Keaton in *Annie Hall*. “Di proceeds heaven bound with less ambivalence... wants everything. I told her she wanted too much and I too little.” And then, not missing a beat, a wee dig at a classic beauty, with a bit of *Annie Hall* lifted from real life. “Met Di’s grandmother who was amazing... really does think if Jews can beat cha it’s your fault cause they getcha with your eyes wide open.” As was the case for Woody Allen in his film, this Keaton relation was a goy from another planet.

There was commentary on her latest reading, Jane Lazarre’s, *The Mother Knot*, “which was very good for me... allowed myself to be less idealizing around babies and touch some of my real doubts.” She “followed this with letters home from Sylvia Plath which was exhausting... had she been able to express Lazarre’s ambivalence she probably wouldn’t have

stuck her head in the oven...” Then there was *Sugar Blues*, “and have not touched any since tho it is quite a fantastic and fascinating thing,” the anti-refined sugar craze having gripped the health conscious culture widely as I have commented elsewhere. A few verbal nose-gays were thrown my way as if to place some solid ground beneath our crumbling alliance. “Martin Sheen asked how you were and I said ok, I hadn’t heard, difficult times... he said to tell you to stop being so Irish which I thought you’d like.” It was indeed true that I promoted the Irish side in my ethnic mix, but it would have more accurate to have cited my more dominant Teutonic makeup, which might have made me a less appealing enigma to her. Then there was a friend of Kathryn’s whose name I no longer recognize who “thought you were one of the most charismatic men she’d ever met... so you see... do you like you any better these days?”

That theme is punctuated throughout the body of Kathryn’s correspondence, and especially in the late stages of our time together. By mid-1977 she refers in one letter to these last “difficult six months.” Clearly I was a living specimen of ambivalent man. I could come on strong, strike someone as “charismatic,” and then just as quickly dance away, all that apparent charm dissolving in an addiction to self-lacerating loneliness. I would not have described it that way at the time, and yet it was precisely this state of mind that I channeled on many a brooding evening into the medium of poetry. In lieu of any steady relief from a dose of self-awareness, I seemed to wallow in my misery.

One example will suffice, composed January 6, 1977:

Image on Brick

Why this shock  
At the face in the window pane?  
You’ve met this man  
hidden deep in his sorrow  
sallow and pale from seclusion.

Watch him move like liquid  
all contained and turbulent.  
He's watching you too,  
so watch out!

His smile can disarm you.  
then quickly skate away,  
while you squirm  
in your haste to flee.

What precise episode brought on that flinty self-indictment I cannot say? Strangely I have a strong memory of the moment I wrote this – looking through a window facing a brick wall - and the knowledge that I could not flee from the image it revealed. Under other circumstances I would aim that judgmental inner fire, not at myself, but at another; either way the morbid underbelly was all of a piece. And yet I am certain that if someone had asked me to explain myself, I would not have recognized that I was deeply unhappy, in fact I'm sure I wasn't. I simply had a suspicious cast of mind, a legacy, I came to believe, of parental reticence reinforced – or so it is alleged - by the trauma or war. In either scenario, or both, others were not to be relied upon emotionally, and neither was I.

I would prove this thesis before Kathryn returned to New York. There was a chance encounter in an East Village dive with a woman who held an administrative position at the Public Theater. I'm shaky on the details but we ended up in bed at her West Village apartment. I don't fault myself for the behavior itself, but for not being upfront about it with Kathryn, who found out when the object of my attentions revealed all to keep faith with an actress she saw too frequently, and from whom she might risk not wrath so much as silent scorn. I frankly had higher hopes, having mistakenly imagined we'd had a spark. Certainly my vanity was deflated after I was so quickly discarded. This gave rise to another poem which I happened to have in my possession one evening when I ran into the same woman at a bar we both frequented. Her

comment after she'd read it, was, "it's a real poem," which seemed to surprise her and, I suppose, she had intended as a compliment. It was unduly bitter, dated October 1977, it ended with this verse:

Now I am sorry for this pitiless quiet  
surrounding us  
I listen for a feeling I can give your name  
while I straddle the boundary between E. 9ths Street  
and more certain causes of my loneliness

When I track this chapter's personal narrative against the parallel telling of my work life, the comment made by a woman with whom I served on a board of a food coop years later can be starkly illustrated. Recognizing my ability to articulate a given point, but my lack of diplomacy in communicating it effectively to fellow members of the board, she concluded I was a "systems man," which is to say, not a people person. Whatever clarity and consistency this characteristic brought to my work in these years it did not translate to my personal life. And so as 1977 morphed into 1978, I can – and will in the chapters ahead – provide a close account of the action packed final days of Safe Return and the amnesty movement, and the transition through the GI union campaign and close collaboration with our friends in San Francisco to a new entity Tod and I created called Citizen Soldier.

I am infinitely cloudier on the details of how my relationship with Kathryn Grody slowly ground to closure. There was no abrupt break mainly because in the act of dissolving our connectedness as a couple, we did not deny our deep emotional ties as friends. And so for the next two plus years, during which I moved to Brooklyn in late 1978 with a new partner, Carol Brightman, and became a father, and Kathryn was romanced by, then, in 1980, married the actor Mandy Patinkin, we maintained steady, ever diminishing contact.<sup>i</sup>

The artistic pull of Kathryn's world imprinted itself deeply on how I now spent much of my time outside the office, most intensely during the period I was between steady relationships. I had always craved physical activity, choosing to walk in the city when others might hop on a subway. I still spent many a Saturday afternoon at the YMHA on 14<sup>th</sup> Street playing highly competitive basketball (one game sending me to Beth Israel for seven stitches under my chin). I have no precise record of when exactly, but certainly by late 1976, I had begun to study modern dance at the Alonso Castro Studio on W. 20<sup>th</sup> Street, around the corner from the Flat Iron Building. Actors like Kathryn often sought a dance class both for exercise and to tune what in the craft was called "the whole instrument." Fluidity of motion was an essential asset for a stage actor.

I was lean and tall, the ideal body type for dance, which I threw myself into with a passion, slipping away from the office to Alonso's studio several times a week. To this I soon added an acrobatics class taught by a woman who had performed in a circus act at a Las Vegas casino, and after much practice learned to walk on my hands. To soothe my joints and stretched muscles, I joined the New York Health Club in the Village to take steam, which became a kind of addiction at the end of the day. There was also an improv movement class and private sessions with a former ballerina who taught Alexander realignment therapy predicated on a level of mindfulness that, to her frustration, I still found elusive. And once a week I crossed deep into the East Village for a session with a masseuse who practiced Shiatsu. A woman I saw briefly in late 1977, a hot shot lawyer who worked on the Cointelpro issue at the Center for Constitutional Rights, sketched me in caricature as a veritable Nijinsky! This brief but intense immersion in the narcissistic ethos of the emerging post-war Me Generation was totally abandoned (except for the basketball) when my son was born two years later.

In my supreme moment of hubris toward the end of 1977, I had signed up for an acting class at H.B. Studios with Austin Pendleton. One was not required to audition, but Pendleton was a popular teacher, and so if a student wanted a spot in his class it was necessary to form up outside the Studio at the crack of dawn on registration day. I did so, and I got in. The class was scene study, guided by the classic text, *Respect for Acting*, by the school's co-director Uta Hagen. Students partnered up, rehearsed in one another's apartments, then ran their scenes before the critical eyes of both Pendleton and their student audience. My friend Gary Richards and I bit off a chunk of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, he Brutus, me Cassius. I don't think it was particularly good.

But an unusual opportunity arose a year later in mid-1979 to audition for a production by the Veteran Ensemble Theater Company, an entity sponsored by Joe Papp and made up entirely of Vietnam veterans. The one characteristic that had distinguished me from most of the other students in Austin Pendleton's class was my age. I was a good decade older than most of my classmates, steeped in worldly experience none of them could match. On that basis I could at least feign the self-confidence of rebellious disdain. And it was in this persona – I'm doing you a favor – that I approached the audition. I was reading for the psychiatrist in Tom Cole's *Medal of Honor Rag*, a one-act full length play that had had a respectable Off Broadway run in New York, and I got the part.

There would be several plays on the bill, in fact pieces extracted from plays, for the show at the La Mama Annex at 66 E. 4<sup>th</sup> Street, one of the landmark buildings on the Lower East Side from the 19<sup>th</sup> century when this neighborhood was known as *Kleindeutschland*, Little Germany. In the nineteen seventies the building's spacious high ceilinged interior had served as a television sound stage, and a theater holding nearly three hundred seats had also been installed. Several



performances were scheduled over late May and into early June during what was being officially designated Vietnam Veterans Week. Author Tom Cole had based his work on a true life event that ultimately saw a black war hero who had won his country's highest military citation for bravery killed in a robbery attempt at a convenience store in Detroit. For our performance one long scene had been lifted where I am conducting a therapy session with a this former soldier suffering from survivor guilt and temporarily interned at Valley Forge Army Hospital for observation, sometime before he was released and met his tragic end. For me this is a nice bit of symmetry on several level, not least my own four month stay at the same hospital after being evacuated from Vietnam.

Much of the Annex's interior had not been renovated, and our dressing rooms on an upper floor were dismal, overlooking a shelter on E. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street where we could observe below crowds of homeless men gathering on the sidewalk in the evening hours before curtain time. On opening night one actor in another play circulated wide eyed among the various cast members, arms flailing excitedly, voice incredulous, having suddenly learned that Diane Keaton was in the audience. "Who the hell is she here for," he demanded, clearly flustered by the unanticipated presence of such an eminent celebrity. When I informed him it was me, the only actor in the group with no prior experience unless you count high school dramatics club, the poor chap became visibly demoralized. Kathryn was in LA at the time, but I guess she had asked Diane to check out what I expect she imagined might me be an embarrassing episode.

I had one lucky piece of business that brought me to the edge of the stage under a spot light to deliver a monologue. The role was custom made for me, and I played this scene without artifice. I don't remember being self-conscious at all when Diane was there, but I was keenly aware of my father's presence the night my parents came to the show. Spotting my dad near the

front, I played the scene with just a bit of extra juice; it was one of the most exhilarating moments in my life.

Apparently I had not embarrassed myself, because Diane Keaton, who was at the time involved in the pre-production of the movie *Reds*, recommended me to her boyfriend Warren Beatty. And on one lovely June morning I joined the director at a hotel on Madison Avenue, not far from Grand Central Station, where he was shooting the interview of one of the Witnesses – an ancient who had been an organizer in the CPUSA - who appear at the beginning of the film as a prelude to the action, and who provide first hand commentary on the film's principal subject, John Reed, played by Beatty, and on the Russian Revolution which the radical journalist had covered and written about in *Ten Days That Shook the World*.

There was some vague talk about me playing a character for a scene in a Greenwich Village Café that gathered members of Max Eastman's magazine, *The Masses*, basically a kind of mannequin who could credibly represent a figure of that era. Beatty told me that the scene was being filmed that August in Britain to save money, and when I told him that I would be in Brooklyn at that time expecting the birth of my child, that was the end of it. Later that same day I wandered into Prospect Park to join the festivities for the birthday party of my partner's young daughter, and the other matrons were especially attentive after Carol told them of my morning adventure in the company of one of America's number one heartthrobs.

There were several reasons why I never seriously entertained the option of pursuing an acting career following my brief moment of glory on the stage. I had too much respect for the serious actors like Kathryn in who's the company I'd spent so much time in the recent past to imagine that my beginners luck was anything more than that. But mainly I knew how unsuited I was temperamentally to tolerate the constant humiliation actors were subjected to in the audition

process, where one was required to suffer the fools among the industry's underlings and gatekeepers with equanimity and not knock their blocks off, or at least not until you were a star. Since I did not hope to be a star, and I had by that time accumulated some skill as a writer, I reasoned that if I were to pursue a career where rejection was always more likely than not, it would be preferable to get those pink slips through the mails and not in person.

I well remember being in the audience with Kathryn when she first saw Mandy Patinkin in a revival of Pinero's *Trelawny of the Wells*, the young actor's Broadway debut and, mirabile dictu, Meryl Streep's as well. There was already a buzz about Mandy which Kathryn commented on, and we were both highly impressed with his performance. When the two actually met, I have no idea. In one of her letters, Kathryn, always ambivalent about the profession she had chosen, ruminates on why she became an actor. "The other options were mother, teacher. I chose the available adventure." She would in time win a pair of Obies for stage work, and write a one woman autobiographical play called *A Mom's Life*. So, substituting 'writer' for 'teacher,' in the end she got all three.

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<sup>1</sup>. We would reconnect many years thereafter at Tod Ensign's 2014 memorial in New York City.