

# **I Guess That's Me (A Reflection)**

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# NYU Student Me

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## NYU Student Me

Immediately after starting my new job at GBA, I resumed my college education. The twenty-eight hour work week gave me ample time to use the unlimited tuition. My first shock came when only fourteen credits out of over ninety were allowed to be transferred from Rensselaer. I was told RPI was not a liberal arts school and therefore many courses were not comparable. I even had to retake basic Freshman English (more on that later).

OK, so now I was once again a second semester Freshman. My first choice for a major was Sociology. No particular reason, but entering Freshman had to select a major. After differences with a Sociology professor (more on that later), I became an Experimental Psychology major. I mention this only to make this point: I was still aiming at the same goal. My interest was still designing things for people to use and I could easily see the benefits of Experimental Psych. when applied to computer programming.

*These courses were largely at night. My job at GBA was not restricted to daytime, and I occasionally used the computers in the evening. My choice of courses was wider than most evening students. With my work week limited to twenty-eight hours, I had plenty of time for school. Most semesters, I took twelve credit hours.*

I said I had more comments on retaking Freshman English and I have. (And in a moment another story about its successor, English Composition.) At the end of this first forgettable NYU English course, a classmate asked me for computer help. Leo, older with three grown daughters, was having trouble grasping his introductory computer class. He offered me dinner in exchange for my help and I was glad to help, given his age and commitment to education. A few brief tutoring sessions and Leo passed his course. For the reward dinner he chose one of the many nondescript luncheon places near the Washington Square campus. Seated in a booth, we were waiting for our nondescript meals and he began to talk. What he told me completely captured my attention. The meal was served, I suppose, but I didn't see it or the other patrons. What he told me was this: He had been stationed on Pearl Harbor before The Attack. He was there with James Jones, the author of *From Here to Eternity*. He knew Jones well, and proceeded to tell me, in extraordinary detail, which aspects of which characters were based on which real people. I was mesmerized. You'd never notice Leo on the street, never guess he was part of American and literary history. I certainly didn't.

The next required English course, Composition, was not only interesting but involving. It was both these things because for the first time in my scholastic career I had a teacher who was interested in me. Richard not only rewarded my writing, he respected it. Did it help that we were contemporaries? (I was twenty-eight when I resumed college.) Probably. I know we communicated as equals, and he respected my not inconsiderable, if somewhat random, collection of knowledge. (Once in class, I pointed out certain lines in *Glass Menagerie* came from e. e. cummings.) We exchanged extra-curricular poetry. I introduced him to Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media*. Next semester he taught a course on McLuhan.

By this time I was a major in Experimental Psychology, a second choice after a run-in with a Sociology professor. My attitude towards education hadn't changed, although the level of my teachers' education had increased considerably. It was now easier for me to respect their knowledge. Respecting authority was still something else. When the Sociology professor F'd my first essay test, I asked why. He said he couldn't read my writing. I admitted my handwriting was poor, but I explained I wrote as carefully as I could. What were my options? He asked if I owned a silent typewriter. I offered to read him my written answers. Unacceptable, he said. I thought, but didn't say, he was being a jerk. Maybe it showed in my class demeanor: I often wrote poetry in his class. The best grade I could manage was a D, which automatically disqualified me as a Sociology major. The kicker to this story happened the next semester. I wrote a paper for a Politics course. It received an A and I was praised for my knowledge of Sociology.

My second college career came to an end for a number of reasons. Leaving GBA was only one. Although I had encountered my second, and last, teacher to show a personal interest, classes were quickly becoming irrelevant for two reasons.

NYU had decided to phase out their night school program. When I asked what were my choices from such a limited selection, they said that was my problem. Despite my putative Experimental Psychology major, I was given carte blanche in course selection. Was this a joke? Then I asked, I thought facetiously, if I, a professional FORTRAN programmer, could take a beginning FORTRAN class. They said it made no difference. OK, thought I, here's some easy credits. When I showed up in the class, the instructor did a double-take and asked what I was doing there. This teacher was also the head of the computer center at the Courant Institute. We saw each other almost

every day. I told him the counselor's tale. He said I could stay if I didn't bother (code word for help) the other students.

A second reason for dropping out for the second time was the realization I could accomplish more professional advancement with quality experience than an irrelevant degree. In the sixties, computing degrees were still being developed. No one was hiring on knowledge of computing theory; everyone was desperate for experienced programmers. I went to a few job interviews (the best of which is described in *My Life*), and was offered salary increases up to fifty percent. This potential professional New York success quickly became moot as I realized my physical future took precedence. I had to leave the New York climate. I chose Florida. But wait! There's a lot more about me and New York.

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