

Souvenirs of the LFNY: A Personal History by Gabrielle Griswold ('44)

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I) The Early Years at the Lycée

Who am I?—A Brief Introduction

I was born in New York City in 1926, and educated in the U.S. and France prior to attending the Lycée from 1938 through 1941-42 (*Promotion de 1944*). I entered into 6ème, skipped 4ème, and half-way through Seconde my family, to my regret, moved from NYC to Long Island, and I had to leave the Lycée.

I attended college at St. Lawrence University in Canton, N.Y., prior to moving to Paris and London where, during the late 1940s through 1955, I worked for the U.S. State Department for both the Marshall Plan and N.A.T.O., first as secretary to Ambassador Averell Harriman's special assistant, later as secretary to two successive American ambassadors to N.A.T.O. (The Hon. John C. Hughes and The Hon. George W. Perkins).

At the end of 1955, I married an American attorney I'd met in Paris and returned to the U.S. to live in the Boston area for about 20 years while raising my two daughters. After divorcing my husband in 1975 and moving to the White Mountains of New Hampshire in 1976, I enjoyed a 20-year career from age 60 to 80 as a journalist for an award-winning local newspaper. Today, at the ripe old age of 88, I happily reside in a wonderful retirement community outside of Philadelphia.

My memories of the Lycée are still vivid and dear to me today. I think of the school as the best and most enjoyable one I ever attended, well in advance of most American schools of the time—perhaps even more so now, when contemporary American schools seem to have deteriorated quite surprisingly in recent years. The textbooks, the teachers we had then were marvelous, scholarly, informative, and the learning was of a high order. Some of our teachers, in fact, were university professors, who



On Park Avenue in 1940

expected us to perform at the level they were used to in France. Things I learned then laid a basis of knowledge that has proved its value throughout my life since, and remains with me still.

How I Came to the Lycée

When I was 10 years old and living with my family in Riverside, Connecticut, my French godmother—who was my mother's dearest friend—came over from France on one of her periodic trans-Atlantic crossings and proposed that, when she returned to France, I should accompany her.

For me, this idea came as a grand and happy surprise. Had she and my parents been planning this trip for some time, or was the proposal entirely spontaneous? I didn't ask and never knew. I simply viewed the prospect as a fine adventure.

The time was November 1936, and the only means of mass travel in those days was by ocean-going liner. My godmother and I traveled on the French Line's *Lafayette*, an experience I found exhilarating, as, on a big luxury ship, there was always so much to do and to explore. Besides, for every day of the week-long trip, I had a new present to unwrap, which my family had prepared for me and entrusted to my godmother !

French lessons began our first morning on shipboard. My godmother, Mlle. Marie-Louise Fontaine, had earlier founded and for some years run a girls' school at Cannes for the English-speaking daughters of American and British parents living in France (business people, diplomats, voluntary expatriates), and she did not lose a minute before beginning my French education. After our arrival at Cannes, one of her former teachers, a Mlle. Simonot, came daily to tutor me in French language and culture. She and I had textbook lessons in the mornings, and in the afternoons we went for long walks in town or out in the neighboring countryside, sometimes following a canal up into the hills behind Cannes, sometimes roaming farther afield. Whatever we did, we always spoke French, so at the end of three months I was sufficiently prepared to attend, full-time and at the proper grade level, a private French school called the Institut Lochabair. During the summer of 1937, I spent three months at school in Switzerland.

It was a wonderfully happy year, and it strikes me now (although it didn't then) as perhaps somewhat unusual that, although I loved my family dearly, I was never homesick for a single moment during that time I was away from home. I must have lived then, as I have since, vividly 'in the moment,' as I enjoyed my year abroad with my beloved *Marraine* to the fullest possible extent. There was literally never a dull moment. Any challenges of adjustment in a new and different land never seemed daunting, only novel and exciting.

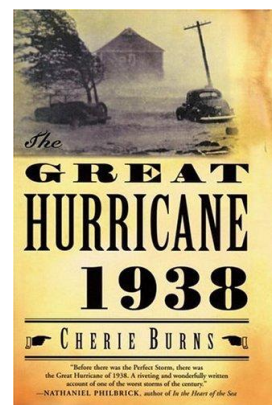
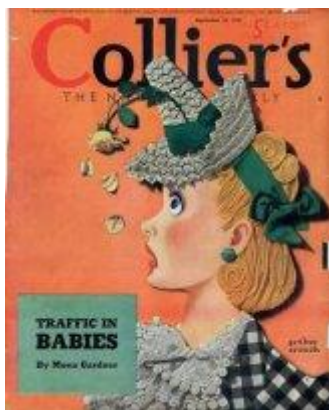
When I returned home to the U.S. in late-December 1937, now aged 11, neither my parents nor I wanted me to lose the French language skills I had acquired during the past year. This led, in part, to my family's decision to move to Manhattan so that, come fall 1938, I could attend the Lycée, where my brother, Arthur, would have an opportunity of his own to learn French. If my year in France had been blissful, my first year at the Lycée was equally so. We moved into New York just days before the Great Hurricane of 1938 struck the east coast. Although there was some flooding in the city, I don't



With brother Arthur in front of Lycée in 1938

believe I noticed anything that day other than perhaps the wind and rain. All my thoughts and dreams were concentrated on the fact that, within the week, I would soon be in a French environment again, entering the Classe de Sixième.

II) The 1938-1939 School Year: My First Year at the Lycée



In Sixième

I shall never forget my excitement when the great day dawned. I was now 12, and, although we didn't know it then, this would be the last year of peace before the outbreak of World War II. At the time, the Lycée was just three years old, newly located at 3 East 95th Street in a beautiful mansion minimally altered from its former use as a private home to accommodate the school. Our parents walked my brother and me there from our apartment, only a block away at 1326 Madison Avenue. On the way, we met another family of four headed to the same destination, two girls, *Marie-Claude Boulin ('46)* and her sister, *Anne (Boulin) Robertshaw ('47)*, with their parents. The girls seemed as excited as we were to be entering the school for the first time. Arriving at the Lycée on that first day, I was ecstatic to be there with a joy so intense I can feel it still. I would be re-entering the sort of international milieu I had learned to love during my year in France and Switzerland.

The Sixième classroom was located at the northeast corner of the building's third floor, a bright sunny room day-lit by four tall windows, two on each exterior wall, with those on the east side overlooking a spacious courtyard below where students played during *récréation* periods. My desk, one among about 20 others, was at the center of the second row. From the first day, I felt instantly at home among my French, English and American classmates. We were all bilingual to a greater or lesser degree, and outside of class might speak to one another in either language or a mixture of both. All classes, however, were taught in French by French teachers from French textbooks, with the sole exception of English Language/Literature and American History, which were taught in English.

In its newly acquired building, the Lycée was just beginning its fourth year of operation, still small enough in teaching staff and student body to feel like an extended family, in which everyone more or less knew everyone else or at least had some idea who they were. For me, it was an environment that combined what I perceived to be the best of France and the United States, and I felt like a pearl in its oyster, perfectly at home, completely comfortable in what I perceived to be my natural element. I fitted in right away, made friends quickly, and loved my teachers. It would be a halcyon year.

Besides me, the other students (more boys than girls) included Christiane Donat, Gloria (Iden) Giannestras, H  l  ne Barbet, Pauline Frassati ('45), Jacques Changeux ('44), Ethan Davis ('45), Pierre Grelet ('46), Charles Haines ('45), Georges Gonneau ('45), Marcel Lavignette ('45), Marcel Monory ('44), Fran  ois Lee (45), Martin Moynihan (45), Pierre Monsarrat ('44), Jean-Pierre P  tolas ('44), and G  rard Tanqueray ('46). Later in that 1938-1939 school year, Grete (Unger) Heinz ('45) would join the class, as would Natacha Stewart Dorfman-Ullman ('45), daughter of concert pianist Anya Dorfman.

Girl friends

Almost immediately, Christiane Donat and I formed a close friendship, which included her older sister Odile who was one or two grades ahead of us. Sadly for me, at some point before the school year was out, even before the onset of World War II, Christiane left the Lyc  e to return to France with her family. I never knew why they went, unless it was that they sensed the coming upheaval and had personal, patriotic, or business reasons for returning before war broke out. (Later, their departure would perplex me even more when so many new students would be traveling in the opposite direction, fleeing Europe for the safety of American shores.) For some time after they left, Christiane and I corresponded. But in due course the war ended our communication. I have always wished I knew whether they survived the war.

Another good friend was Gloria Iden, blonde, sophisticated, and somehow more 'American' than the others in our class. She also seemed to lead a more worldly social life outside of school than the rest of us (one of her friends was Oona O'Neil, one of New York's top debutantes, who later married Charlie Chaplin), and seemed to dip not infrequently into the high society whirl.

When I visited Gloria at her Manhattan apartment, she and I, with the complicity of the family maid, would sip Coca-Cola (parentally forbidden to both of us because of its high caffeine content) from dark-red glass goblets which concealed the nature of the contents within—and felt wonderfully wicked putting one over on any adult who might wander in unexpectedly and never suspect that we were drinking anything but water.

We perpetrated another prank that spring when I went to stay with Gloria and her parents at their vacation home in Point Pleasant, New Jersey. That weekend was a hoot because the joke we played on her friends turned out to be so successful. We spent most of our time sailing and socializing with two boys, named (I believe) Henry and David Chaffee, whom we conned into believing that I could speak only French and no English. This meant that Gloria had to translate everything they said to me and everything I said to them, then translate back our respective responses. What made the feat difficult to pull off was that Gloria had *unsuccessfully* attempted the same mischief with another French-speaking friend just the summer before, so naturally the boys initially suspected that this was just another hoax like the last one. Somehow I managed to play the part well enough to convince them that this time the scenario was genuine. Finally, on our last afternoon, when they asked Gloria to translate something for me, I totally dumbfounded them by announcing coolly in English, "Thanks, I don't need a translation—I've understood every word!" At the time, we four were sitting on a dock, swinging our legs out over the water, and I do believe the two boys nearly fell into the drink at the shock of having been bamboozled a second time.

Boy friends

I was never boy-crazy. However, two boys in Sixi  me were of some interest to me: Ethan Davis and Pierre Grelet. Ethan was the eldest of three sons of a friend of my mother's from earlier days, whom she was delighted to meet again as a fellow Lyc  e parent. Early on, Ethan took a particular liking to me and became, in a sense, my boy-friend *en titre*. Although I always thought he was fonder of me than I was of him, I did

enjoy his friendship and our times together. In any case, I had other boy *friends*, and, at the Lycée in those days, no one to my knowledge ever engaged in anything so confining as ‘going steady.’

Ethan was intelligent and studious, and because of our mothers’ friendship and the proximity of our two apartments (only a block apart), he, his brothers, my brother, and I often walked together on Saturday mornings to the 85th-Street-and-Madison Avenue Trans-Lux cinema for the 11 o’clock children’s show. When that show was over, either we all walked home together or Ethan and I sent the younger ones on ahead, and we ourselves stayed for the adult movie that followed. This didn’t happen often, and only when our parents had given their prior consent to the film being featured.

The other boy I liked in Sixième was Pierre Grelet, because he was something of an artist. In class he doodled pencil sketches of medieval castles and other imagined scenes which appealed to my romantic nature. One day I asked him to replicate for me in miniature a castle he had drawn earlier, to a size that would fit within a tiny circle. When he had done that, I cut it out and placed it inside a gold locket I frequently wore. But when I showed it to him, it surprised me that he seemed faintly embarrassed.

Dark-haired and dark-eyed François Lee (familiarily known as Flea) sat next to me in class, and I rather liked him briefly, but not for very long. However, I had forgotten (if I ever knew it then) what a trouble-maker he must have been. It was only many years later that he wrote me saying how negative (unlike my own) his memories of the Lycée were, of which he recalled little beyond endless hours spent after school in various kinds of *punitions*.

The ‘three Musketeers’ of the class were Marcel Lavignette, Georges Gonneau, and Jacques Changeux, a trio of upbeat male camaraderie. They perpetrated their own brand of mischief, not so much rebellious as harmless and high-spirited. Marcel was tall, lanky, dark-haired, and never serious, always laughing, joking, and playing pranks—which sometimes did elicit admonishing comments from teachers. But he was too effervescent and fun-loving for them to disapprove of entirely. Georges was quieter, as was Jacques, a cheerful soul of mirth and character, with serious depths. It was probably not in Sixième but the following year that the Lycée held an essay contest on the subject of ‘Democracy,’ which I entered but Jacques won.

One boy in class I studiously avoided. That was Gérard Tanqueray, who always sat at the back of the schoolroom. Like Pierre Grelet, he doodled during lessons, but his drawings were ghoulish and abhorrent to me. He had a predilection for sketching things like knives dripping blood and similar gory subjects, and then as now I had a horror of horror. Decades later, a former classmate told me that Gérard had always nourished a secret passion for me. This came as a total surprise, as at the time he’d never given me any indication of such a thing. On reflection, it’s probably a good thing he hadn’t!

Competition

Another of my Sixième classmates was Pauline Frassati, a petite girl with dark, curly, shoulder-length hair, who would have been pretty had she smiled more often. I soon learned that she had attended the Lycée from the school’s inception three years earlier, that she had carried off a *Prix d’Excellence* every year from the beginning, and was generally considered the class’s superstar student. This would have been all right except for the fact that she seemed to hold herself aloof from the others, as though her academic status placed her above the rest.

That unsociability of hers, her scholastic intensity and air of unassailable superiority, together with my own innate love of learning, acted as a spur to me. Not normally of a competitive nature, I now found myself in a school where prizes were awarded at an annual *Distribution des Prix* for first, second, and runner-up places in every subject. Further motivated by this, I quietly determined to challenge Pauline's status as the smartest kid in class. Thereafter, we ran neck-and-neck throughout the school year, one or the other of us finishing at the top in every subject during trimestrial exams.

The pattern held right up until the actual ceremony of the *Distribution des Prix*, when she and I shared class honors across the board. When the final moment came for the *Prix d'Excellence* to be announced, I held my breath. Would it be Pauline? Or would it be me?

It turned out to be both of us! A shared honor between equals. But at that moment, I already no longer cared. I'd felt no burning need to be top-dog. All that mattered was that I'd proved what I'd set out to prove, namely that Pauline's supremacy could be challenged. Now she was no longer the only star in class. I was right up there with her.

Study and learning were certainly my first priority in an academic atmosphere as stimulating as the Lycée's, and I yearned to excel. But let no one suppose that I was without my own mischievous side. Under the heading 'Conduct,' my first and second *Bulletin Trimestriel* rated me as 'bavarde' and I have no doubt there were few limits to my loquacity in the unbridled enthusiasm I experienced at finding myself in so congenial an atmosphere. In fact, for a short spell, I occasionally played the role of class clown (along with the boys), and took pleasure in that. By the time the school year's third and last *Bulletins Trimestriels* came out, however, I had apparently calmed down as the comment on my 'conduct' then was "Bien."

The only time in my life I received a disciplinary *punition* was one afternoon when our entire *Classe de Sixième* had to stay an extra hour in after-school study hall for our 'unbecoming conduct' in Mme. Errante's solfeggio class that morning. One of the boys had somehow got hold of a small quantity of mercury and brought it to school in a little bottle. This he uncorked midway through class, ostensibly to demonstrate its properties to a classmate. Whether he intended the outcome or not, some of the silvery stuff spilled onto the floor, shattering into a dozen or more tiny particles that began rolling around in all directions. On the instant and as with a single mind, we all dropped to our knees and began chasing the shiny, semi-liquid globules across the floor, trying to recapture them, some of us bumping heads in the process and all of us laughing like fools. Poor Mme. Errante had all she could do to regain our attention and order us back to our proper places, scolding like a magpie all the while. (How much serious solfeggio we managed after that, I cannot imagine.) That afternoon, chastened but not one bit sorry, we put in our extra hour's study hall, feeling that the fun we'd had was well worth the *punition*. We had, quite by chance, also learned some interesting facts about the properties of mercury.

Teachers



Mme. Marie-Andrée Mount



M. Pierre Brodin

Sixième teachers I remember were: Madame Mount (French and Latin); Miss Gladys Peacock (English Language/Literature), who returned to England at the end of the first trimester and was replaced by a Miss Davis; Monsieur Deschamps (Math); Monsieur Hoffherr (Zoology and Botany); Madame Corr ea (Ancient History); Madame Sylvie Brodin (Geography); Madame Errante (Solfeggio and Singing); Monsieur Gallet (Drawing). Mme. Brodin was also in charge school dramatics, and responsible later that year for an afternoon of short plays, in one of which called *Les Deux Mendiants* I had a part. Her husband, Monsieur Pierre Brodin was our headmaster (*directeur des  tudes*), and taught both history and geography. Monsieur de Fontnouvelle, one of the Lyc e’s founders, had an office in the building but did not teach class. The school’s two secretaries were Miss Helen Horsey (who would later become a good friend of my mother’s and mine) and her sister, Miss Elizabeth Horsey, between them sources of endless knowledge about everything to do with school affairs. Like M. Brodin and M. de Fontnouvelle, they had their office downstairs on the building’s ground floor, where the only other room was a large mirrored and gilded hall, perhaps once a formal banquet-hall, which served as an after-class study hall for those of us who began our homework on the premises before leaving school for the day.

The Lyc e curriculum was one that provided students with a classical education, and I have always been grateful for having received that at a young age. It is always possible—in fact inevitable—that one will be exposed to more contemporary learning as one progresses through life. It is, however, *not* always possible to go back and acquire that kind of solid foundation later on. A classical background, absorbed in youth, equips one with a depth and a perspective on which all future learning can solidly rest.

And then there was one . . .

Besides teachers, we also had *r p titeurs* or *surveillants*, proctors or monitors, who supervised students during study halls and trimestrial exams, and at other times such as during our daily *r cr ations*. One of the school’s two or three *r p titeurs* was a certain Monsieur Soula, whom all the students disliked and feared, and often tended (secretly or not so secretly) to refer to as Sourpuss.

I personally had not experienced any close encounters with him, but I knew his reputation. One day when he came to supervise a study hall in our Sixi me classroom, I made the mistake of passing a note to my neighbor Fran ois Lee, which read something like “Sourpuss seems especially grumpy today.” To my dismay, Fran ois noisily crumpled up the note, snorting aloud as he did so. At the sound, M. Soula jumped up from his desk at the front of the class and came to tower over Fran ois.

“Qu’est-ce que vous avez là?” he demanded to know. François handed up the note. “Qui a écrit ça?” he further demanded, frowning around at us all. Defiantly, I shot up my hand, expecting instant punishment or at least a scolding. To my surprise, M. Soula simply grunted and returned to his desk. I think we were all nonplussed at this, myself more than anyone.

Another time, he caught me going up the back staircase after hours, which was strictly forbidden unless one had prior permission (and I had not). I’d left a textbook in the Sixième classroom and, after lunch, decided entirely on my own that I would nip quickly upstairs and retrieve it. Imagine my chagrin when I looked up and saw M. Soula descending the stairs above me, who sternly asked: “Où allez-vous?” I wasn’t normally impertinent, but, determined not to let him intimidate me as he did everyone else, I answered slowly, “Je vais quelque part—chercher quelque chose—pour quelqu’un,” a truthful answer if an evasive one. I knew I was tempting fate, and of course M. Soula demanded a more precise explanation, which I then gave him in a level, matter-of-fact tone. Once again to my surprise, he did not react angrily but waved me on upstairs, saying only, “Alors, montez vite and redescendez *immédiatement!*” Which I did.

After that, whenever our eyes chanced to meet, a fleeting gleam always seemed to pass between us, in a sort of tacit understanding as though each was satisfied at having taken the measure of the other. He never scolded me, never punished me, and I was careful not to test him again. On balance, I could only suppose that perhaps he secretly relished the fact that at least one Lycée student had stood up to him. In some curious way, I believe we were both proud of ourselves and of each other for having broken the usual mold.

(Many long years afterwards, a former classmate and friend Lizzie Bertol wrote me her recollection of Monsieur Soula as someone “who absolutely scared me to death! I used to go miles out of my way just to make sure that I wasn’t going to bump into him!! How he terrified us . . . but somehow you got through to him.”) Yes, I did.

Students that year whom I remember from other grades include: my younger brother, Arthur Griswold, who also attended the Lycée ; Ethan’s younger brothers, Curtis and Malcolm Davis; George and Tommy Mount (Madame Mount’s two sons); Hélène de Breteuil; Consuelo Eames; Fanchon de Garon-Dombasle (a young relative of M. de Fontnouvelle); Hilda Beer and her three siblings, Martin, Lise and Jean; Maurice Raviol (whose parents owned and operated an excellent French restaurant in town); Joyce Culbertson (daughter of the contract bridge expert); Jacqueline Dutacq; David Leach; and Mathilda Mortimer (who later became Duchess of Argyll). For a time I had a mild *béguin* for David Leach, who was English and, in my eyes, the most elegant and cultured boy then in the school. But Mathilda, also of English descent, clearly had designs on him, and she had the advantage of red-hair and of being in Quatrième with him, two grades above mine, so I knew I myself to be out-gunned. This I philosophically accepted : there would be plenty of time for boys later on.

That school year still stands out in my memory as one of sheer bliss. During the Distribution des Prix ceremony, after I had received the armload of books that represented my prizes, the school’s director, Pierre Brodin, asked my mother whether she might consider joining the Lycée teaching staff the following year. Having taught English some years in the past, she said she would consider it. When later she finally accepted, how thrilled I was to think that the following year there would be three members of my family all at the Lycée together.

III) The 1939-1940 School Year IN CINQUIÈME

Below: Classe de 5eme in 1940



Back row, left to right: Jacques Changeux ('44)*, Marcel Lavignette ('45)*, Georges Gonneau ('45)*, Ethan Davis ('45), Martin Moynahan ('45), Guy Leroux ('45), Bonita Boomer('45)

Middle row, left to right: Colette Marie-Louise (Smith) Douglas ('45), Gabrielle Griswold ('44), Pauline Frassati ('45), Grete (Unger) Heinz ('45), Claire (Nicolas) White ('44), Jeanne Martin ('45), Natacha Stewart Dorfman-Ullman ('45) *;

Front row, left to right: Unknown boy, Francis Lee ('45), Charles Haines ('45), Jacques Regard ('44)

Absente: Liliane (Coppens) Lucas ('45)

(* = deceased)

The War Begins

When I entered Cinquième in September 1939, it was only a week or two after the Nazis invaded Poland, thereby launching World War II. The invasion took place on September 1st, and on 2 September 1939, England and France issued an ultimatum to Hitler to withdraw his troops from Poland. When he did not do so, World War II began on 3 September with the United Kingdom's declaration of war, soon followed by that of France. The United States, however, still in thrall to this country's long tradition of isolationism, was not yet ready to join the Allies.

That year when I first entered class, I rediscovered some of the same teachers we'd had the year before: Madame Mount (Latin), Monsieur Gallet (Drawing) and Madame Corr ea (Math). New were Madame B gu e (French Grammar, Composition and Literature), Monsieur Lavall e (English), Monsieur Reinold (Singing), Miss Geymet (History and Geography) for the first trimester, followed by Mme. Brodin for those subjects during the last two. Science that year was doubtless taught by Madame Corr ea. As always, my favorite subjects were French and English composition, with Latin close behind.

Most of my former Sixième classmates I found again in Cinquième, but some were no longer there and some new ones had arrived—or would soon do so, in flight from the war in Europe. Hélène Barbet was no longer among us, nor was Pierre Grelet, nor was Gloria Iden (who had perhaps gone off to a finishing school somewhere ?) Neither Marcel Monory nor Jean-Pierre Pétolas appears in the class photo, but perhaps they were absent on the day the picture was taken. That year, as I would discover, Pauline seemed to have thawed considerably, and our class photo shows her relaxed and smiling.

New arrivals in Cinquième during the course of that school year included Bonita Boomer, Colette Smith, Jeanne Martin, Guy Leroux, Jacques Regard, Claire Nicholas, and pink-cheeked Liliane Coppens. As the school year progressed, more and more students arrived at the Lycée from European countries now at war. Where before the student body had been composed mainly of French, American and English youngsters, it rapidly became more international. In our class, Claire Nicholas came from the Netherlands, and Jacques Regard, with virtually no English-language skills, from France. Lauro Venturi, also with little English, the son of a famous Italian art critic and historian, entered one of the upper grades, and would be privately tutored by my mother at his parents' urgent request. Other students came from other countries, all in flight from the impending doom abroad, including one lone, sad Polish boy, whose name I forget and for whom my heart ached. At some point, the putative heir of France's Bourbon kings also attended the school, as did a Chambrun descendant of Lafayette. Many of the new arrivals were sons and daughters of intellectuals, artists, writers, and others with interesting political, diplomatic or creative backgrounds, including thinkers and innovators whom the Nazis feared, some Jewish, some not. The arrival of these new students created the kind of international mix that I loved. But of the tragedies they individually might have witnessed prior to leaving Europe, we knew little.

Some of the older boys went back to France, recalled to their homeland to fight in the war, as did some of our male teachers. Some of them would be killed in action, among them M. de Fontnouvelle's own son Pierre and Francois Chapman, the elder of two lovely Chapman brothers whom everyone liked. *[Editor's Note: [Click here](#) for "In memoriam: Les Lycéens Tombés au Champ d'Honneur"]* One teacher who left was Monsieur Soula. When he returned to France, I corresponded with him for a time, but before long his letters ceased arriving and we wrote no more. For long years I did not know whether or not he had survived the war. Much later I learned from a 1958 Lycée listing of former teachers and students that he was at that time serving as *Chef de Cabinet du Recteur* at the University of Lyon. Having finally developed a sort of perverse fondness for him, I was relieved to learn that.

From the onset of the war, my parents, especially my mother, hoped to see the United States take part in it, not because they were warmongers, in fact quite the reverse. Remembering how our country's entry into the First World War had helped hasten its end, they wanted to see our participation bring the fighting to a quicker close. In particular my mother, who had served in France not far from the front lines during World War I, understood how necessary American participation would be.

At home, she angrily read Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, then a bestseller in the U.S. which was slowly beginning to wake up to the gravity of the international situation. Normally a great respecter of books, she had no compunction about penning in the margins of the pages furious rebuttals and repudiations of everything Hitler said and stood for. My family listened regularly to foreign broadcasts by commentators like Edward R. Murrow from London and William L. Shirer from Berlin. We shuddered together at Hitler's screaming, ranting orations, and were duly impressed by Churchill's rousing eloquence. In an era before television,

movie theaters showed images of what was happening in Europe by means of weekly newsreels, a feature no longer extant in today's cinemas. Between radio, the press, and the cinema, we kept abreast of foreign news.

Then, after the turn of the year, things began getting worse. Nineteen-forty was a year of cataclysmic disaster as the Nazis subjugated more and more of Europe. Early in May 1940, Claire Nicholas, our classmate from Holland, arrived at school in tears because her homeland had been invaded. Soon thereafter, our Belgian classmate, Liliane Coppens, also arrived in tears because Belgium, too, had been overrun. I still retain a vivid mental picture of those two in the girls' cloakroom, hugging each other in sympathy and sobbing.

Shortly afterwards, France fell, the supposedly impregnable Maginot Line no deterrent after all to Hitler's invading forces. The Germans marched into Paris, and the rest of us who had previously lived in France and loved its people and its culture, were also in tears or near tears, appalled and shaken.

Because the war pitted democracies against dictatorships, one of our English class assignments was to contrast democratic forms of government with other forms, explicating what some of those other forms were and how they functioned. This made for some interesting research, and I enjoyed writing my essay on the subject. But that assignment was the competition won not by me but by my classmate Jacques Changeux.

Owing to the unique nature of the Lycée environment, our experience of World War II differed from that of most of our American contemporaries as it was neither typically nor exclusively an American experience. Our daily existence was rooted in the U.S., but our consciousness included much that was taking place overseas, and this affected our outlook and very often our lives—increasingly, as time went on. Years later (in 2002, in fact), my friend and classmate, Lizzie Bertol, would write me as follows: « In school we were citizens of a country at war.....aware of what was a particularly difficult period in French history. After school, I'd hop on my Fifth Avenue bus, head back home, and notice as I got off in front of my house that there were children of my age playing ball and tag in the street, and I remember thinking to myself, "Don't they know there's a war going on?" But of course, there wasn't—*here* we were in the middle of the America First movement, when the U.S. was determined to stay out of what [it] considered was a European conflict which had nothing to do with us. »

Sometimes I felt as Lizzie felt—I daresay many of us did—marveling at the obliviousness of the average American school kid. But even at the Lycée we had our oblivious times. Like youngsters everywhere, we still managed to live mostly in the moment, and enjoyed our youth, our vigor, our capacity for finding fun wherever it might be found.

Ethan Davis, again in the same class with me, was still nominally my beau, who that year would become something of a fixture in our family life, although his and my relationship remained more of a friendship than anything remotely approaching a teen-age romance. New friendships also developed. One of the new students was Bonita Boomer, whose father, Lucius Boomer, was president of the Waldorf-Astoria hotel. Like Gloria Iden in Sixième, Bonita seemed to move in somewhat more rarified social circles than most of the rest of us. She was the only girl in our class who came to school in silk stockings and high-heeled shoes ('sensible' heels, of course !), whereas other girls of our age still wore casual flats and ankle socks. As her French was not very good, she remained relatively silent in class. But her mother took a liking to me and encouraged a friendship between us.

A closer friendship developed with Gloria Alvarez, a student in the class above mine, and we became inseparable, sharing our romantic young hopes and dreams. We read all the novels of Dumas *père* and *fils*

that we could lay our hands on, discussed them at length, wrote poetry, and planned our glorious futures. We played ping-pong in the Lycée basement, strolled arm-in-arm around the block, singing—and were seldom apart. The only problem was that Gloria's being in a grade above me meant that we could not share the same classes or do our homework together. In any case, she lived out of the city and more often than not had to take the train home as soon as school let out.

Through Gloria, I met Eleanor Cramer, who would become an even closer friend. The same age as mine, Eleanor was a lovely, quiet girl, poised and dignified, who had previously received her education in England, Germany and Switzerland. She was cultured, cosmopolitan, sensible, practical, flawlessly mannered, versed in many subjects, a gracious hostess, and an interesting conversationalist. Not as pretty and feminine as Gloria, she was more serious of demeanor, dark-haired and dark-eyed, conservative and classic in dress. Her great attraction for me was that she was so polished and civilized. Like Gloria, she was in the grade above mine and had apparently heard about me from Gloria. So, one afternoon when the two of us found ourselves leaving school at the same moment, she stopped me on the sidewalk outside, and we began to talk.

It was one of those eureka moments, when time seems to stand still because you know that something momentous is happening. What started as a casual conversation kept us standing there on the street for more than an hour as we continued discovering more and more compatible things about each other. With mounting excitement we found that we shared many of the same likes and dislikes, that our tastes were identical on many points. We both loved books, had an interest in the 18th century, a passion for the theater, a fascination with costume, and so on. We exchanged impressions about the Lycée, our teachers, our schoolfellows. It all came pouring breathlessly out. Time passed, we kept saying we must get on home, then something would come up that started us chattering all over again. New topics kept surfacing which we absolutely had to explore. Finally we parted, each of us knowing that she had just made an important new friend. It was a magical moment, which became the basis for a friendship that would last well beyond the Lycée. I sailed home with my feet scarcely touching the ground.

As classmates together, Eleanor and Gloria were already good friends, so we soon became a threesome, sharing after-school outings whenever we could. Eleanor and I became the closer because we lived not very far apart and could see each other more often. Since Gloria commuted from out of town to the Lycée, in-town outings had to be prearranged. For Eleanor and me, it was easier to spend time together. The habit we formed was for me to join her after school at her 1200 Fifth Avenue apartment, where we spent long hours reading, talking, discussing our respective homework assignments, exchanging confidences, and spinning out our dreams.

We soon had even more to talk about as we rapidly began spending every possible free moment going to movies, ballets, concerts, plays, and other Broadway shows. Whenever we were not in school and could go out together, that is what we liked to do. Eleanor's particular passion was music, mine was ballet, and we both adored movies and plays. We also shared regularly scheduled activities such as swimming at the Spence Natatorial Institute (otherwise said, indoor pool) on Friday afternoons, spontaneous get-togethers on Saturdays when I didn't go out with Ethan, and museum visits on Sundays. Every evening after school we telephoned to each other, and her telephone number, Atwater 9-2987, will doubtless remain embedded in my memory forever.

With Bonita, the ritual was somewhat different. That pattern involved my going home with her to the Waldorf as soon as classes ended, seeing a movie or a Broadway show in the afternoon, then dressing for

dinner with her and her parents on the Starlight Roof, and afterwards spending the night in the guest bed in her very large bedroom. Because of her parents' position in the social and business worlds, Bonita had free passes to every theater and cinema in town, so all we had to do on any given afternoon was simply decide what show we wanted to see and head straight for it.

Another important friend I made that year was Elizabeth Bertol (sometimes called Bette, sometimes called Lizzie), who, like Eleanor and Gloria was in the grade above mine. With my three closest friends in that grade, this meant that I now yearned to skip Quatrième in order to be in the same class with my friends. In the teen years when one's social contacts are experienced as so vitally important, that was a natural enough impulse. In retrospect, however, it can be seen as not the smartest move for me to have made at a school like the Lycée, where every hour of our schooling incorporated so much for us to learn. (In an American high school, where the same five courses are taught at the same five times on all five days of the week, one can miss a few classes, even a week or so, and not miss much. But at the Lycée, where the course load was greater and the entire curriculum more tightly packed, that was hardly the case.)

Nonetheless, I managed somehow to persuade not only my parents but the school that skipping a grade was a desirable thing for me to do. I was considered an excellent student, I was clearly motivated and loved to learn, so the general consensus seemed to be that I might risk boredom and disaffection if I remained where I was, whereas the intellectual challenge of having to measure up to a higher level of learning would stimulate me to even greater efforts. No one (not even I) appeared to realize that I would be tackling second year Spanish without ever having learned it at the first-year level, ditto for physics and chemistry, not to mention what I would have missed in algebra and geometry, math never having been one of my best subjects.

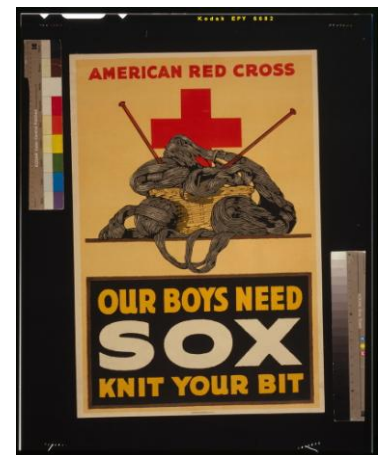
I promised faithfully to study diligently throughout the summer in anticipation of the academic difficulties which might lie ahead—but who, attending summer camp with a full program of sports and other activities to fill every hour of every day, manages to find time for study ?

Nonetheless, in the fall of 1940 I entered Troisième, thrilled at the prospect of finding myself among my three best friends. I'd left my faithful beau Ethan Davis a grade behind, although he would remain a personal and family friend with whom we would share many outings. I had a brief aha-moment when it suddenly struck me that David Leach was now only *one* grade ahead of me instead of two, although the distance still seemed insurmountable. Eleanor, who loved school dramatics as much as I did, had the heady idea that she might persuade Mme. Brodin to produce Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, with David and me in the lead roles, then opted instead for *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Either would have suited me, but neither play materialized. However, I could still be philosophical, and boys could still wait.

I seem to recall our Classe de Troisième as being rather smaller in number of students than Cinquième had been, but I cannot be sure I remember who we all were. Besides Eleanor Cramer, Gloria Alvarez, and Lizzie Bertol, the class included Esther Huisman, Maurice Raviol, Marcel Monory, Jean-Pierre Petolas, Ludmilla Alexeiff, Michel Guggenheim, and Raoul Grenade among others. At some point either that year or the following year, others besides myself would skip a grade, including Marcel Monory, whom I found again in Troisième, and Claire Nicholas, Jacques Regard, and Jacques Changeux, all of whom I would find again in Deuxième.

Meanwhile, I settled in, and looked forward to another wonderful year.

IV) MORE ABOUT THE WAR YEARS



1940

Nineteen-forty was an election year, and even though we were too young to vote, most of us were for President Roosevelt in his third-term race against Wendell Willkie. One way Eleanor and I supported FDR was by wandering into Willkie campaign offices and collecting as many Willkie buttons as they would give us, then marching off and tossing them into the nearest trash receptacle. That year had also been the second year of the New York World's Fair, and in one of the fair's science buildings I had received a large button which read «I have seen the future. » Occasionally, I would wear that button to school (prophetically, I hoped) directly above an equally large button which read «Roosevelt for President. » When he won, we were elated.

In those early days of the war, even before the U.S. entered it, private relief organizations sprang up to help embattled nations in whatever ways they could. Among these were the Allied Relief Fund, Bundles for Britain, and British War Relief. With admiration mounting in this country for Britain's lone stand against the Nazis, I was moved to devote my entire 1940 Christmas vacation to volunteering daily as a 'salesgirl' in a small, select Bundles for Britain gift boutique called The Merrie Market, located at street level in the (now defunct) New Weston Hotel on Madison Avenue. As the youngest member of the shop's minimal sales staff, I was placed at the first counter immediately inside the front door, where my cheery teenage smile would be the first to greet incoming customers. (Unconscious of this at the time, I only later realized the strategy behind that positioning.)

That was, in effect, my first-ever job, unpaid of course but delightfully satisfying to me. I took the work seriously and felt wonderfully appreciated, thanks to the beaming approval of my elders in the shop, the conviction that I was doing something worthwhile in raising money for the British war effort, and the interaction with customers who, marveling at the sight of one so young behind a sales counter, were always very friendly. An author named Polan Banks came in several times, and inscribed one of his books to me as « The cutest, sweetest Christmas gal in all Manhattan. »

1941

When the Merrie Market closed after the Christmas holidays, Eleanor decided to join me in my next volunteer job at a British War Relief warehouse on Lexington Avenue, where every Saturday we went to sort and pack clothing destined for dispossessed men, women and children in war-torn England. One Saturday, we were briefly visited by Lord Halifax, then British ambassador to the U.S. Another Saturday, we had a more sobering experience. Upon arrival at the warehouse that morning, we were met by a couple of the adult women who ran the place, with fingers at their lips, enjoining silence. Noiselessly, on tiptoe, they took us to the tiny corner room that constituted their office, lifted the curtain which divided it from the rest of our warehouse floor, and showed us the recumbent figure of an exhausted man, lying huddled beneath a grey blanket, sound asleep with his face to the wall. In whispers they explained that he was a British seaman whose ship had been sunk off our shores, and who had subsequently been rescued outside New York harbor and brought to us by someone obviously ignorant of where else to deliver him. Later when he awoke, they said, our organization would contact the appropriate British authorities, who would make proper arrangements for him. That's all they told us at the time, two 14-year-old girls whom they doubtless wished to shield from the harsher realities of war. Later we would learn that even then, before the U.S. officially entered the fight, German U-boats routinely prowled offshore of our east coast sinking ships (including neutral ones) in order to sabotage shipments to England of war materiel. Our seaman, therefore, was a member of England's merchant navy engaged in transporting such cargo, and had survived such an attack.

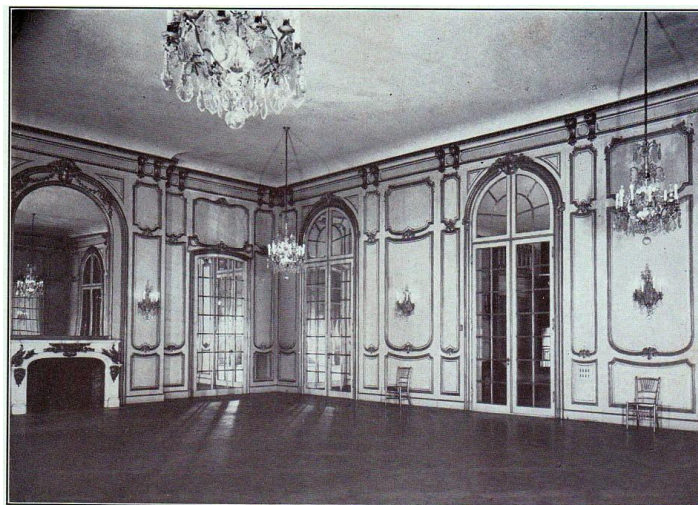
Others at the Lycée doubtless came up with their own volunteer projects for supporting the war effort. Madame Mount, who often initiated innovative ideas for the school, suggested a patriotic program whereby students who bought War Bonds would be forgiven any really bad grades they might incur.

Among students, Hitler was the object of hatred and loathing, the butt of vituperation, sneers, contemptuous jokes and hand-drawn cartoons. Although we were aware that horrors were unfolding abroad, there was no way we could grasp their full extent. Still, we did know something about them.

Eleanor Cramer and I were great Anglophiles, admirers of British pluck and grit when Britain alone held Hitler at bay. British prime minister Winston Churchill was one of our heroes as he was in much of America, a great war leader. Like many others concerned for the fate of Europe, we devoutly hoped the day would come soon when the U.S. would enter the war and help to end it more quickly, saving the free world.

That March, one of my personal achievements was to conceive and organize, together with best friend Eleanor, the first-ever Lycée ball, an elegant, romantic, masked and costumed affair. Inspired by my feeling that the Lycee's beautiful 18th-century-style ballroom should have something more colorful and exciting happening in it than just weekly dance lessons, I came up with the idea, flew it by her, and received her enthusiastic approbation. From then on, she and I organized everything ourselves : obtained the consent of M. Brodin and M. de Fontnouvelle, issued invitations, collected money from all the invitees who

responded, planned the music, shopped for decorations and refreshments—and spent glorious hours deciding what costumes we would wear, and speculating about what everyone else might wear. We charged all attendees a 25-cent admission fee, the proceeds to be donated to the Allied Relief Fund.



The Lycée Ballroom

The first Lycée ball was held on Friday evening, 14 March 1941, and it was a triumph. Everyone turned out in gorgeous costume and had a marvelous time. Eleanor came as a Chinese emperor in a lavishly embroidered yellow satin costume and I in a custom-made 18th-century ball gown of my own design. She and I were ecstatic at the ball's success, and it was marvelous to see that lovely ballroom come alive with movement and color. (Later, classmate Claire Nicholas would write a poem for the Lycée yearbook about our ball.)

As far as my studies went, I kept up pretty well that year, despite my having skipped an important grade—in fact the crucial one which laid the foundation for all subsequent studies leading up to exams for the *baccalauréat* degree. To English, French and Spanish, I even added Greek. It would only be during the following school year that the strain would start to tell.

After another summer spent at a girls' camp in the Adirondacks, I returned to school in September of 1941, ready for my fourth Lycée year, this time in Deuxième, little realizing that soon the U.S. would finally enter the war. In that grade, to familiar classmates new ones would be added, including (if memory serves) Jean Bussard, Michel Grinberg, Paulette Guénet, Brigitte Dreyfus, Jean Pardo, Michel Guggenheim, Dorrance Velay, Jean-Pierre Fatzer, and Jean Alvarez de Toledo. That year for the first time, a certain amount of intrigue began to manifest among some of them, and undercurrents of volatile male-female relationships of a bizarre and uncertain nature made themselves felt. A certain clique-ishness developed, and in some quarters teenage libidos were clearly beginning to kick in. I had little interest in any of that, felt in no way ready for it, and focused on my friendships with Eleanor, Gloria, Lizzie Bertol, and with Esther Huisman whom I had previously known but now came to know better.

Meanwhile, my parents had been hoping to leave the city and return to suburban life on either Long Island or in Connecticut. I've no idea why they finally decided to move us out to Garden City, Long Island, in late-November. Did they, perhaps anticipating America's entry into the war, imagine that we would be safer there? To this day, I don't know. However, nine days after we moved, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor

(Dec. 7, 1941). After that, the U.S. abandoned its neutral status to join the Allies and declare war against the Axis powers. America was in the war at last, and from the outset would be fighting on two fronts.

La Déclaration de Guerre

Le 8 décembre tout le Lycée s'est rassemblé dans la salle d'étude pour écouter la déclaration de guerre au Japon par le Président Roosevelt et le Congrès. Depuis ce jour l'esprit du Lycée a changé pour devenir plus sérieux.

From 1941-1942 Yearbook

Later that month, Winston Churchill, whom we all admired at the time, visited President Roosevelt in Washington, D.C., where he spent Christmas at the White House. I sent him a Christmas card, naively hoping for a handwritten reply from the great man himself, but had to be content with a typewritten thank-you on White House stationery. It wasn't the personal note I'd anticipated, but it was something.

1942-1943

In Garden City, my experience of both school and the war altered radically. Now an older teenager (15 at the time of our move), I entered Garden City High School during the second semester of what would become my Junior year. Compared with the Lycée, where we might study eight or ten different subjects in a single week, I found incredibly tedious the American system of studying the same five subjects at on all five days of the school week.

Even though America was now actively engaged in overseas combat, among my American schoolmates — except for those with family members or close friends in the military — attitudes continued to reflect less connection to events abroad than I was accustomed to.

Nationwide however, evidence of the war soon became ubiquitous. Movies and books addressed patriotic and wartime themes. Big Bands played nostalgic tunes like 'I'll Be Seeing You,' 'I'll Walk Alone,' 'I'll Never Smile Again,' and 'It's Been a Long, Long Time'—tunes that expressed the pangs of parting, of absence, of yearning for reunion with loved ones far away. Separations were particularly painful then, as there was no limitation on military tours of duty. Unless they were wounded or killed, servicemen and women remained in the war for the duration.

Posters appeared everywhere, proclaiming patriotic messages such as 'Buy War Bonds,' 'Loose Lips Sink Ships,' and 'Is This Trip Necessary?' People were urged to restrict travel to make room for servicemen in transit, and, whenever we did travel anywhere, men in uniform proliferated on trains and buses. Food and gasoline rationing went into effect, and collection drives were held to recycle clothing, newspapers, bacon fat—almost everything imaginable. Certain textiles were in short supply (women's stockings were almost unobtainable and, when nylons came in, they represented a rare, luxurious novelty). Fashions featured styles cut skimpily to economize on fabric. The draft law had been passed in 1940, and families with members in the military hung small red-bordered white flags in their windows, each with a central blue star for each man or woman in uniform. If a family member was killed in action, the blue star was replaced by a gold one.

Like just about everyone else, my parents switched jobs to work for the war effort. My father, previously an advertising executive, went to work in public relations for the War Production Board. My mother, a teacher and former editor of nationally published women's magazines, worked in the design department at Grumman Aircraft in Bethpage and served as air-raid warden in our neighborhood. Many women went to work who had been 'housewives' before, and many of us youngsters became 'latchkey kids,' fending for ourselves during the few hours after school until our parents returned home from their jobs.

This country was united then as it had never been before—and has never been since. Like everyone else, my family bought war bonds and learned how to respond in case of an air raid. My brother and I stripped and saved the silver foil lining from our parents' cigarette packs and rolled it into hard-packed balls to donate to scrap-metal drives. I clumsily knitted woolen scarves, simple but warm, for servicemen overseas. Many people cultivated 'Victory gardens' to eke out the national food supply. Once when we went for a rare drive farther out on Long Island, we passed a farm that had posted a sign soliciting volunteers to help bring in the harvest. My brother and I begged our mother to let us apply. She agreed, and in no time he and I were out in the hot sun, picking row after row of string beans and lima beans, for several long hours. Back home at close of day, we felt tired but happy and proud.

Sometime in 1942, a German U-boat landed saboteurs on the coast of Long Island. Those who came ashore were soon caught and imprisoned, but the incident scared many people, bringing the war closer. Now old enough for my first summer job, I worked one summer at Mitchell Field Air Base, located a short distance from our house, as a salesperson in the officers' department at the Post Exchange. Many of us at the PX briefly dated airmen, who would soon ship out for duty overseas and whom we would never see again. They always behaved like perfect gentlemen, and seemed content just to share movies and ice-cream sodas with young girls who probably reminded them of their sisters at home. On one occasion, my family and I hosted a party for some of them.

At some point early in 1942, the Lycée actually held another costume ball, the first one having been so successful. For this second ball, I made myself a colorful Turkish harem costume and won second prize for it. After that, I continued returning periodically to New York (which I missed) to socialize with former Lycée classmates. By then, my friend Eleanor was going out with Free French naval officers stationed in Manhattan, enjoying city outings more formal and more sophisticated than my suburban ones, including tea dances at Delmonico's. Although she often invited me to come up to town to join her for those occasions, somehow that plan never materialized.

1943 and after

In June 1943, I graduated from Garden City High School and set off for college. In 1944, FDR entered his fourth term as president and lived to witness D-Day in June of that year, but died before VE-Day and VJ-Day, both of which occurred during the summer of 1945.

The jubilation at war's end was intense and universal. But, mixed with relief at our victory and the end of the slaughter, there were underlying sorrows. So many had died; so much had been destroyed.

My adored French godmother, who had survived the war, left her home at Cannes and came to the United States to recuperate, as her health had suffered. From her we heard tales of the wartime privations she and her friends had endured. When she arrived in New York, I was the first of our family to greet her in her room at the Plaza where I found her resting in bed, and was stunned at how frail and fatigued she seemed,

how powdery and dry her face looked. This must have been sometime in 1946 but, happily, after remaining in the U.S. for several months she was able to regain her health before returning to France.

As things gradually began to resume normalcy in the United States, my attention turned to the devastation in Europe, to which, among other influences, my Lycée years had sensitized me. In summer 1947, I sailed for France, to work at the Paris headquarters of American Aid to France, a private post-war relief agency (NGO) which operated medico-social centers in seven of France's most shattered cities, where our organization distributed food, clothing and medications to needy victims of the war. The AAtF Paris office oversaw these operations, maintained warehouses for the storage of goods collected in and shipped from the United States, and organized their distribution. In late-1947, we were the organization selected by syndicated columnist Drew Pearson to head up distributions in France of the merchandise collected in the U.S. by his people-to-people [Friendship Train](#). When private relief agencies started phasing out a year later as government aid began to come in, I transferred in the summer of 1948 to the Marshall Plan (officially,



France, 1947 : Being welcomed by crowds greeting the Friendship Train

the Economic Cooperation Administration), then setting up its international headquarters in Paris. When that program came to a successful conclusion after another few years, I went to work in the selfsame building (at 2, rue St.-Florentin) for the United States Mission to N.A.T.O., acting as secretary to two successive American ambassadors to N.A.T.O.

Finally, after spending almost the entire decade of my 20s in Paris, I returned to the U.S. to be married and raise a family. It is fair to say, however, that both the war and the Lycée experience left an indelible, lifelong imprint on my mind, and on my subsequent interests and motivations. Forever after, the fate of the world and its democratic freedoms would matter mightily to me. This is a legacy that the war bestowed upon many members of my generation. In my case, the Lycée years compounded and intensified that legacy.

V) REMEMBERING LYCÉE TEACHERS AND FRIENDS

When I look back upon my days at the Lycée during the school's earliest years, one of the things I recall is the excellence of the education we all received — an education far in advance of anything offered in approximately-equivalent American schools then (and probably now). Our teachers, our textbooks, and the whole learning ambience was wonderful. The quality of education we received at the Lycée is something I still marvel at all these years later.

Exciting subjects

Much of the excitement of our learning I attribute to the superlative teachers whom the Lycée employed: absolutely the best of the best, all highly qualified, highly motivated, and highly motivating to us in turn whom their zeal inspired to love not only learning itself but the whole *process* of learning.

For instance, before I was 16, we had already read and studied no fewer than ten of Shakespeare's plays (one play per trimester), read and studied in their entirety Goldsmith's 'The Deserted Village,' Dickens' 'David Copperfield,' Longfellow's 'The Courtship of Myles Standish,' Whittier's 'Snowbound,' not to mention plays by Molière, Corneille and Racine, stories by Washington Irving, Mark Twain and Bret Harte, selections from Pepys' diary, from the essays of Francis Bacon, Emerson, Addison and Steele, plus a great deal of French, English and American poetry. (The *Oxford Book of English Verse* was one of our textbooks.)

We studied ancient history, the history of civilization, the history of Europe, American history; biology, zoology, botany; French and English (of course), Latin, Greek (optional. I took it for a while), Spanish ; math, algebra, geometry ; physics and chemistry : music, drawing, and more. No wonder, therefore, that the American high school routine would later seem monotonous to me when compared with the academic stimulation of the Lycée.

We also memorized and recited aloud in class passages from Shakespeare, poems by classic French, English and American poets, and texts such as Lincoln's Gettysburg address— even some Latin texts. I have always been grateful for that kind of memory training. Many of those poems and passages have remained engraved in my mind, some of which I recall even today—I can still, for example, without missing a beat, recite Lafontaine's *La Cigale et La Fourmi*, memorized decades ago in Sixième !

Wonderful teachers and staff

In Sixième, our wonderful English teacher, Miss Gladys Peacock, taught us about iambs, trochees, iambic pentameter, and some of the different sonnet forms. She also had us try writing verse in some of those forms. I doubt whether students of our age in American schools were learning, as we were, about the forms of poetry, or even knew any of their names. Miss Peacock was marvelously inspiring in every respect, including her encouragement of free-ranging discussions in class. Later English teachers I would also enjoy were Mr. Lowe and Mr. Lavallée.



Mme. Louise Bégué

Mme. Bégué for French was another superlative teacher, incredibly committed, always encouraging, capable of both seriousness and humor, a teacher born and bred.

Tiny, plump little Mme. Corrée was a dynamo in action. She taught both math and science at several different grade- and age-levels, an indefatigable advocate of both those fields.



[Mme. Douce Corrée](#)

Hers were not my favorite subjects, but they were exceedingly well-taught, and I nonetheless enjoyed them and did as well in them as I ever would.

M. Deschamps taught us math in Sixième, but after that he may have gone back to France for the war. He was movie-star handsome, blond, with fine, delicate features, and always appeared rather retiring and shy. Perhaps that came from self-consciousness about his looks, which I understand caused some of the girl students (and presumably a *répétitrice* named Miss Glass) to have serious 'crushes' on him. I was not one of those who did, but I could appreciate his good looks.



[M. Georges Deschamps](#)

Mme. Sylvie Brodin was another teacher whom we all enjoyed. She taught us geography in class, and after-school subjects such as drama and music. Both Lizzie Bertol and I performed in plays she directed, and for a while Eleanor Cramer and I took recorder lessons from her.

Then there was art teacher, M. Gallet, who taught us drawing in the same spacious, airy classroom to which we also repaired for solfeggio. I don't remember much about our music teachers, but M. Gallet was tall and imposing, and always had a large sign posted on the wall whose oversize lettering sagely reminded us that *'Observer, c'est voir. Voir, c'est savoir.'*

The ultimate, quintessential teacher at that time was Mme. Marie-Andrée d'Oberlin Mount, who taught French, Latin, and — life. However she may have turned out in later years, in our time she was an educator to the bone, a thoroughgoing teacher in every best sense of the word, to whom no effort was too great in her commitment to the education of her students. She was devoted to us, to the school, and to learning in general, and put in long hours not only at school but after school. Her passion for her subjects was contagious. She also taught an after-school sewing class, and was always willing to provide extra tutoring for anyone who needed it,

A teacher of a different stripe was Mme. Day-Mondain, who taught Greek, an optional course. A quick learner of languages and loving Latin, I was eager to acquire at least the rudiments of another ancient tongue, so in Troisième I signed up for the course, one of less than half-a-dozen students to do so. Of that tiny class, held in a tiny, dark, closet-like room, the only student I still remember besides myself was Raoul Grenade, who was something of a humorist and a quiet clown.

Mme. Day-Mondain had the strange habit of occasionally disappearing from the classroom (sometimes even in the middle of exams) to dash off who knew where? Perhaps to the teachers' room for a quick cigarette, leaving us to our own devices, completely unsupervised. Seemingly never too interested in the course she was supposed to be teaching, she scarcely appeared to notice us even when she remained in our midst. In return, we did mischievous things in her class that we would not have dreamed of doing in any other.

One day, whenever she wasn't looking, Raoul spent part of class time crumbling up tiny bits of art eraser, which he dipped slightly in the inkwell atop his desk and then quietly sent zinging against the dark walls of the room with a slingshot. I, on the other hand, once brought a coconut into the classroom, surreptitiously split it open with a hammer, poured off the milk into a glass which I circulated to my fellow students to sip from, then broke the coconut into pieces, which I also circulated. Mme. Day-Mondain never seemed to hear the hammer blows, or notice the constant undercurrent of chatter which habitually prevailed in her class, and she never called anyone to task for any of these things. In due course, we either tired of such monkeyshines and stopped performing them, or left the class — as I did, feeling that I really wasn't learning much of anything.

With that single exception, our teachers were dedicated and inspiring, our textbooks full of interest, and the curriculum wonderfully stimulating. I continue to believe today that, in the four happy years I spent at the Lycée, I learned many things that most of my American contemporaries would not learn until they entered college, and not always even then.

Assuming that the quality of education at the Lycée today is as good as it was in those early days, it must still be a unique privilege to attend such a school.

Other teachers whose name I remember, although they were not *my* teachers, include a Mr. Chown, a Miss Butts, a Mme. Durieux, a Miss Giaouque, a Miss Geymet, a *répétiteur* called M. Reynolds, and a Miss Glass, the blonde *répétitrice* who seemed to harbor such warm feelings toward handsome M. Deschamps.

Mais où sont les neiges d'antan ?

Some years after the war's end, I did finally learn that M. Soula had survived it. But I never found out whether Christiane Donat and her family did, and I've always wished I could somehow have reconnected with them. Only recently, to my surprise, an old address book unexpectedly surfaced in which I found the French address at which I once had written to her: Manoir des Piliers, Belleville-sur-Saône, Rhone, Lyon. If I'd had that address with me when I returned to France after the war, perhaps I might have found her.

To this day, a sort of mystery seems to surround Jacques Changeux. He was my classmate in Sixième, yet must, like me, have skipped a grade somewhere along the way, because when I reached Deuxième he was again my classmate there. Then, many years later, in some Lycée alumni publication I saw his business address given as 2, rue Saint-Florentin, Paris—which astounded me because for years I had worked at that same address, first for the Marshall Plan, later for N.A.T.O., and had never run into him. Unfortunately, I've not been able to discover during what years he worked there, nor for what organization. Interestingly, some years ago when I went on-line and Googled his name, a listing came up apparently linking him with the O.S.S. (Office of Strategic Services, WW II forerunner of the C.I.A.). So, does that mean that the Jacques Changeux I knew at the Lycée later worked in American intelligence? When I searched again more recently, I could find nothing.

In 2001 I revisited 2 rue Saint-Florentin and learned that there was then (or had been earlier) an office of the C.I.A. located somewhere in the building. If I had known then that Jacques had once worked there, I would have pressed for further information. Meanwhile, it does seem rather striking that two former Lycée classmates might both have worked at the same address without, at some time or other, their paths ever crossing.

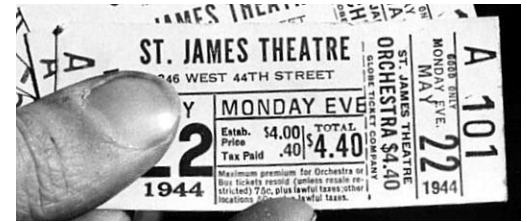
VI) AUTRE TEMPS, AUTRE MOEURS

Things were different then.

It is a cliché nowadays to say that those were more innocent times. But they genuinely were. One thing that strikes me, when I look back, is how simple and uncomplicated our diversions were. We had no television, no drug culture, no celebrity culture ; we were subjected to no media hype such as invades our world today ; peer pressure hardly existed ; and, while we were literate and sophisticated in some ways beyond our American peers, in other ways we shared their simplicity. By which I mean that simple things amused us. It took little to entertain us, and we were entirely capable of entertaining ourselves. We had radio and records, we had movies and theater, but we also played simple games and laughed at simple things.

Another thing that seems anomalous now is how safe (and inexpensive) New York was then. A ride on the Madison Avenue bus cost five cents, ten cents on the double-decker Fifth Avenue bus—and how we loved

to ride on its second level, especially the summer open-tops with the air blowing fresh on our faces. Even theater tickets were more affordable then. A 1944 letter from best friend Eleanor Cramer, written to me at college in anticipation of my return on vacation, suggests various plays we might see in New York and cites ticket prices in the \$1.60, \$2.40 and \$3.60 range. We never settled for



bad seats and usually sat fairly far forward in the orchestra section, so it's clear that the price difference between then and now was considerable, quite apart from inflation.

There is something else about those times. Going to the movies was not a thing we took for granted. It was always a treat. Youngsters then were not accustomed to, and did not expect, the steady diet of entertainment they get today. Instead, I believe we focused more on what was real and tangible in our lives, and used our imaginations for the rest. A wonderful story I've heard in recent years tells of a young boy in today's world who was asked which he preferred as between television and radio. The boy reflected a few moments, then surprised his adult questioner by answering, "Radio." Why radio, the questioner wanted to know? « Because," the boy replied, "the *pictures* are better. » This is a lovely story which purports to be true, and I hope it is, because I really believe that the imagination is more richly developed by creating its own pictures than by passively accepting those imposed by someone else's vision, however creative that vision might be. The boy's reply is reminiscent of Einstein's when someone asked *him*, « Which is better, knowledge or imagination ? » Einstein's answer was that « Imagination is better, because knowledge is finite whereas imagination is infinite. » For me, that is also the advantage which reading books has over any movie, TV, cartoon or computer version of the same material. So, yes, I persist in thinking that, for my generation the 'pictures' definitely were better. We imagined more and were less consumers of what entertained us than creators of it.

Manhattan was safe enough for my brother and me to walk alone to school (granted the Lycée was only a block from home that first year and only three blocks distant thereafter, but other youngsters coming from farther away also often walked). Beginning in Cinquième, Eleanor and I routinely took buses downtown to shop or to see movies and plays, with no one, least of all ourselves, concerned about the safety of two young girls on the loose in Manhattan. Even Central Park was safe. Often, especially during that first year, my mother would take my brother and me to roller-skate in a nearby park playground, where there was also equipment available to exercise on. One of his and my favorite things was chinning ourselves on the iron bars of a 'jungle gym,' and showing off our biceps. But we might equally stroll onto a grassy portion of parkland to play the child's game of 'duck-on-a-rock.' On summer evenings, the whole family would sometimes sally forth from our apartment to take a cooling after-dinner stroll around the reservoir, a thing unthinkable today when the park is generally deemed unsafe after 5 p.m.

On another front also, those times were different from these. There were none, or certainly far fewer, of the sexual pressures to which young people are exposed today. Boyfriends were merely boy *friends*. We remained sexually innocent longer and were, I believe, more romantic. None of the girls I knew were 'boy-crazy.' At that young age, we had little real interest in the male sex unless it were abstractly and from afar, as for example when we might admire certain movie stars, such as Laurence Olivier or Errol Flynn. Some

of us liked some of the Lycée boys better than others, and some of them liked us, but I don't recall any serious 'dating' taking place outside of school, unless perhaps in the upper grades.

The pressures we did experience were essentially social and academic. There were academic expectations placed upon us which we were supposed to meet. Decades later, my classmate Lizzie Bertol (Moon) wrote me that she still remembered « the [Lycée's] high level of intellectual activity, » and the fact that « the expectation that all students would be capable of absorbing it made it necessary for us to stretch beyond what we would ordinarily have achieved. »

But social pressures were relatively light. There was none of the peer-pressuring conformity one often sees nowadays among American teenagers. At the Lycée, every student's individuality was simply taken for granted in a remarkably tolerant environment, and so long as one was friendly and avoided self-importance, there was a wide latitude of acceptance for individual differences.

Studying was definitely at the forefront of our minds. We were at the Lycée to learn, and the relative sternness of some of our instructors only served to motivate us the more. Even the French system of numerically ranking each student's standing in the class was just one more incentive to excel. And at the Lycée, there was never any social stigma attached to being 'brainy' as there often is in American schools. One's personal popularity was not affected one way or another by one's academic standing. Whether a poor student or a good one, you were accepted for the person you were.

VII) CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN OLD FRIENDS



The following happy exchange took place in 2002 between Elizabeth (Bertol) Moon ('44) and Gabrielle

From Gabrielle to Elizabeth:

"Dearest Lizzie, How absolutely thrilling to hear from you at last! I have been trying for WEEKS to reach you by phone. Finally I became aware of Roger [Liwer's] Lycée alumni query line and contacted him yesterday. He responded with remarkable promptness, and so at last we are in touch! I am so glad.

I am so happy to note that you retain much the same memory of the Lycée as I do. The magic of those early days in the school's history, the incredible quality of the education we received, the architectural beauty of the building, not to mention the marble, the wrought iron, the polished hardwood floors, the crystal chandeliers, the ballroom . . . the courtyard, which is no more, having given way to an annex building . . .

So many fine teachers, such interesting textbooks (in my mind's eye, I can picture them still), so much intellectual stimulus, and such a varied and fascinating student body . . .

Yes, you are right. We were fabulously lucky to have had that experience. I have little idea of what the Lycée is like today, except that it has expanded enormously—five buildings in all, soon to be sold to allow the construction of one huge comprehensive one. I hate to think of OUR own original Lycée building being anything other than the Lycée, for who knows what will become of it when they do sell it? It doesn't bear thinking about. But I gather it will be there for at least another year, so I intend to go down next spring for the 2003 Spring Festival—assuming they hold it again (and I am assured they will). Is there any chance at all that you might also go?

I did go down (from New Hampshire where I now live) for that event a couple of years ago with my two daughters who, having heard me speak of the Lycée all their lives, decided they wanted to go and see it, too. It was marvelous to be in that building again.

It is amazing to me to realize how often over the years those rooms, hallways, staircases and floor plans have figured in my dreams—not necessarily as relating to the Lycée per se, but serving as backdrops for whatever action takes place in the dream. Always when I wake, I recognize the setting.

And yes, the masquerades. You came to my family's apartment, gowned as Scarlett O'Hara (wearing her white Tara dress, if I remember rightly), and together we took a taxi to ride the three blocks from our place to the Lycée. I went dressed as an 18th-century lady (that was my favorite period then), Eleanor Cramer wore a richly embroidered yellow satin mandarin's costume, David Leach went as a Redcoat (I had guessed he would), and everyone entered beautifully into the spirit of the thing. It all happened exactly as we had dreamed it and was deemed a great success. In fact, a predecessor to later Lycée balls . . .

Oh dear . . . You have opened the floodgates, and I find the memories beginning to pour forth! So must try to return to the present for a moment . . . Of my two daughters, the elder, Marise, is married, lives in one of Boston's west suburbs, and is the mother of 7-year-old Sophie, my only grandchild. My younger daughter, Gillian, is executive director of one of Philadelphia's most prestigious law firms. Currently I live alone in a rather messy house that I adore, across from a small pond, with fields and mountains in the background and a sweep of sky overhead. Deer, moose, bears, foxes, Great Blue Herons, Canada geese and other interesting wildlife roam the neighborhood. I quite love that, too.

Have I mentioned that I am SO happy to have found you? At some point during the last year or so, I thought I had found Esther Huisman, only to discover, before I had time to contact her, that she had recently died. Eleanor Cramer died sometime in the mid-1970s, but her mother still lives in the same 5th Ave. apartment. Do you happen to remember a 1939 birthday party of Eleanor's, which I am sure you must also have attended, that was held in that same apartment, a luncheon party following which we were all whisked away in taxicabs to witness a screening of *Gone With the Wind*, during what I am certain was its first week's showing in New York? What a dazzlement that was . . .

But 'nuff said for now. How I would love to see you again. Perhaps at some point we can make that happen. Meanwhile, the only other former Lycée student with whom I am in touch is Maurice Raviol. Maurice says he and his wife definitely also plan to attend the Lycée's Spring Festival next year and it will be nice to see them.

Till soon, Love, Gabrielle"

From Elizabeth to Gabrielle:

"Ma dear little Gabie! I can't tell you how exciting it was for me to find your message waiting for me this

morning. Ever since I learned from Roger [Liwer] that you were anxious to find me, I've been plunged into that rich storehouse of extraordinary memories of the Lycée and those magic years I spent there. It's interesting to read (and re-read) your letter, because your memories are identical to mine, and the things you remember are vivid in my memory because I, like you, often think of the Lycée, which played such an important role in my life, and had such an influence on me. Your letter brought back so many happy memories!! How truly wonderful that we have been able to re-connect after so many years!!!

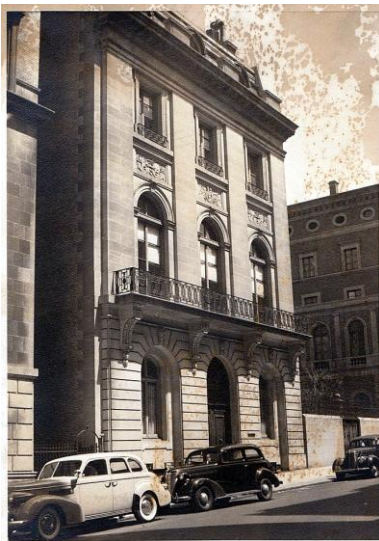
So interesting to read the details about the masquerade parties! I had completely forgotten that you had been the inspiration behind those spectacular events! BUT I hadn't forgotten your beautiful dress . . . and I'm happy you haven't forgotten my *Gone With the Wind* dress . . . I felt so beautiful that night! And I remember our ride by taxi to the Lycée . . . that was special

I've been enjoying reminiscing about the Lycée and those wonderful carefree times when we lived through what appears to me to have been a magic era. We were so lucky to have had those exciting experiences. I think so often of that beautiful building . . . those mirrored walls and rooms . . . And the courtyard where we played La Balle au Prisonnier . . . Monsieur Brodin . . . Mme. Mount . . . Mme. Bégué . . . Miss Horsey . . .

Dear friend . . . Life is full of wonderful surprises . . . this is one of the best!

Love . . . Bette!"

VIII) SIXTY-PLUS YEARS LATER The Lycée Revisited



It must be axiomatic that an attractive environment is an inducement to learning. When I first entered the Lycée in September 1938 at the age of twelve, I was thrilled to be there for a multitude of reasons, and the beauty of the building soon became one of them, in itself a joy and a motivation. My first year there was the Lycée's fourth and its very first in its own building at 3 East 95th Street. It was also, for everyone across the globe, the last year of peace before the outbreak of World War II.

In 1936 and 1937 I had lived at Cannes with my beloved French godmother and had come back from that experience a committed Francophile. When my parents moved our family from Riverside, Connecticut, to Manhattan, I was exhilarated at the prospect of again attending a French school. From the first, I loved everything about the Lycée: its courses, its textbooks, its teachers, its bilingualism, my classmates—and yes,

the elegance of its architecture, its marble staircases, crystal chandeliers, high ceilings, tall windows and bright classrooms, its gilded ballroom, its intimate 18th-century charm.

At a time when the school's entire student body probably numbered little more than one hundred of us altogether, we were able to know (at least by sight) students in grades other than our own. Among them, when I entered the Classe de Sixième, were Hilda Beer, two grades above mine; her older brother, Martin; her older sister, Lise; and their younger brother, Jean. While Hilda went on to complete the full Lycée curriculum and pass her *baccho*, the other Beers eventually transferred to American schools. For my part, I left the Lycée in end-November 1941 while still in Seconde, when my family moved to Garden City, Long Island, just nine days before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

Fast forward sixty-five years to November 2006. After an interesting and active life, I left my long-time home in New Hampshire and moved to a retirement community outside of Philadelphia. I had been at Kendal less than a week when, to our mutual amazement, I discovered all four Beer siblings already ensconced as residents here! In the intervening years there had been no contact between us. What a surprise for all of us therefore that, out of so small a school as the Lycée had been when we knew it, five of us should turn up in the same place six-and-a-half decades later.

From that moment on, Hilda Beer (now Grauman) and I had talked periodically about some day taking a trip to New York to visit the brand-new modern Lycée, all steel and glass, of which we'd seen pictures, showing it to be not only larger in size than our old school but also endowed with all sorts of amenities our Lycée had not possessed. Finally on Tuesday 13 July 2010, we joined a Kendal day trip headed for Manhattan, having taken the precaution beforehand of ascertaining that someone would be at the school to tour us through it.

That someone was Claude Aska (Assistant Director of Development and Alumni Relations) who greeted us upon arrival, and guided us through a building that proved to be, as we'd expected, in dramatic contrast to the one we remembered. Here was a structure as modern and sleek as our Lycée had been vintage and ornate. But, as we immediately realized, here also was an attractive learning environment that must be as motivating to today's students as ours had been to us, and beautiful in altogether different ways.

To house a much larger student body and teaching staff, the new building is not only many times bigger than the original one, it also incorporates features that accommodate vastly expanded programs, including some we never knew, such as athletics and far more comprehensive drama and music programs. In our day, outdoor recreation took the form of recess periods in an open courtyard, where we played our own games at will. For additional exercise, the older boys were sometimes taken out to Central Park for a pick-up game or two, but the girls never were, and no real sports program existed for either sex. Music and art were equally minimal, taught alternately, once a week, in the same room. Art instruction never amounted to much, and music took the form of weekly lessons in solfeggio and singing. Drama might, at best, include a short play performed once or twice a year on the ballroom's raised stage, but all of this is small stuff compared to the facilities available to today's Lycée students. Hilda and I marveled that the new building boasts not only one but two *large* gymnasiums, and a large, professionally appointed auditorium/theater/concert hall.

In Hilda's and my time, the original Lycée had been converted to school use from a private mansion designed to replicate an 18th-century town house, with the result that many of our classrooms were former bedrooms, complete with rococo wall sconces and marble fireplaces. A few classrooms up under the roof had doubtless once been servants' quarters. A latticed solarium at the top of the house served as classroom

for the very youngest children (with twin terraces at either end which the lower grades visited at mid-morning *récréation* for a breath of fresh air and a snack of milk and graham crackers). Older students in the graduating classes enjoyed as their classroom the luxury of the mansion's former library, a high-ceilinged chamber with period *boiseries*, glassed-in bookshelves, and tall balconied windows overlooking the street.

In the new Lycée, architect-designed and purpose-built to house this particular school, we were especially impressed by the banks of spacious classrooms overlooking a grassy patio, all of whose window walls let in natural light and can be retracted in fair weather to open the rooms to fresh air and sunshine. How delightful that must be to the students who occupy them!

Today's airy, sunlit Lycée cafeteria contrasts dramatically with the basement eating areas where we lunched at 3 East 95th Street. In that subterranean space, a long corridor opened onto the boys' and girls' cloakrooms. plus a kitchen, a dining-room which served students who took hot, school-cooked meals there each noon, and a sort of refectory that held tables and benches where those of us ate who brought lunchbox meals from home. (Needless to say, those underground rooms, the only part of the building that was not really beautiful, required electric lighting during every hour they were in use.)

Of course the new Lycée's state-of-the-art technology impressed us, including its several 'green' features and its multi-media 'smart boards' with their Internet connectivity (replacing the old blackboards, chalk and dusty felt erasers so long featured in earlier schools). Also new to us was the existence of Lycée libraries (not just one, we were told, but two), separate art and science rooms, and a students' lounge, none of which had existed in our day. Then, even our teachers had only a tiny cubby-hole of a room in which to deposit or pick up their textbooks when changing classes—nothing one could remotely call a teachers' lounge, which doubtless the new Lycée also has.

Despite these lacks, I am certain that none of us ever felt in any way deprived; on the contrary, we loved the elegant interiors through which we moved and felt privileged to be attending school there. For our day and our use, they provided a far better than average learning environment. In addition, our glorious ballroom (substituting for the present school's auditorium) served as venue for Christmas caroling, any dramatic performances we might present, for our weekly social dancing lessons, and for the annual Distributions des Prix held at each school year's end. It also inspired me to organize the first-ever Lycée ball, a masked, costumed affair held in March 1941.

Toward the end of Hilda's and my Lycée tour, Scott Hunt, Director of Development, joined us in a conference room to answer any questions she and I might have. Shortly thereafter, we left with an armful of mementos, a head full of happy memories—both old and new—and great pleasure in the thought that, like us, today's Lycée students have such a bright and positive space in which to pursue their education.

The End

Late-autumn 2014