JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL
My Favorite Educational Experience

I entered JHS 52, Thomas Knowlton Junior High School, in February 1940. I was 12 years old. I had come from PS 62, which was co-ed. JHS 52 was all-boys. I remember those first days, walking to 52, with trepidation. We had been warned that the ninth graders were giants, that they beat up the incoming seventh graders, and cut off their ties. Fortunately, that didn't happen.

JHS 52 was on Kelly Street, and I would walk up Fox Street, cross 156th Street, to Leggett Avenue, make a right on Leggett and walk past Beck Street to Kelly Street . During the 2 ½ years that I attended JHS 52, my mother had me take our laundry to a steam laundry on Leggett Avenue. Once a week, I would drop it off in the morning and pick it up after school. When I was not returning from school with the laundry, I would walk down Beck Street hoping to see Sallie Mae Pollack who lived at 722 Beck Street.

I had a short four block walk to 52. Some of my classmates came to school from the Hunts Point area and beyond, a mile or more away. Ten years later, I was followed to 52 by Colin Powell, who also lived near Hunts Point, and who went on to the neighborhood high school, Morris, and then to CCNY, and the rest is history.

On school days, my routine was to wake up, make my bed, wash, dress, turn on the radio and have breakfast. My breakfast consisted of juice, a soft-boiled egg, toast and milk. My radio listening consisted of Phil Cook, who, when he ended his program at 8 am, would sign off with the following song:

"Try and live today
So tomorrow you can say
What a wonderful yesterday.

"Let's not borrow sorrow
For tomorrow's skies may clear.
Life is what you make it
So just take it while it's here."

My God! I remembered it, and that was over 70 years ago! When Phil Cook retired, he was followed by Arthur Godfrey.

I would usually walk to 52 by myself. If I spotted one of my friends, we would walk together. There were at least 10 or 15 boys on my block, headed for 52: David Goldman, Danny Lala, Stanley Harris, Eddie Handwerger, Larry Wilson, Miltie Greenspan, Seymour Mirchin and Eugene Alperin. On the next block were Irving Plotnick, Sidney Reiter, and Sheldon Greenberg. Bert Siegelstein lived on Leggett Avenue. Phil Bernstein had lived on Fox Street, but moved around the corner to Southern Blvd.

A whole slew of kids came to 52 from PS 39, the other feeder school, which was on Longwood Avenue and Beck Street. PS 39 had more black and Puerto Rican kids than 62, but still not that many. My guess is under 20%. Whoever drew the district lines routed Fox Street ending at Longwood Avenue to 62, even though we were closer to 39. Among the kids from 39, was Sol Rauch. We became good friends during that first semester in 7AR.

I felt that both school and class assignments were largely arbitrary. We were aware that there were bright kids, average kids and slow kids. The teachers assigned us to classes according to their evaluation of us. The "1" class was for the brightest. And in descending order: 3,4,5 and 2. And then there was something called "ungraded" for the absolute slowest students.

Many kids were afraid of being "left back," being required to repeat a semester. There were students at 52, a year or two older than their classmates who had been "left back." Conversely, there were a few bright kids who were "skipped," I actually felt sorry for them because they were younger and smaller than the others in their class, and felt out of place.

This was not the case with the "Rs." If you were assigned to 7AR, as Sol and I were, you did three years of junior high in 2 ½, as a class. Equally bright kids were placed in 7A1. Bob Epstein, Phil Bernstein and Mel Schulman, who became three of my closest friends, were placed in 7A1, and were then moved to 9AR for their last year. They did not skip a term as Sol and I did. Alex Roth and Sid Stern, who attended PS 39, also made the "Rs," but they were a term behind us.

Kids today carry their books in knapsacks. This was unknown in my day. A few kids had school bags. I and most of my friends simply used a strap which held our text books and note book. The note book was either hard covered (more expensive) or soft covered. The cover was marbleized, black and white, with the multiplication table on the back. We may have had a pencil case, which we jammed in under the strap. If we were taking math, the pencil case would have contained a compass and a protractor. Some of us had a pencil sharpener. Toward the end of junior high, my mother gave me a pen knife which belonged to my father. I used to sharpen pencils.

The transition from PS 62 to JHS 52 meant that we were able to move from class to class. In 62, one teacher taught us most everything—English, history, geography, math, science. We remained in the same classroom. In 52, we started out in our home room, but then we would go to different classrooms for different subjects with different teachers. It was much more grown up. The junior high school teachers were subject matter specialists. Junior high was also our introduction to hall and staircase monitors, and staircases labeled "up" and "down."

A concern of many students at every level was bullies. My children have horror stories of bullies, which I only learned about much later. The only bully I remember was the previously mentioned David Goldman, who was in my class in PS 62. It was in fourth or fifth grade that he picked on me until he provoked a fight. I certainly was not a fighter. Somehow I managed to survive that experience, and even knocked him down. (Unless he tripped.) After that, no more bullying. Besides, the toughest guy in my class, Sheldon Greenberg, was my friend, which helped. I don't remember bullies in junior high.

Though I have a vivid memory of those 2 ½ years, it has been augmented by my having saved the graduation program, dated June 25, 1942. It listed all the graduates and indicated those who made the Honor Roll. I also have the January and June 1942 copies of the Knowlton Herald, the combination literary magazine and yearbook. I am sure I kept them because they contained two of my stories and a poem, and I was listed on the masthead as a member of the staff. Another valuable resource (about which I will write later) was my autograph album. And thanks to a relatively recently discovered classmate, Bert Siegelstein, I have a copy of the 9BR graduation photograph.

I not only remember the names of my classmates, I remember almost all of my junior high school teachers. Why, since I do not remember many of my high school and college teachers, did my junior high school teachers make such an impression? Perhaps I was at my most impressionable during those years, and perhaps they just happened to be good teachers.

Today, kids usually start school in September. We entered school in both February and September. I started first grade in February 1934, having turned six the previous December. In February 1940, entering seventh grade, we were finally coming out of the depression, but my mother still did not have work, and we were still on relief. She soon found work in a WPA garment shop. World War II started in September 1939. In the fall of 1940, I began preparing for my Bar Mitzvah, and campaigning for FDR who was running for an unprecedented third term. At 12, FDR, was my hero, as were Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, and Governor Herbert Lehman.

It felt good being in junior high; more grown up and independent. In elementary school, we lined up by class, in the schoolyard, or the inside yard. We then went to our classroom as a group. In junior high, if we came early, we milled around the schoolyard, then went directly to our "home rooms." We were supposed to be in our home rooms by 8:30. We put our coats in the closet, attendance was taken, announcements were read, and a bell was rung for our first class. We would walk through the halls, supervised by both teachers and hall monitors. We went up and down the stairs, supervised by staircase monitors. After the last morning class, we returned to our home rooms, from which we were dismissed for lunch.

Lunch was between 12 noon and 1 pm. Most of my classmates went home for lunch. Some of them brought their lunch, and ate them in designated classrooms. There was no lunch room. Those of us who received "free lunch" went to the second floor where it was served. A couple of classrooms were designated for the purpose. We lined up, took trays and were served a watery soup, a sandwich, milk and either fresh or canned fruit.

I felt stigmatized, receiving free lunch. It meant that you were poor. I have already written about the experience of receiving a winter jacket which had been distributed to the children on welfare. I came to the school yard one morning and noticed 10 or 15 other kids wearing the same jacket. It may not have been obvious to other kids, but those of us who were wearing them saw it as a sign that said, "We are poor." One of those kids, Tony Rodriguez, was in my class. A week or two later, he came to school with another jacket. I asked him where was the "relief" jacket. He said, with a smile, that he threw it in a fire, and told his mother that he tripped and fell into the fire, but, thank God, didn't get hurt. His mother was so thankful, she bought him another jacket.

An important part of the junior high school experience was "assembly." Once a week the entire school would line up by class and go to the auditorium. We lined up by height, with a monitor in front and in the back. Height took on a value which frequently determined how you were viewed by others. It was better to be tall than short. I felt lucky to have been among the taller boys in our class. We were seated in our classes by height, with the shorter boys in front. It seemed to make sense. One of the smallest boys in our class was nicknamed "mousy." I did not view it as complimentary. Kids who had vision problems also sat in the front.

We entered the auditorium, took our seats, and when every class was seated, the Principal or Assistant Principal would greet us. I believe he then read a passage from the Bible. There was a "color guard" which marched down the aisle with the flag; we would then recite the Pledge of Allegiance. (At some point in my school experience, the Pledge was amended to add "under God.") We also sang the Star Spangled Banner. Each week, awards were given to classes for the least tardiness, and best attendance. The President of the class receiving the award would go to the front of the auditorium to accept it. I can still see Phil Bernstein as he casually strode down the aisle, during our last year at 52. He was cool. There were also announcements, pep talks, and singing: Miss Haver at the piano and Mrs. Lubin leading us, waving her hands and mouthing the words. Despite the fact that I was labeled a "listener," I sang along with everyone else. In our music classes, we learned the songs of the season, the busiest season being Thanksgiving and Christmas. The songs had a religious overtone, but nobody seemed to mind. We sang them in assembly.

Junior high school was a wonderful learning experience, expanding on the subjects we were exposed to in elementary school, with subject matter teachers. My English teachers made the greatest impression on me: Mrs. Merten, Miss Jensen and Mrs. Davis, who was black. They were all older women; I would guess in their 60s. They taught us grammar, sentence structure, creative writing, and they introduced us to great literature. We read Shakespeare, and memorized poems, sonnets and soliloquies. The mention of Shakespeare reminds me of an exchange between a teacher and student in ninth grade English. We were reading aloud from a Shakespeare play, when my classmate came upon the word "whore." He pronounced the word "who-ah." The teacher stopped him and told him that it is pronounced "hore" like "more" or "core." He looked at the teacher and shook his head and said, "I always pronounce it "who-ah." (How times have changed: today, on the street, it is pronounced, "hoe.")

We were encouraged to read lots of books, and I read lots of books. My mother had a bookcase filled with Yiddish books, which she had bought when times were good. Soon after I came along, times turned bad. I remember having only one book, when I was seven or eight. It was a "pop-up" book of fairy tales: Puss in Boots, Hansel and Gretel, Rumpelstiltskin. For my Bar Mitzvah, I received two books: Laughs from Jewish Lore (which I still have) and a book by Richard Halliburton.

It was during junior high school that I really became "a reader." I had gotten my library card while I was in elementary school, and would go to the Hunts Point Library regularly. The children's section was one flight up. I entered the library, turned to the right, and against the wall were shelves and shelves of children's fiction, arranged alphabetically. My favorites were Barbour and Heyliger who both wrote about high school sports teams. I was also a fan of Howard Pease who specialized in nautical adventures—cabin boys on steamships, pirates on the high seas, intrigue in foreign ports. Toward the end of junior high school, I moved on to "Books

for Older Children" and I started reading Dickens, and Dumas and Mark Twain. In my autograph album, I claimed that "The Three Musketeers" was my favorite book.

My history teachers were Mr. Levin and Mr. Rothfeder, who was the Debating Club advisor. We also had classes in Geography and Civics, all of which came under the heading of social studies. We did a lot of memorizing in social studies as well as in English. We entered World War II with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on Sunday December 7, 1941. The next day we had a special assembly and heard President Roosevelt declare war, calling the day of the attack, "a date which will live in infamy." I was in 9AR. We had been following the progress of the war in our history class from the time I entered 52. Several of my classmates were very knowledgeable, especially Augie Iglesias, who was an expert on the war in Yugoslavia. I was aware of what was happening in Germany, before entering 52, from discussions in Hebrew School, from my mother's reading of her Yiddish newspaper, "The Day," and listening to news on the Yiddish language station, WEVD.

The teacher who, without a doubt, made the greatest impression on three of my closest friends, was our science teacher, Mr. Mandel. Phil Bernstein, Mel Schulman and Alex Roth all credit Mr. Mandel with stimulating their interest in science. Phil and Mel stayed after school and worked with Mr. Mandel on chemistry. Alex, who had been involved, on his own in several scientific projects involving electricity, actually went to Mr. Mandel's house for help.

Only one foreign language was offered—French--and there was only one foreign language teacher--Miss Garmir. She was French, and easily intimidated by unruly ninth grade boys. She was the only teacher so intimidated. We were never disruptive in any other class. The high point (or low point) of our behavior: we entered the classroom one day and Miss Garmir was not there. Her record book was on her desk. One of my classmates took the record book and threw it out the window. We did learn French and we all were admitted to third term French in high school.

One of the subjects we all liked was typing. We were thrilled to be sitting at a typewriter, which none of us owned, learning how to "touch-type." It was not easy, but we plugged away at it: "a s d f g f" etc. And we liked the teachers, Mrs. Kerchof and Mr. Fried. My friend Irving Plotnick was the best typist in our class, and when he was in high school his father, a furrier, bought him am old Remington manual typewriter, which weighted a ton. Irv typed his father's bills on it, as well as his homework, and term papers. The rest of us hand wrote everything.

We were given a wonderful introduction to music. We listened to classical music and were provided with words, enabling us to remember the melody: "This is the symphony that Schubert wrote and never finished." And we sang the Ballad for Americans, and we put on a production of Gilbert and Sullivan's HMS Pinafore, and a school play where we sang lots of folk songs. The play was called, The Land of the Free. I was designated "a listener" and was not supposed to sing when the class performed.

Shop classes were the high point of the day. There was wood shop and sheet metal shop. We learned to use tools, and we made useful objects like a tie rack in wood shop and a dust pan in metal shop. Print shop with Mr. Lyman was magical. I loved the smell of the ink and the sound of the printing press. We learned to hold a printer's stick and take the letters from the boxes and assemble words, then sentences, then paragraphs, and finally a page. Our literary magazine,

"Knowlton Herald" was produced in our print shop by the students, and illustrated with linoleum cuts, made by the students in the Linoleum Club. How many other junior high schools published a literary magazine?

We were dismissed at 3 pm and most of us went straight home. A few guys may have stayed around the schoolyard and played ball. A few may have had some after school duties, or were being kept after school as punishment. Most of the Jewish kids went to Hebrew school, which they usually left after Bar Mitzvah. (My Bar Mitzvah was at the end of my second semester at 52, but though I left Hebrew School, my mother sent me to the Yiddish school, which I attended until the end of junior high.) Hanging out was an important after school activity. We talked, we played ball, we engaged in whatever the seasonal activity might have been: skating, marbles, bottle caps, trading cards. And then we headed upstairs, and listened to programs like Jack Armstrong or Little Orphan Annie. The streets became deserted.

When my mother came home from work, she would make supper. It was late and she found shortcuts. She would open a can of Campbell's vegetable soup, heat it up, prepare hamburgers or some other meat, serve the soup without the vegetables, while the meat was broiling. Then serve the vegetables from the vegetable soup with the meat. Sometimes my mother would serve canned salmon or tuna with a salad, or noodles and cheese. For dessert, canned fruit.

After supper, I would do my homework. I had a constant battle with my mother who insisted, "Do not do your homework with the radio on." I tried to tell her I could do both. I never won that battle. When I finished my homework, I was allowed to listen to "my programs:" The Lone Ranger, The Shadow, The Green Hornet. Inner Sanctum. However, if one of my programs came on at 9 pm, my mother's insisted that Gabriel Heatter take precedence. So I put on my program at 9:15 pm and tried to imagine what took place during the first 15 minutes. There were several programs that we listened to together: The Goldbergs, Lux Radio Theatre, Amos and Andy, The Quiz Kids, Information Please. And the comedians and news commentators.

During my last semester, I was confronted with the momentous question: where to go to high school? I immediately selected Townsend Harris, the very prestigious exam school on 23rd Street in Manhattan, the CCNY "prep school." The other exam schools were Stuyvesant, Bronx Science and Brooklyn Tech. Prior to making application, we met with an "advisor." When I met with her, she looked at my record and told me that I was not Townsend Harris material. I told her I planned to apply anyway. Her attitude was: "it's your funeral." However, during the spring of 1942, New York City closed Townsend Harris, so I never found out if I was Townsend Harris material.

I, and most of my classmates, applied to Stuyvesant. A few others applied to Science and Tech. Our teachers worked with us, preparing us for the exams. An indication of how good our teachers were (or how smart we were): almost all of us passed. The Knowlton Herald carried Norman Perlmutter's story, The Stuyvesant Test. He described how we nervously left 52, took the subway to 14th Street, and entered the high school auditorium where there were students from all over the city. The tests were distributed—vocabulary, then a paragraph test, then math and algebra. No one in my class wanted to go to the district high school, Morris.

The best schools attract the best teachers. I don't know if JHS 52 was considered one of the best schools, but we had outstanding teachers. My guess is that close to half the student body was

Jewish. My 9BR class had 36 students; 28 were Jewish and five were Puerto Rican. Using name recognition, I guess that 111 of the 225 graduates in June 1942 were Jewish. By the late 40s, the ethnic make-op of the school was changing.

When I was a substitute teacher at 52 for a few days in 1950, the school was majority Puerto Rican and black. None of my teachers were still in the school. My friends and I returned to the school 50 years later. We were revisiting the old neighborhood, or the Shtetl, as Bob Epstein calls it. We met the Principal who was Puerto Rican. She had little idea of the history of the school, and was surprised to know that there was a school song. We were shown the auditorium, and spontaneously burst into song:

"Rah for dear old Knowlton.
Shout til the rafters ring.
Rah for dear old Knowlton once again.
Let every man in Knowlton sing.
We'll sing of all the happy hours.
Sing of the carefree days.
Sing of dear old alma mater.
The school of our hearts always."

There is another stanza which begins: "We'll be true, we'll be true…" but I can no longer remember what it was that we will be true to. I asked everyone I knew who went to 52, and only Phil Bernstein who now has a severe short term memory loss said: "We'll be true to the teaching of truth and of happiness…" Thanks , Phil. We all remembered it then.

No matter how poor you were, when you graduated from junior high school, you bought an autograph album. There were two kinds: one with a zipper, and the cheaper one with a clasp. I got the one with a clasp. When my friend Sol died, his children found his autograph album, and not knowing what to do with it, they sent it to me. Though he was as poor as me, his had a zipper.

Comparing the contents of both albums, I realized how similar the entries were. At the beginning of the album, was a page titled "Favorites." For Book, Sol chose The Trail of the Lonesome Pine. I chose The Three Musketeers. For Game, Sol's choice was stickball; mine was baseball. For Chum, Sol picked Marvin Peyser and me. And I picked Sol and Larry Wilson. We both selected CCNY for College. On the next page, Class Officers, we of course had the same entries: Philip Bernstein as President, and David Mass as Vice President, the 52 equivalent was Captain and Lieutenant.) I was the Class Secretary, but since the list included Treasurer, Sol put me in as Treasurer as well.

Having the albums at hand, I don't have to rely on memory to share what my fellow classmates wrote. The last week before graduation, the halls of 52 were alive with the scurrying of the graduating class, albums in hand, cornering other classmates and teachers. The aim was to fill up your album, as if the graduate who filled the most pages, got a prize. Teachers usually just signed their names. The teachers who were special, wrote something special for you. My favorite English teacher, P. T. (Pauline Turner) Davis wrote "Steadiness is one of your fine qualities. Success to you," A few teachers wrote Best Wishes, or Sincerely, or Good Luck.

Looking through Sol's album, I was impressed that our gorgeous music teacher, R. Sybil Haver, wrote "You'll talk your way through, I'm sure." There has to be a fascinating story behind that.

Very few of us were original. The same inscriptions appeared year after year in junior high school autograph albums across the land:

"You asked me to write, What shall it be? Two little words. "Remember Me.'"

"When on this page you chance to look, Just think of me and close the book."
I wrote the following in several albums: "First comes love. Then comes marriage. Then comes (Sol, Phil, Bob etc) with a perambulator."

"Here's to those who wish you well. And those who don't can go to 'Morris.'"

"If all the girls lived across the sea, What wonderful swimmers we would be."

"If writing in a book, Remembrance assures. With the greatest of pleasure, I will write in yours."

"He who only hopes is hopeless."

"Remember once, remember twice. Remember the time We rolled the dice."

"I am no poet, I have no fame. Just to do you a favor, I'll sign my name."

"If you sit on the tack of ambition, you will surely rise,"

"When you get married And have a shiny new car, Remember me, the guy from 9BR."
Another 'When you get married…poem: "When you get married And your wife asks for a drink, Just give her a cup, And show her the sink."

"Friend is a word of royal tone. Friend is a poem all alone."

"When you are low and feeling blue, Just think of the days in 52."

One of my classmates looked for a page with a certain color, and wrote: "May you never be as blue as this page."

Another classmate had this as his favorite inscription: "First in the album, Best of the lot, first to be remembered, Last to be forgot." I didn't have the heart to tell him that it should be written on the first page of the album, not in the middle.

In addition to the clever poem or saying, I was surprised to see how my classmates addressed me: I was Jake, Jaky, Jakie, Jacke, Jackob, Jacob, J.S., and Schlitt, To Tony Rodriguez, I was Schlittzenbergen.

And how did my classmates close their entries? Your pal; your classmate; your friend; your fellow grad-u-8; your fellow grad-u-past tense of to eat; a fellow grad; your brother graduate.

Phil Bernstein signed: Your Captain, and David Mass wrote Your Lieutenant. The page was occasionally decorated with "4 get me knot" in the corners, or "Yours til the board walks."

A sad note: I had saved the first page for my mother, but I never asked her to write anything. There were entries from my classmates, my teachers, my relatives, but I had not asked my mother. Three years later, after I had graduated from high school, she found my junior high school autograph album, looked through it, and wrote the following on the first page that I had reserved for her:

"Sep. 7, 1945
To my son Jacob,
Best wishes to your Graduation my son. Late, well, late is my fate.
You, my dear son, came late, but thanks God you came. You came, my son.
Blessed shall be that day in December 1927. The day of days.
Dear God, may my son be blessed white. Everything that is good, fine and nice.
A very happy New Year 5705, to you my son.
Mother"
Five and a half years after she wrote this, she was gone.

While we were in 52, we never gave any thought to why our school was called Thomas Knowlton. It was a given. Somebody, I would assume at the Board of Education, named it Thomas Knowlton. But we never knew who Thomas Knowlton was. I believe I once asked a teacher, and was told that he fought in the Revolutionary War, but he wasn't sure. Thanks to Wikipedia, I learned that Thomas Knowlton was born in Boxford MA in 1740, his family moved to Ashford CT when he was 8, he fought in the French and Indian War when he was 15, and as a result of his leadership in the Battle of Bunker Hill, was made an officer. He organized a group of spies called the Knowlton Rangers, in August 1776, he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, and was killed in the Battle of Harlem Heights in September 1776. It would have been nice to have known this when we went to Knowlton.

I recently learned that our school is no longer designated JHS 52; it is now Middle School 302. Furthermore, it is no longer Knowlton; it is Luisa Dessus Cruz. When I asked who was Luisa Dessus Cruz, no one knew. Someone believes she was an educator.

For some reason, we never questioned that junior high school should be a single sex institution. (52 became co-ed in 1962.) We said goodbye to girls as classmates at the end of sixth grade, just as we were beginning to be aware of them. During that last year of elementary school, I decided that I was in love with both Phyllis Flyer and Rita Feit. I suspect that they had no idea how I felt about them, though one day I went with a friend to the courtyard of Phyllis' apartment house and shouted, "Phyllis, I love you!," and ran away.

All those feelings were put on hold for the next few years. I suspect that for the same reason Orthodox synagogues separate men and women, the New York City school system separated boys and girls in junior high school (and even in some high schools.) They are very distracting. Girls were absent from my world during junior high school, and the chasm that junior high created was widened by an all-boys high school. Not only were there no girls to distract us, there was only one teacher among the entire faculty who was young and attractive: R. Sybil Haver. I

would have thought by the law of averages, there would have been more. But it was the end of the depression, and teachers were holding on to their jobs for dear life. There was very little turnover. Few young teachers were being hired.

A final observation regarding sex: In my 2 ½ years in junior high (and for that matter in high school and college) I never met a homosexual. They must have been well closeted in the 40s. We knew they existed, but we thought they were confined to Greenwich Village. If we wanted to make fun of someone, especially someone who was not macho, we would call him "homo!" and speak in a falsetto It might be accompanied by a limp writs and a pinkie along the eye brow. My Puerto Rican friends labeled the individual "maricon." The closest anyone came to having his sexual preference questioned in 52 was Norman Perlmutter. He was blonde and pudgy, and played Buttercup in our production of HMS Pinafore, wearing a dress. That really took courage. And he wasn't gay.

At 2:15 every Thursday, we participated in the "club" of our choice.. Most of the clubs were extensions of the curriculum: French Club, Glee Club, P.T. Club, Debating Club, Clay Club, Soap Sculpture Club etc. We didn't stay with the same club each term. I was in the Debating Club one term and possibly the Stamp Club or the Garden Club another term. We did not take it very seriously. It was when the Glee Club and Orchestra practiced, and when the members of the Traffic Squad, the Staircase Squad and the GO met.

I was always puzzled by what the GO (General Organization) did. It was supposed to be something like a Student Council, where elected representatives from each class, met and deliberated. But about what? It was the "teacher'advisor" who ran the show. I always joined the GO (dues were 25 cents), and I have my GO buttons from all my five terms. Our dues money bought the Service pins, the Knowlton "K," and the carnations given to the graduates. We also saw a baseball game, underwritten by the GO.

Perhaps it was my involvement with the Garden Club that led me to join the school's Victory Garden over the summer. Across the street from the school was a garden plot, and we prepared the ground during the spring, and tended to the garden during the summer. We harvested our "crop" before school started in the fall. I worked in our Victory Garden for two summers. (The summer of 1942, after I graduated, was devoted to looking for a summer job.) I believe the N.Y. Herald Tribune partnered with the Board of Education to encourage school Victory Gardens. They held an annual fair where students displayed the result of their labors, and prizes were awarded. We may not have won a prize, but all of us who worked in the garden were awarded certificates. And we were able to bring home the food we grew. In addition to the more common vegetables, we grew stuff I had never heard of. My favorite was kol rabi. It was years later that I realized that my friends Bob Epstein and Mel Schulman were also involved with the Victory Garden. We must have been solitary gardeners.

My interest in growing things preceded my working in 52's garden, but it was encouraged by the school. We were sold seeds every spring that were packaged by the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens. The packets sold for a few cents, and contained both vegetable and flower seeds. I would get cheese boxes from the grocery store, fill them with soil that I would dig out of the empty lots near the East River, put the seeds in the soil, and place the boxes on my fire escape. I

grew asters, marigolds, morning glories and string beans. Again, I owe a debt of gratitude to JHS 52.

I have enjoyed reliving those years, and treasure the friendships I made at junior high school 52, my closest friends. Most educators consider the junior high school--middle school years the most difficult to teach. I don't believe my teachers felt that, but times were different in the 1930s-'40s. JHS 52 had children of immigrant parents. Learning was the passport to success. We wanted to do well. We may have come from families that questioned the economic system, but we were taught to respect out teachers, and that the knowledge they were imparting will be the tools we would need to make a better world. Thank you Thomas Knowlton Junior High School.

Finally, I am a sucker for reunions. When I learn about a reunion—from high school or college—if I can get there, I will. Of course, it usually is a disappointment. As far as I know, there has never been a junior high school reunion of any of the graduating classes of the 1940s and 1950s. I am toying with the thought such a reunion would be a great idea. Those of us who are still around will range in age from our mid-70s to our mid-80s. Why not? We just have to get the word out.

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