

102 My Draft Board and Me

What follows describes my nine-year “Herculean” struggle with my draft board to avoid the draft. I was prompted to write this when I came across the file of correspondence with my draft board: all the official letters, orders, certificates, reports, forms, and Notices of Classification, the official name for draft cards.

The first letter in my file is dated December 27, 1945. It is from The President of the United States, though it was signed by Leon Goldman, member of Local Board 80 of Bronx County, 809 Westchester Avenue. It said, “Greeting: You are hereby directed to report for preinduction physical at 809 Westchester Ave. at 10 am on the 5th of January 1946.”

Some background: In the spring of 1945, I was a senior in high school, the war was raging, and recruiters from the army, the navy, and the marines swarmed over our class, trying to persuade us to enlist. Several of my friends did, including Mel Schulman who entered the army, and Phil Bernstein who chose the navy. It was supposed to be advantageous to enlist rather than wait to be drafted. If you enlisted you could choose your branch of service. Otherwise you might end up in the infantry. You could enlist at 17 or wait to be drafted at 18. By May 8, the war ended in Europe, and on August 14, after the atomic bomb was dropped, the Japanese surrendered, and the war ended in the Pacific. I would turn 18 on December 18. And despite the fact that the war ended, the draft continued.

On January 5, 1946, I was given my preinduction physical and was found “physically fit, acceptable for general military service.” The next document in my file is “Registrant’s Affidavit—Family Status and Dependents” in which I listed my family group--my mother and myself--and our incomes. I was sent a postal card on January 21, asking me to report for a hearing before the Local Board on January 23. On February 4, I was notified that my “...complete file will be submitted to the Appeal Board on or before February 8, 1946. It is advisable for you to submit the reasons that you believe entitle you to deferment.” I tried to make the case that drafting me would create a hardship for my mother, and that I was a full time college student. On March 14, I was advised that my induction has been stayed until June 16, 1946. And for the next two years, each fall and spring, I would submit proof that I was a full time college student and my 1A status was changed to 2 S.

In 1948, the draft ended. There are no more letters, notices, or orders--until September 25, 1950. The draft had been reinstated as a result of the “Korean conflict.” The letter from Lillian Bick, clerk of Local Board 19, 1910 Arthur Avenue, stated: “You are hereby directed to report for armed forces physical examination at 39 Whitehall St .at 6:45 am on the 2nd of October 1950.” And so I did. And on October 2, I received a Certificate stating that I was found acceptable for induction into the armed services. This was followed on October 19 by an “Order to Report for Induction” to 44 Whitehall Street at 8 am on Nov. 2. However, I was part of the ILGWU Training Institute which was a full time college equivalent program, On October 19, I was notified that: “Your induction

into the armed forces heretofore fixed for November 2, 1950...is hereby postponed until April 30, 1951..." The Training Institute program ended on April 30, 1951. I should note that my draft board had moved from Westchester Avenue to Arthur Avenue, and it was no longer Local Board 80, but Local Board 19. My new Selective Service Number was 50-19-27-1022.

When the Training Institute ended, I thought I might keep out of the Army by getting a job at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. I was offered a position as an instructor in academic subjects in the Yard's apprenticeship program, but it was made clear that no draft board would defer anyone on the basis of such a job. I took the job anyway,

While all this was going on, I had fallen in love. Through the months of April, May and June, Sylvia was uppermost in my thoughts. In July, she left for Camp Welmet where she was to be a counselor. In August, I went up to visit her and she told me that they needed another counselor. I left my job at the Navy Yard and joined Sylvia at camp. When we returned home, I applied to NYU graduate school. I also asked Sylvia to marry me. NYU accepted me; a month later Sylvia accepted me.

September 1951 was another busy month involving my draft board. On September 20, I was ordered to report for induction (again). This time on October 3rd. Another letter dated September 20, states: "This will advise you the recent evidence submitted concerning your case has been reviewed by this Local Board, but it does not justify the reopening..." A week later I received a letter postponing induction until October 24th in order to afford me the opportunity to present my case: that I was a fulltime student in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of New York University. I was deferred, and continued to be deferred until January 1954.

Immediately after I was accepted at NYU and got my deferment, I went to the ILGWU and was hired as an organizer (\$60 a week) with Local 38. From the fall of 1951 until January 1954, I worked full time at Local 38, and carried 12 credits as a graduate student at NYU. On December 22, 1951, Sylvia and I were married. The years 1952 and 1953 may well have been the busiest years of my life. I had my hands full at work, and I found myself unable to keep up with my classes. I felt like a fraud claiming to be studying for a Doctorate in Labor Economics, and not having the time to do the readings.

At the end of the fall semester, I notified my draft board that I am no longer enrolled at NYU. I had visions of the draft board jumping for joy, and shouting that they finally got me. Instead I received a Postal Card dated Feb. 12, 1954 asking me to report to the Local Board February 17, at 7:30 pm for an interview. I believe I asked them if they would be kind enough to take me after Passover. They said they would take me when they felt like it, not when I felt like it.

In February 1954, I left my job at Local 38, and Sylvia and I flew down to Miami to visit her folks, and then hitchhiked from Miami to visit friends in Phoenix. I notified my draft board when we returned in March.

On April 20, 1954 (after Passover) I received another letter from the President by way of my draft board: “ Greeting ...you are hereby ordered to the Joint Examining and Induction Station...at 7:30 am on the 4 day of May, 1954...where you will be examined...” Now it gets confusing. When I had the physical examination, they found sugar in my urine. I was very excited, thinking I might be rejected. I was told to report to Governor’s Island where I would be kept overnight for a more thorough examination. Independently of the Army physical, I saw my doctor and had a blood sugar specimen taken, and in a letter dated May 27, 1954 the report indicated that my blood contained 86 mgs. of sugar per 100cc, and the norm was 80-120 mgs. Oh well. And nothing was found at the Governor’s Island examination to cause me to be rejected, despite the fact that I ate four candy bars before being examined.

On May 17, in my last letter from my draft board, they wrote triumphantly and finally: “You are hereby ordered to report to the Armed Forces Induction Station...on Tuesday June 1, 1954 at 9 am for Induction.” My nine year struggle was over. My draft board won. And I was on my way to Fort Dix, New Jersey for basic training.

June 27, 2008

Revised April 16, 2009