Prologue

The Beginning

I was six years old, nagging my mother incessantly to get me a dog. The response was always the same: "You can't have a dog; we live in an apartment, and you have ellegies" (Brooklynese for "allergies," as I discovered later). One Saturday, she agreed to take me to an animal shelter to look at the animals. I recall my unbounded joy—all those beautiful dogs!

"What happens to them?" I asked the attendant.

"We put most of 'em to sleep."

"No," I said. "I mean when they wake up. Do people take them home?"

"No, sonny. We put them to sleep, and they don't wake up. They're killed. Nobody wants them."

I didn't understand.
I still don't.

I

Life in New York

My academic career path gave little if any early indication of what was later to become my passion: moral concern for animals. Through college at City College of New York, I slavishly followed the stereotyped New York Jewish yellow brick road—hard academic grubbing resulting in a straight-A average after my first year, majoring in literature and philosophy. Except for my long hair, remarkably similar to Angela Davis's, I was my Jewish mother's ideal. The only deviation from this trite script was my insistence that I work summers in Coney Island, both because I could work eighty hours a week (at a dollar an hour) and because Coney Island was a dangerous, rough, intimidating "Sodom by the sea" as one book put it, thereby leading me to believe (with some justification) that I could learn street smarts there. It was in Coney Island that I developed some "real world at its worst" sense and honed the wisecracking, tough-guy persona that would later inform my teaching and lecturing.

There I got to interact with thugs, hookers, street cops, grifters, sideshow "freaks," mafiosi, bikers, kid gangs, drunks, disbarred lawyers, at least one murderer, and lunatics. I befriended a Cherokee Indian paratrooper who saved me from mayhem on a number of occasions, and we became blood brothers. Despite hours of practicing cold, deadeye stares in front of the mirror, I remained a 150-pound former yeshiva boy who didn't shave yet and from whose eyes, as a rabbi cuttingly put it years later, "the light of Judaism shines." Nonetheless, over the eight years I worked there, a bit of

what I aspired to be began to emerge. I had acquired skills that would serve me well in combat on behalf of animals.

One additional summer job had major implications for my career. When I was twenty, I needed a job during the week, as Coney Island offered me only weekend work that year. My uncle Oscar was traffic manager for a giant Lily-Tulip paper cup warehouse in the Bronx, and I asked him for a job. He informed me that he did not hire relatives and that the people who worked in the warehouse were roughnecks, hooligans, racists, and anti-Semites. I explained that I needed the money for school, and he relented, but with the proviso that no one know we were related and with the understanding that he would treat me as he treated everyone else—badly, it turned out. I agreed.

The first couple of weeks were rough. I had to join the Teamsters, and the workers were very large, very bigoted, and disparaging of "college boys." They were Italian, German, Polish, Irish, Hungarian, a living museum of the history of anti-Semitism. The worst was an alcoholic German who kept baiting me about being Jewish. One day, I'd had enough. The next time he made a crack about my being Jewish, I said, "[I'll] cut your fucking liver out, if you have a liver left." Amazed, he gave me a wide berth; I had earned some respect. Gradually, the men started asking me what I was studying. When I told them philosophy, I elicited hoots of derision, along with "What the fuck is that?" So I started teaching them philosophy in plain language during breaks and lunch, introducing numerous paradoxes and classic questions. Sure enough, they bit, and I learned how to translate esoteric philosophy into plain talk that piqued their interest. I thus developed, contrary to most philosophers, a healthy respect for regular people. I found them willing to engage issues if I didn't patronize them and if I conducted the discussion in ordinary language, a skill essential to my later work with farmers and ranchers. This experience, of course, fit perfectly with the respect for the Common Sense philosophy that would also inform my subsequent career.

In fact, I was so successful in these discussions that Oscar deemed them subversive and ordered me to desist, particularly during smoke breaks, since I did not smoke. Since our relationship was employee to employer, I solicited the help of the Teamster shop steward, "Uncle Louie" Bongiorno, who rolled into the warehouse in a cream-colored Caddy convertible with red leather seats ("Hey, kid, have a cigar!"). Uncle Louie assured me of my right to lecture on philosophy and so informed Oscar, who cussed me out to my mother for half an hour on the phone but who left me alone thereafter.

At City College of New York, I fell in love with Linda, the brightest, most beautiful woman I had ever met, and throughout college we dated each other exclusively. (Why I loved her was clear; why she loved me was more

perplexing. As a colleague uncharitably expressed it in later years, "How did a gargoyle like you land a world-class beauty like her?")

In my senior year, I was awarded a Woodrow Wilson fellowship and a Fulbright fellowship to Edinburgh to study David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and Scottish Common Sense philosophy. I had also applied to the Harvard doctoral program in philosophy, at that time the best in the United States. To my delight, I was accepted with a full four-year fellowship. I traveled to Harvard to determine whether I could defer my enrollment until after the year in Britain. The department head affirmed that I could but handed me my first academic disappointment when he commented, "Your application was very controversial." "Why?" I asked. "Because you have expressed interest in the history of philosophy—in Hume, Kant, Plato—what about *real* philosophy?" "Real philosophy?" I echoed. "Yes! British philosophy after World War I." He explained that analytic philosophy ruled Harvard, and I had shown no special interest in it. To me, it was yet another approach with no special status, and I told him so. "Well," he replied, "if you want to study hard and be thought of as a philosopher, not a historian, you'd best spend the year in Britain getting up to snuff on analytic philosophy." Shocked at his smug attitude, I blurted out that the Scholastics thought they had the ultimate method, too, and where were they today? He replied, "Well, we will take you next year, because *we think you can be saved,* but perhaps you'd best think about going to Columbia unless your attitude changes."

Many years later, I realized that he had done me multiple favors. I *did* master much analytic philosophy during my year in Scotland and learned its great value. And I did go to Columbia. But most important, I learned very early about arbitrary academic bias even in the best of places, determining almost as a matter of fashion what was legitimate to work on and what was not. Without that lesson, I probably would never have found the courage to buck the academic philosophical community's universal bias against philosophy that had anything to do with real-world issues, derisively dismissed as "applied philosophy," and to write in non-jargon, developing a style accessible to and even fun for interested people.

Edinburgh was unforgettable: physically beautiful, civilized, safe, with no need for street smarts. I got to work with George E. Davie, the great Hume and Scottish Common Sense philosophy scholar, and with W. H. Walsh, Kant scholar and analytic philosopher. This combination of influences imprinted me with a strong belief in common sense as a basis for philosophy, a position even the greatest of all skeptics, David Hume, espoused in his ordinary life moments. Linda and I hitchhiked across Europe over three months, encountering hospitality and kindness everywhere and mitigating considerably my New York–based belief that society was "a war of

each against all," in Hobbes's immortal phrase, and that one always needed to lock one's doors. Absent the Edinburgh experience, I probably never would have left New York.

I returned to Columbia to earn my doctorate. It turned out that Columbia was an extremely cold, unfriendly, bureaucratic place. Though there were more than three hundred active graduate students in the doctoral program in philosophy, there was only one faculty adviser for all the students who were not yet ready to write their dissertations. One seminar I took had more than fifty enrolled students; the room held only twenty. It is arguable that the Columbia "student riots" of spring 1967 were not about the Vietnam War or about Columbia's racist policies toward its black neighbors (the ostensible reason for the insurrections) but, rather, about the total indifference of the university toward students' well-being. For example, although I had arrived with a Woodrow Wilson fellowship that was presumed to be renewed for a second year if I did not flunk out, in practice Columbia would appropriate the money, informing me that, since I had already invested a year, I would "find the money somewhere."

To qualify to write the dissertation, one needed to pass comprehensive exams on some fifteen thousand pages of philosophical material, which often did not overlap at all with courses offered. In addition, the highly competitive graduate students waged psychological warfare on each other, usually by invoking legends regarding the comprehensive exams. Example: "Oh, you're taking the metaphysics exam? I hope you've read Whitehead." "No—it's not on the reading list." "Doesn't matter. They often ask about Whitehead." Since Whitehead was utterly incomprehensible, fear and paranoia were the order of the day.

I doubt I could have gotten through the program without my wife, then doing a quickie master's degree so she could teach elementary school and help support us. Being far brighter than I am, she was invaluable—teaching me and my fellow graduate students logic, reading my papers, blunting paranoia. (She has an IQ of over 170 and got a Ph.D. in math at Colorado State University [CSU] for *fun,* never opening a math book after her oral exam.) Besides her love and friendship, animals were my salvation. New York air was such that one could slice it, producing beautiful sunsets, filthy white shirts, and, in me, chronic asthma leading to visits to the emergency room five times a week and more. Between the pressure of the program and the asthma working synergistically, I experienced the worst four years of my life.

Mao was an Abyssinian kitten I had acquired from Bideawee, a pioneering no-kill shelter. Linda and I spent hours playing with her; I even carried her on my shoulder to the park. Tough, smart, wisecracking—a paradigmatic New York cat—Mao later survived the move to Colorado, learned to negoti-

ate the rural outdoors, had a litter of kittens, fished for carp, and eventually disappeared on one of her forays, presumably killed by coyotes. Helga was a 150-pound black Great Dane who accompanied me everywhere and whom I guard trained sufficiently for her to growl and snarl whenever my wife and I coughed in a certain way. On at least one occasion, she saved my wife from being mugged. As Linda left our building, she saw five teenage no-goodniks entering our building. Aware that we had no teenagers in the building, my wife coughed and alerted Helga. The kids obligingly held the door for Linda, wished her a good morning, and mugged the next tenant at knifepoint.

Helga was probably the sweetest dog I have ever known. I would walk her to Linda's school at 3:00 P.M. to pick her up. Hordes of schoolchildren would sit on Helga, hang from her ears and neck, and hug her, and she greeted them with gentle delight. I realized then—and even more so now—that the dog and cat were my salvation. The only thing that relieved the constant, nagging fear of the next asthma attack was playing with my animals, and their silent affection was a source of constant joy (except when the downstairs neighbors complained about my chasing the cat around the apartment at 3:00 A.M. or when the ineffectual Park Avenue allergist pumping me full of cortisone recited his weekly mantra, "Get rid of the dog and cat").

Anyone who has lived in New York is well aware of the coldness and callousness of people there. Mind your own business, don't get involved, don't make eye contact, and don't talk to strangers. Watch New Yorkers on an elevator: Each person unerringly finds a spot as far away from everyone else as possible and develops a great interest in examining the ceiling. When I later moved to Colorado, I suspected the entire city of Fort Collins of being populated by hookers, because women smiled at you in the street and said, "Good morning."

Life in New York, as I realized after moving west, can be far lonelier than living in rural Wyoming. The Wyoming cowboy, whose nearest neighbor may be eighty miles away, is separated from companionship only by geographic distance. The New York apartment dweller may be separated by two inches of plasterboard and never exchange a greeting. Shorn of physical distance from others, people create unbridgeable psychic distance.

Helga was, as she taught me, not only a source of unqualified love and companionship but also a bridge across that psychic distance and a social lubricant. The one exception to the "never talk to strangers" rule is if they or you or both of you are walking a dog. A dog—preferably a puppy or an exotic dog—is a license to approach another. "Wuh kina dawg is dat?" is a password for accessing other minds, or, alternatively, "Bewful dawg!" (Ice-breaking hint: All large Dobermans walked by Italian men are named Diablo, pronounced "De-ah-bull-o.")

I recall walking Helga at 4:00 A.M. on Broadway, a dangerous time, but I was unafraid. I was approached by a young black woman. "Sir," she said. "I was heading for Harlem, but I got off at the wrong subway station. You need a token to get back on at this hour, and I don't have one. I'm scared on the street. Would you walk me to Harlem with that big dog?" I did, wondering how she knew I wasn't a monster with a big dog.

I would usually work all day, take the dog to the park in the late afternoon, work until midnight or so, then take a long walk with the dog before going to bed from 6:00 A.M. to noon. On one occasion, I was about to enter Riverside Park, a beautiful two-mile-long park abutting the Hudson River, about which I will say more shortly. As I started to descend the stairs, a patrol car came screaming up. "Hey, you can't go in there," a cop shouted. "Why not?" I asked. Thinking me a simpleton, he said, "Because the park is full of bad people at night, and it's dangerous." "If that's the case," I replied, "why aren't you in the park getting the bad people, instead of giving me a hard time?" "Don't be stupid, buddy," he said. "We don't have that big dog to protect us." (He had only a day stick, a nightstick, mace, and a pistol, as well as, very likely, a throwaway gun and knife.) In fact, research has shown that a man-and-dog police team is far more effective in park patrol and crime deterrence than either cars or foot patrols. (Dogs were not used because of pressure from the black community. The dog was a symbol of white oppression, *vide* Bull Connor's use of dogs in Alabama. Some of my police friends told me they would rather have a dog than their weapons: "Bad guys know you can't bullshit a dog.")

My meanderings often took me three miles to the theater district. At an all-night doughnut shop, the prostitutes would assemble at 4:00 A.M. after work. My arrival—or, more accurately, Helga's arrival—was greeted with joyous cries of "Hilda, Hilda!" (as they had come to call her), as they dropped to their knees and hugged and kissed her. (I was addressed only for permission to buy her a doughnut.) These cynical, guarded, hard-bitten women would allow the little girl in them to emerge for the brief moments of pleasure and genuine affection toward the dog. I cannot recall those times without emotion.

Strangest of all, Helga introduced me to the "dog people," a subculture of people who walk their dogs at the same times in the morning or after work, year-round. The dogs, not knowing New York etiquette, would interact and romp while we watched. Eventually, we began to communicate with each other and, *mirabile dictu,* to care for each other. (Eventually, some would visit me in Colorado.) One story epitomizes that phenomenon for me: Red was a huge German Shepherd owned by Phil (I don't know his last name), a former British commando. Though aggressive with male dogs (Phil put Red in a pen alone to run or let him run with female dogs), he was an

obedient angel with people. When Phil had surgery, we all took turns walking Red for the two weeks Phil was in the hospital. We had a key to Phil's apartment we passed around; though Phil did not know our last names or addresses, he seemed to assume we were worthy of trust. Through the animals, *Gesellschaft* was replaced by *Gemeinschaft.*

Perhaps two years after Phil's operation, I was suffering from chronic asthma, experiencing attacks every night, sometimes multiply in a night. My physician was preparing to hospitalize me indefinitely until the cycle was broken. I mentioned this to Phil one evening. He nodded and said nothing. The next evening he handed me an envelope. "What is this?" I asked. "The key to my cabin in Thunder Bay, Ontario, and a map. Stay there until you can breathe. The air is clean, and there's no reason for stress. It beats a hospital."

For more old people than I care to recall, the dog (or cat) was a reason to get up in the morning, to go out, to bundle up and go to the park ("Fluffy misses her friends, you know"), to shop, to fuss, to feel responsible for a life and needed.

Although I had various opportunities to remain in New York after finishing my qualifying exams for the doctorate, it began to dawn on Linda and me that New York was no longer the wonderland we recalled from our childhood. The air was polluted; the streets were paved with junkies; my skin erupted in giant weals, which the doctor assured me were "just the effect of acid rain"; a professor at Columbia was killed for refusing to surrender his wedding ring; I was forced to escort Linda everywhere, even to the basement to do laundry, for predators often sought victims there. The year in Edinburgh had taught us that there were nice places to live. We resolved to get out of New York as soon as I had finished my exams and was ready to write my dissertation. In 1968, I began applying for jobs, but only at places whose whereabouts I was unsure of, on the assumption that if I did not know where they were, they were probably not like New York. I still have a file of letters of application to Alaska, Calgary, Edmonton, Wyoming, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands.

In January 1969, we attended the American Philosophical Association's annual meeting in Washington, D.C. Since there were then still more jobs than applicants, the convention was not yet the "slave auction" or "meat market" peopled by desperate graduate students and academic wimps brimming with self-importance and lording jobs over the job-seeking students that it would become a few short years later, and remain until today. I had a number of interviews lined up, and was brightly optimistic. As we exited the elevator in the convention hotel, we literally bumped into a rube-ish elderly gentleman, shiningly bald and dressed in white socks and a manure-colored

shiny brown suit that complemented his head. He peered at my convention name badge. "Columbia, huh?" he intoned in what I would later learn was a rural Hoosier accent. "Motty good school." I smiled and nodded. "Looking for a job?" I looked at his badge: "Willard Eddy, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado." "We need a man in History of Philosophy," he intoned. That was, indeed, what I wanted to teach. Furthermore, though I had vaguely heard of Colorado, I had never heard of Fort Collins. "Come for an interview at 1:30," he said. What the hell. I went to chat with him. He rocked dangerously in the chair as he told me about CSU. "It's just an old cow town," he intoned. "No fancy stores or anything like what you're used to. Bunch of retired ranchers. An ag school. Cowboy country."

My mind wandered out and began to create mental pictures. Elevated wooden sidewalks. A general store. Tumbleweeds. Indians. The Philosophy Department holding forth behind a cracker barrel. "I see you read Hé-brew. You a Jew?" "Umm, I came from that background but have no religion." "Never had a Jew in the department before," he exclaimed. "Got a Korean though." "I will have a friend ready-made," I said archly. "Got a woman, too," he continued. "Another friend," I countered. "Mott be nahss to have a Jew. Mott ask you to teach some religion." "I'm not interested in religion," I said, unheard. "You could teach some Judaism. But I gotta warn you: There's a Colorado state law against proselytizing." He apparently liked me, because he invited Linda and me to join him and a couple of department members for dinner. When I told Linda about our conversations, she said, "Don't waste our time." But we went, expecting little except a good story. I was later to learn that Willard was doing his "interviewing easterners" shtick, intended to turn off anyone from a city who was not interested in going to a small town. I never saw the brown suit again, and was to come to know Willard as one of three men I ever met who, if they asked me to jump, I would ask, "How high?" He was to exert an unmatched influence on my career. Absent his influence, my life would have been vastly different and impoverished.

We went to dinner and met Don Crosby and Dan Lyons, who had doctorates from Columbia and the University of Chicago, respectively. They made it plain that they would consider hiring me to get Linda. They also let me know that, while everyone else at CSU was hiring from the Midwest, Willard was hiring from Princeton, Yale, Stanford, and Edinburgh, seeking mavericks or people with respiratory problems looking for fresh air. I was both, as well as the first Jew. I ended up with offers from Wyoming and CSU and took the CSU job because the department had fifteen members and Wyoming's had three and because CSU offered me $10,500 to Wyoming's paltry $10,000. In July 1969, we rented a U-Haul truck, took the dog and cat,

and, accompanied by my brother, drove west of New Jersey for the first time in my life to a job I had accepted, sight unseen.

As we loaded the truck for Colorado on our last day in New York, an old lady approached me with tears in her eyes. "You're leaving?" she queried in a refugee accent. "Yes," I said, thinking, "How can she be upset at my leaving when we've never even exchanged hellos?" "I will never feel safe again," she declared. I stared uncomprehendingly. "I will never feel safe again without that wonderful dog watching over the building."