

Chapter 7

MY WAR AGAINST THE WAR

Rightly to be great
Is not to stir without great argument,
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honour's at the stake.

— Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Act IV, 53-56)

In ceremonies of the horsemen,
Even the pawn must hold a grudge.

— Bob Dylan, “Love Minus Zero: No Limit”

Buried deep inside the weekly entertainment section of the *Ithaca Journal* one Saturday morning in June 1970 was an eighth of a page ad headlined: “Sons of America: Don’t Accept Their Lies!!” The ad consisted of a torrent of words, including these:

The draft board, the army and other military institutions tell you it is your duty to kill and die and suppress other people at their command. But you know it is your duty to yourself and to those on the receiving end of US military actions to decide by yourself on the benefits of denying another person of life and liberty. It is neglect of duty to let others decide your actions....Before you do business with military institutions, you owe it to the people of the world to investigate the economic interests which are at the root of military involvement. Your decision on how you should relate to the military should be your most important and revealing one, because the American military system is the most important factor in the lives of the oppressed people of the world...

The ad ended with a name and number to call, “If you want to talk or act...” It probably didn’t have much impact, being dwarfed by a half-page ad on the facing page with pictures and bold claims

for Colorful Carpets, and competing with a page one report that the 300 American and 768 South Vietnamese soldiers dead in the invasion of Cambodia had been offset by 12,000 enemy killed! (With such losses, one has to wonder who was left to sever all the roads into the Cambodian capital, a fact that was somehow integrated into the same story.) But I was proud and excited: it was my name and number on this invitation to join in conspiracies to “act” against the draft.

I had come to this point because I was consumed with the task of stopping the war. Virtually every waking minute from my senior year in high school until the war ended seven years later, I heard the challenge, at times in a whisper and at times in a scream, to halt the brutality being committed by my country against its sons and the Vietnamese. Of course, anything so deep-seated must have had a deeper meaning. I’m sure I needed to protect others because I wished someone had protected me from my father’s violence, to declare independence from the System because I needed to break away from childhood, to rage at society’s insouciance because I couldn’t rage at my parents, to torment myself over the weakness of my effort because my parents’ demands had habituated me to tormenting myself over something. Metaphor or not, though, the war became my version of the “great testing” my father faced in the Cornell Crisis. It drained and scarred me, but also set my course for the rest of my life.

Marching simply wasn’t enough for me. I would sit in my dormitory room in Chicago in the fall of 1969, looking west down 55th Street on gloomy afternoons, and fantasize about chaining myself to induction centers, assassinating Nixon, or being a soldier bringing coffee into the Joint Chiefs and then grabbing a rifle and gunning them down. These daydreams would have required me to go out of my way to risk my life, and I didn’t have the gumption or certainty to do that. Decisions about the draft, though, were unavoidable, so when I turned 18 in October, my war with the war smoothly transformed itself into a personal struggle with the draft. Rushing toward the campus bookstore in the rain one day, I happened to glance at a newsbox and was mesmerized by a headline about an increase in draft resisters. With cold water dripping down my neck, I read the part of the story that was visible on the top half of the page. I knew immediately that this was to be where I took my stand. My many confusing fantasies were re-

placed with a single clear image: me refusing to step forward for induction, and being hauled off to prison.

On the surface, the draft was no threat to me. I was eligible during 1971, the year following my 19th birthday. As a college student, I could have deferred my year until after the draft ended in 1972. According to the page I obtained from the Selective Service 20 years later, that's what 18 of the 30 people did who were born in my month and registered at the Ithaca draft board. Even the non-college 12 in my cohort ran little risk of being forced into combat: five had a physical deferment, two were deferred for family hardship, two enlisted before they had any prospect of being drafted (one in 1968 at 16, the other in 1970, a month before the lottery even gave him a number for 1971), and three enlisted (Coast Guard, Navy, and Army) at a time when the withdrawal of combat troops made a drafted tour in Vietnam highly unlikely. Of course, at the time, nobody could have known that the draft wasn't going to kill us, and it wouldn't have made any difference to me if I had known. For me, the draft posed moral as well as physical dangers: I needed to fight it honorably rather than beat it if I was to respect myself.

Honor was the virtue preached most often in our house when I was growing up. Explicitly and implicitly, through exhortations and looks of disapproval, my parents told us how important it was to do the honorable thing. When as a teenager I stole recklessly in private, swore loudly in public, and resisted achieving in school, I did so to show my deviation from what I knew very well to be the norm. Emerging from my cocoon of childhood to focus my search for adulthood on the war, I measured my honor by how I resisted the draft. I worried about my complicity constantly, sacrificing my youth not so much to the struggle with the war as to the struggle within my soul. I couldn't even discuss my options with draft counselors or others in the Movement, because I feared that my conscience would tear away at me for not being strong enough to handle this challenge on my own.

The first decision I made when I registered for the draft in 1969 was to refuse the student deferment that would have let me sit on the upper-class sidelines while my less wealthy peers were dragged away. I applied instead to be a Conscientious Objector. I was influenced in this decision by social psychiatrist Franz

Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth, which said it was crucial to the dignity of colonized people to throw off their masters' control themselves rather than passively receive freedom from them, by tracts on civil disobedience by Henry David Thoreau and Mahatma Ghandi, and by Martin Luther King Jr.'s modernized versions of their teachings. I don't know why these writings didn't convince me to go a step further and renounce the draft system by refusing even to register, or once registered by burning my draft card. Perhaps I feared prison more than I cared to admit and wanted to delay the incarceration I believed would come soon enough. In any event, I thought I was doing the honorable thing by stating in my application for a "C.O." that I refused to enter the armed forces. It was no surprise when I didn't get the C.O. You had to say that for religious reasons you couldn't kill, but I said that I wasn't religious and would kill to defend myself and my family from an invader, which was what the Vietnamese were doing against the Americans.

Now I was dependent on the lottery for my future. Before 1969, men could be called at any time until they were 26, and the 4,000 draft boards used their own random methods to decide who would be taken and when. That must have struck someone as an unfair way to kidnap and kill people, so the Selective Service System inaugurated an annual lottery to order a pool that, because of declining inductions, was now too large to take as a whole. I recall watching the first lottery in the fall semester of 1969 in the cavernous, cold television room in my dormitory, and being happy when my birthday came up 115th out of 365, because that meant I had not been deprived of my battle with the System. There are two problems with that recollection. First, according to the history books, my age cohort was governed by the next lottery, which took place on July 1, 1970; second, whatever my number, I could have had my battle simply by bending, folding, stapling, mutilating, or mailing back my draft card, all of which the card said in no uncertain terms would give me five years in jail and a \$10,000 fine.

It makes it hard for me to trust any of my recollections of this tempestuous time when I can recall such a key event so clearly, and so incorrectly. I also have a vague memory of mailing back my draft card in the spring of 1970, and the local board mailing it right back to me, maybe even a couple times; that would obviate

my recollection that I avoided steps that could lead to jail. It's pretty easy to get tangled up in blue, as Dylan said, when you look hard at the past. One thing I am sure of is that I had decided by the spring of 1970 that the Movement had failed, that the war was going to grind on, that anything I might do would have no effect...but that I would keep up the fight anyway. I decided that it would be most difficult, and hence most honorable, to confront the war and the draft on the personal, local level, so I decided to return to Ithaca for the summer. Ann went to work as a waitress to pay the rent, and I went to work proclaiming the banality of evil.

I wanted to show Ithacans that in collaborating with the draft they were like the good citizens of the short story by Shirley Jackson we had read in junior high school, "The Lottery," in which an apparently civilized town descends into barbarism once a year, drawing lots to select one resident to be stoned to death. I wanted to convince them of the madness of the monthly breakfast send-off for inductees that was hosted by the American Legion and Mayor Jack Kiely — Jack Kiely the good man, the good father to good kids, the coach in my Peewee hockey league. I wanted them to see that if Jack had really cared for his city's kids, he would have laid down in front of the bus to save them rather than send them off with pancakes and a speech about honor. I wanted them to contemplate the sins of the math professors who had demonstrated the bias in the 1969 lottery when the drum wasn't turned and left the later dates on top for earlier selection, and advised the government on how to make the call to slaughter truly fair the next time. I wanted them to see my rage that they were trying to kill their children, and me, and calling it patriotism, as if America was God and they were Abraham. And I suppose I subconsciously wanted my father to hear it all, and apply it to his violence against me and his betrayal of my trust.

So in late May I typed up leaflets with my call to the Sons of America (spelled "Amerika" to denote the connection to the good Germans who let Hitler work his evil) and stood outside the quiet office building that housed the draft board, ready to hand them out to draftees. Most of the board's business must have been done by mail, because few kids came by, so for a few days I handed out copies to the other tenants as they dribbled in and out. Out of boredom as much as fear that I wasn't being aggres-

sive enough, I finally went into the draft board's office and informed the staff that I was leaving some leaflets on a table by the door in case anybody came in. The chief secretary knew of me from my many letters, and told me that she had lost a husband in World War II but still believed that a draft was necessary to protect our freedom. I doubt that my leaflets stayed on the table very long after I left.

Standing out front of the draft board had been terrifying. I had seen a television report from the bush in Vietnam in which a soldier who wouldn't go on patrol said that despite his opposition to the war, if he saw a Viet Cong flag when he came back home, he'd beat the shit out of the person bearing it. I fully expected every person I met as I handed out my leaflets to slug me, but I made myself stand there in hopes that I'd talk one kid out of one stupid decision. When it became clear that few kids came that way at all, I took my leaflet down to the Ithaca Journal to find out the cost of an ad. Copy like that quickly brought out the editor, a brusque middle-aged man named Jerry Langdon. "What is this? What is this?" he yelled. "What is this with the 'k' in 'Amerika'?" He knew very well what it meant, and he refused to run the ad with that spelling. This unexpected moral confrontation scared me as much as the physical confrontations I expected, because I knew I would assail myself as a coward if I backed down and as selfish if I sacrificed this chance to get out the anti-war message to maintain my purity.

I decided to accept his change, and I raised the money for the eighth-of-a-page ad, which I remember as being the princely sum of \$38, by setting up an aluminum table by the war memorials in the one-block park across from the country library. It was a slow day in slow little Ithaca, but things picked up when a group of older pacifists came by on their way to a noon vigil they held at the Post Office every Saturday. By the early afternoon I had enough money for the ad, and could go swimming in the gorge like normal people do on Saturdays in Ithaca. On Monday I plumped my money down, and the ad ran the next Saturday. I got none of the calls the ad solicited "to act" and only a few calls "to talk." One I remember was from Neil Wallace, an extreme right-winger and contemporary of mine who later ran for congress, who started out the conversation belligerently but ended up saying he respected me for acting on my beliefs. One person

who almost called was the one for whom the ad was subconsciously intended, my father. He told my mother he didn't understand why I'd placed the ad, and she said that since the ad openly invited people to call with questions, he should call and ask me that. He didn't.

The lack of response to my ad already had me dreaming about the next step, such as some kind of disruptive action at the draft board or at Mayor Kiely's induction breakfasts. I was looking for trouble and I think I was likely to find it before the summer was up. But I'll never know if I was gearing up for real resistance that could lead to jail, or would shy away as I had in the past, because my father took his life, took away his pain, two weeks later. Until I wrote this chapter, I thought I had drifted away from the Movement out of frustration with its apparent futility. Now I can see that politics was just a crow flying over my own waterfall: it was my father's death that shattered my anti-war activism along with what little was left of my youth. For the rest of the war, my political activities were limited to writings that would burst out in response to propaganda by local media. (For example, one Thanksgiving a newspaper ran a picture of US soldiers in Vietnam, captioned with Lincoln's famous lament: "So costly a sacrifice on the altar of freedom." Unable to contain my outrage about who was being sacrificed to what in Vietnam, I wrote, and they published, a long rebuttal linking the War to the fate of the Indian nation that had first celebrated Thanksgiving.)

My father's death was like having your breath knocked out of you by the first tackle in a football game: you lie there gasping and stunned, impervious to the noble thoughts of team and glory that had been so strong an instant before. It didn't help when a doctor I went to see soon after molested me. I went back the next day to confront him, but ran out of gumption after his nurse refused to let me see him. (I wiped the incident from my mind, but it came back 20 years later while I was reading an article about child abuse. This time I confronted him, and found out he had just been caught and disciplined for similar incidents.) I was afraid to talk to people, since my likely response to any confrontation would be rage or tears. My fears even extended to my remaining mainstream avocation, the summer lacrosse team I was playing on with Dougy and Scott. Coach Terry Cullen, a scion of a great Ithaca sports family who had been wounded in

Vietnam, looked out for me in his gruff way, but I soon had to quit because the rough-house and posturing that was part of the camaraderie of the game now seemed gratuitous and vicious. I wandered in a daze through the summer and fall, trying to avoid all difficulties. But since the July 1 lottery really had given me number 115, the draft was one difficulty I couldn't avoid.

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Neither David nor I had even applied to Cornell after high school; the last thing we wanted to do was swim in the small, placid pool where we would always be Clinton Rossiter's sons. Now, we numbly headed home to be near our mother and Winty. Ann and I transferred to Cornell in art and sociology, respectively, and David left his revolutionary workers' group in Buffalo and started studying agronomy in the agriculture college. Talk about affirmative action on criteria other than merit! David's grades and college boards justified his admission to any college that wasn't leery about veterans of the *Venceremos* brigade, but Ann and I were strictly sympathy admissions.

Ann was pregnant, and as her December due date came closer, I must have had a change of heart about going to jail, since I went to a doctor who had helped me through lifelong earaches and asked him if they were likely to be a factor in my draft physical. (His answer was no.) Here I was, refusing a student deferment yet exploring a medical one! Then came Sarah's birth in December, and all my rules changed. It was immediately impossible to see this little piece of life, to hold her miniature body, to see her with Ann, a child and a woman-child herself both in their moment of need for me, and think seriously about leaving them, about going to jail to make a point. There was no intellectualization, no rational balancing of my duties to my family with my principles about honor and country. There was just a deep, certain knowledge that I would not leave them. An emotional dam cracked in me when Sarah was born, and let some of my youth and my joy flow out again. I had dragged myself around Ithaca all fall, moody and defensive, mad at myself and others for smiling and laughing as if my father had never crawled lonely into the coal-cellar. Now, like the barren old oak in *War and Peace* that Prince Andrei revisits after he meets irrepressible young Natasha, I sprouted my own "canopy of sappy, dark-green foli-

age, (and) stood rapt and slightly trembling in the rays of the evening sun.”

One afternoon, after Winty and I had driven up to the hospital to visit Ann and Sarah, we came giddily out to the field by the parking lot and started playing roughhouse football in the deep and sticky snow. The game had no boundaries, no rules, perhaps not even a ball. Its purpose was simply to let out all the laughter we had bottled up inside our serious bodies and blasted souls since our father had died. On and on the game went, as we took turns tackling each other in the snow for what could have been two hours, screaming hysterically at the foolishness of it all, for once forgetting all our responsibility to be sad. We were kids again for a few hours, and it felt so good that every time we considered getting our soaking, freezing bodies into the car to go home, every time somebody pulled up to see if there was trouble in the two madmen bludgeoning each other in the snowfield, we started laughing again at the absurdity of being serious in a world in which amazing tiny beings like Sarah could just come popping out of the dark, and went back at it.

I was vaguely aware that linking my decision to stay out of jail to Sarah’s birth was taking the easy way out, that I was scared of prison and was perhaps latching onto the excuse of fatherhood as a way out of it, that I might well one day accuse myself not just of cowardice but of manipulation, of using a child as a cover for my fear. I didn’t care. Sarah was owed the full father, not the often absent, often distracted father I recalled, and Ann was owed the full partner in this endeavor. These were debts that had to be paid gladly if paid at all. From what I later read, it appears likely that in 1971 the draft board would have judged a new child grounds for a “family hardship” deferment, but I was still too proud to ask them about it. Instead, I had decided, we were going to Canada! Right after Sarah was born, I wrote a song that I called “Canadian Border Blues,” because that was a line that I expected the three of us to be crossing soon:

Nothing they can do can make me run away.
 I’d die like a Gaul in Roman times,
 that’s what I used to say.
 But then you came into my life,
 or rather unto this earth,

And the killing died within me
 the moment of your birth.
 And it's not that I love you more
 than anything in the world.
 It's just that you need me more
 than I need you, little girl.

Yet soon after Sarah's birth, I slid to the very bottom of the slippery slope of collaboration I'd been on since registering for the draft, and decided that it wasn't fair to drag my family to Canada. A student deferment, the rotten fruit of the System's strategy of dividing and conquering the children of different social classes, suddenly seemed necessary. I told myself that a moral gesture of exile would be only for the benefit of my soul, and that it wasn't worth the disruption it would cause Ann and Sarah. I swallowed a lot of pride when I made this final, self-emasculating decision, but replaced it with the excuse that I should take pride in doing a man's job in protecting my family. Of course, there is no way for me to know if I would have gone to jail, or to Canada, had I not had a family to consider. I had one, and it is impossible even now for me to untangle my feelings of protection for Ann and Sarah from my feelings of fear for myself.

Ironically, having finally decided to take a student deferment, I thought I couldn't get one, because at just this wrong time, I suddenly wasn't a student! Bored with studying problems rather than doing something about them, I hadn't registered for the spring semester in the Arts and Sciences college, and instead had applied to the college of Human Ecology (which had just been renamed from Home Economics) to train to be a pre-school teacher. Much to the surprise of the college's administration, one of the old guard vetoed my admission as the first man in the program, so I was in limbo as my January draft physical approached. I appealed the decision, arguing that if I didn't get in, I would be drafted. In retrospect, that may not have been true, since I suppose I could have registered in Arts and Sciences for another semester while reapplying to Human Ecology. What matters is that I thought it was true.

I assumed that if I passed the physical I would be asked to step forward, if not to head off to basic training on the spot, at least to signify acceptance of my legal entry into the Army. And of course I would refuse. So I went to my physical fully expecting

to do the one thing I had avoided doing: violate the draft laws. I had heard that the Feds never arrested you at the induction center, but rather came looking for you a few weeks later. That would give us time to pack up for the same northern adventure I thought I had renounced. Time had run out on me, forcing the decisions I had sought to defer.

The physical was the first chance I had actually had to talk to a lot of possible draftees, but I was no longer thinking about organizing the “sons of Amerika.” After Ann drove me down to the draft board in the pre-dawn blackness of a cold winter day, I got on the bus to Syracuse and just listened to my peers, rather than proselytized them. The city of Ithaca had about half the population of the county covered by the local draft board, but at most a handful of the fifty kids on the bus was from the city, and none were from wealthy Cayuga Heights. This was a bus for country kids from the townships of Lansing, Groton, and Newfield. Some had graduated near the top of their classes, yet didn’t plan to go to college; at Ithaca High average students went to college, and at my prep school even the worst students knew they could buy a slot. Quite a few in the group had studied vocational subjects half the day at a county-wide center, returning to their school for academic classes, athletics, and other activities; at Ithaca High the vocational kids were quickly pushed to the periphery of all parts of school life.

My busmates were the kids the System could get without a hassle, without a peep from them or their parents, despite the unpopularity of the war. For every wealthier urban kid who deferred or ran to Canada, there were two more Lansing graduates to replace him. Given the lower draft calls as the war wended to a close, the Minotaur would get its virgins. They were not eager to go, and probably once there would have tried like hell not to be, as John Kerry said, the last one to die, but for now they would meet the expectations of their parents, teachers, and entire community, and take like a man whatever the Army gave them. One boy said that if he had even broached joining the Guard to beat the draft, his father would never have spoken to him again. Yes, “God said to Abraham, ‘Kill me a son!’”

We arrived in Syracuse just as the dawn was lightening the sky. It looked like Breezewood during the Mobe, with buses from all over upstate New York pulling in and disgorging their

young. There were some protesters there, handing out literature about ways to beat the draft. We were hustled past them, unable to "join them" as they chanted we should, since we had chosen to be there. Fanon said that colonialists break their victims not only physically but psychologically, by forcing them to cooperate with, to believe in their own degradation; America's fraudulent elections in Vietnam and my father asking me to agree that he hadn't beaten me were such attempts to parlay control into dominance. The draft had a similar function. We were not simply rounded up at gun-point, as lower-class boys were for Britain's navy during the Napoleonic wars or for El Salvador's army during its decade of American war. Instead, we had to sign up for the draft, request deferments, submit to examinations, and set our own alarm clock to catch the bus to the induction center.

Once inside, we were herded about by large, loud sergeants who were well-practiced in controlling groups of teenage males. If anyone made a wise remark, they would be up in their face belligerently with: "What's the joke? You got a problem? You're ours now. We'll tell you what to do." It soon became clear that this day was a preliminary, and that nobody would be asked to step across a line. My confrontation with the law would be delayed at least for the few weeks it would take to score the various exams and call the lucky winners back for a final physical and induction. We were first taken to a room with hundreds of desks, to fill out security forms and take tests. The forms asked about our affiliation with 225 organizations that the FBI thought were communist-inspired. The list ended with the warning that the only way not to answer was to cite the Fifth Amendment and state that answering "reasonably could lead" to prosecution for a crime. The courts had already ruled that no explanation was needed for refusing to answer, but that news was not shared with us, and nobody in their right mind would want to admit to being a criminal. We could have used some advice from one of the groups on the list, the Committee to Uphold the Bill of Rights.

The forms struck me as so un-American that I left them blank and asked one of the loud sergeants why they needed this information. He told me that the government would keep me at the center until I answered, or was charged with the felony of non-cooperation, so I backed down again and affirmed that I had never been in these or any organizations devoted to overthrowing the

United States. Then came the “intelligence” tests, for which, because of my academic abilities, I knew I had the luxury of deciding whether to score poorly or well. I drifted into fantasy, and decided to hammer them so that if I ended up having to go in, I’d have a better shot at being an officer and getting closer to that mythical meeting of brass I could gun down, or to commanding a patrol I could steer away from combat. Like my father, when he literally stepped out of a Ph.D. exam and into the test for officers’ school in World War II, I got a lot of dirty looks for handing in my tests while the rest of the room was sweating through theirs.

I got my comeuppance on the next test, though, which was on practical mechanics. It consisted of a set of multiple choice questions in which you had to choose from a few drawings of gears and cams the one that would fit into a picture of another part of a machine. I was so bamboozled by the first two alone that my head began to hurt, and I laughed at myself as I looked around and saw the country kids happily zooming along. The sergeant accused me of trying to score badly when I handed the test in nearly blank. I had been raised to take college boards; my rural peers had been raised to fix things. A major mechanical success for my father, as for me later in life, was replacing a headlamp on the car. In all the country-western bands I played in later, my buddies couldn’t believe I had no idea and no interest in what went on under the hood; they could no more imagine how I could take my car in for an oil and belt change than I could imagine how they could get through the day without reading the newspaper and part of whatever book they were on at the time! The mechanical test showed me for the first time that there are a lot of different kinds of intelligence, a lot of different ways of taking control of your environment.

Finally, late in the day, we got to the physical exam, in which every part of the body was poked, prodded, and evaluated. The degradation was by now routine. My resistance had been sapped by cold, hunger, and the repetition of the experience of having no control over what happened next. As we stood in our underwear and shoes in line for yet another poking, I jokingly commiserated with the guy next to me that they had apparently forgotten to feed us. Preparing for his new life as a tough, suffering soldier, he sneered, “What’s the matter, you never been hungry before?” I recall thinking that maybe some people, like

my angry companion, were born to be drafted. He was the man Arlo Guthrie merely pretended to be when he told the sarge he wanted to kill, kill, kill... and I knew that he would be celebrated by the good people of his town if he simply followed his inner voices and killed or died, and that I would be castigated if I followed mine and refused to do so.

The only part of the physical that I had trouble with was the hearing test. I could see the puzzled look on the testers' faces as they tried to find a tone I could hear. My rock n' roll years in high school, particularly the one in which I played the organ, had blasted out my highs and lows, but since my hearing in the normal range was fine, as far as the Selective Service was concerned, I was ready to go to war. As far as I was concerned, I was ready to go to Canada. Heading back to Ithaca that night, the bus driver let me out a few miles from town, so I could get a leg up on the ten-mile hitch out to the house we had just moved to with Ann's sister and David. One of the coaches of the Cornell crew team picked me up, and it turned out that he lived on the road right below our house. The conversation turned to my predicament, and I recall he was sympathetic when I said that it looked as if we had to head for Canada within a few weeks.

Here, in late January 1971, is where the trail of my story disappears in the snows of time. I have no recollection of further planning for our escape, nor do I recall much of a pre-induction physical a few weeks later. All that remains is a vivid memory of a kindly older doctor looking in my ears as I stood in line and saying calmly as he stepped on to the next guy, "That'll give you six months." I had no idea what that cryptic remark meant; I expected that within minutes I would be asked to step forward and into the Army, and that I would refuse and head for the border. Then a nurse said "congratulations" with polite irony and wrote on my form: "1-Y, re-examine, six months." Stunned, I asked her why I'd been reprieved, and she said "You have an ear infection."

I did have a slight earache that day, but it was a minor inflammation, not one of the real knock-outs I got every few months. My doctor had already told me that even those wouldn't disqualify me, so I was and still am suspicious. Maybe with reduced draft calls, the doctors were under orders to weed liberally. Indeed, in 1970 only 45 of 100 kids coming to final physicals made it through. In this scenario, my deferment was just one of Dylan's

simple twists of fate by the arbitrary power of the beast. But the conspiratorial explanation is that the draft board thought I would refuse induction, and decided to avoid a draft trial by having me deferred. From president to peon, the System's minions showed themselves throughout the war more than capable of such manipulation. It may be that both explanations have some truth in them, and that a bit of one made the other possible. In any event, I was free, and within a month I was admitted to Human Ecology and so could, and did, apply for a student deferment, which I received before the six months of my 1-Y expired. My trials were over, my trials had just begun.

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For not fighting in Vietnam, some upper-class men appear to have feelings of guilt or regret. In his wonderfully honest article, "What Did You Do in the Class War, Daddy?", James Fallovs says that we with deferments "let the boys from Chelsea be sent off to die." I have heard others wonder wistfully about the deep male bond of risking and taking life together that Vietnam veteran Philip Caputo says in A Rumour of War "made whatever else life offered in the way of delights or torments seem pedestrian." I find these laments crazily self-centered, sort of a lethal version of whites having black friends for the "experience." Why should you kill for something you don't believe in, just so you can answer the stares of your blue-collar peers? If I feel guilty, it's because I wish I had done more to help end the war, and the only rite of passage I regret missing was joining a group that fought more consistently and frequently against the war than I did alone and lonely.

My advice to the would-be warriors is to go skydiving this weekend. It's just like war: you'll be at the mercy of dubious technology, you'll be scared shitless, and you'll feel a desperate kinship with your mates. If that's not enough of a rite of passage, join the local rugby team and experience the thrill of bone-crunching combat, as large numbers of large people careen into you, kicking, slapping, and gouging. These substitutes have two distinct benefits over war: you won't be hurting anyone else (in rugby, it's never the other guy who gets hurt), and when you realize that this is madness, you'll be able to return home that day, rather than in a year and maybe never, to the sanctuary of a hot tub, a cold beer, and a loving family...and after you've hung from the

strut on the wing of a tiny, wheezing airplane with your legs flapping out behind you in the 90 mile an hour wind, anything from a pet turtle to the kid down the block feels like a loving family.

The notion that it was immoral to avoid combat in Vietnam slithered out of its hole during the 1992 presidential campaign, when Bill Clinton was pilloried for draft-dodging. Clinton took pains to stress that he had taken his chances with the lottery after renegeing on an earlier pledge to join ROTC. This defused the issue for the media, indicating that they considered Clinton clean for having played by the rules. As a result, George Bush got little mileage out of calling Clinton a draft-dodger, and so instead impugned him for demonstrating against the war while overseas and visiting Vietnam's ally, the Soviet Union. Bush's insinuations of treason were more than muted by the clearly un-American acts of his minions who were caught cravenly scouring the passport files of Clinton and his mother. By claiming his obedience to the System rather than attacking its moral underpinnings, Clinton passed up the opportunity of lifetime to help us reconsider our past and rethink our future, and to help us define what comprises valor and honor during an unjust war. Of course, I admit that his political fortunes probably would not have profited from such a stance.

In a memorandum on foreign policy I prepared for candidate Clinton at the request of his staff, I suggested he answer every question on his draft status with a discussion of the candidates' stands during the Vietnam War. When Clinton was speaking out against the war, Bush was voting funds for it in congress, and Pat Buchanan and Ross Perot were helping prosecute it on the home front, Buchanan by serving up vicious speeches for Nixon and Agnew, and Perot by assisting in Nixon's cynical initiative to put US prisoners of war rather than the continuation of the war that was creating more of them at the top of the public agenda. Whose prescription, Clinton might have asked, would have shortened the list of names on the Wall of the Vietnam Veterans memorial? Whose foreign policy rejects the assumptions that led us into Vietnam and kept us there? What I hoped for even more, although I didn't say it in the memorandum, was that Clinton would brag rather than apologize for his emotional, powerful letter to his ROTC commander, and say, as I would say of my tangled draft tale, "I am proud of this young man who had the brains to

see that the war was a disaster and had the courage to refuse to participate in it. Lie, cheat, steal, hide or kill, use undue influence: there was no dishonorable way of beating a draft for a dishonorable war.”

Can it be patriotic to oppose your own nation? Can it be democratic to defy democratically-determined laws you believe are unconstitutional (for permitting a war without declaration), illegal under international law (for sustaining a war of aggression), and immoral under higher law (for allowing the use of lethal technology against peasant society and urban centers)? To answer these questions, we need a new lexicon. We invariably use the noble term “service” to denote time spent in the armed forces, and the cowardly term “evade” to describe efforts to stay out. This juxtaposition is inaccurate for those of us who opposed the war and so had a moral imperative to refuse to assist it. We didn’t evade: we served by resisting.

During his presidential bid in 1992, Senator Bob Kerrey was applauded by columnist Mark Shields for leaving behind the protection of his social class to fight in Vietnam. Shields felt that by acting more honorably than those who worked the system to stay out, Kerrey showed qualities that we need in a national leader. Shields was half-right: while those who opposed the war had every reason to stay out of it, for men and women of all ages who supported it as Bob Kerrey did, there was only one place to be, and that was in the field, exposed to danger as soldiers or medical and relief personnel. When some who weren’t there became vociferous interventionists in the 1980s, Representative Andy Jacobs, a former Marine, coined the right word for them: chicken-hawks.

History has confirmed what we opponents of the war were saying, which was that it was unwise and unjust. Far from being responsible for sending Fallows’ boys from Chelsea off to die, the Movement, draft-dodgers and all, saved even more of them from dying. We won’t get Medals of Honor like Bob Kerrey for our service to America, but I agree with the suggestion that those whose resistance took them to jail should be honored as patriotic heroes, with a candle for each, reminiscent of the 1969 March Against Death, placed along the top of the Wall. Ironically, the autobiography of one badly-wounded marine, Lewis Puller Jr.’s Fortunate Son, made me think that at least Puller’s hospital roommate, a young officer named Bob Kerrey, would agree with me

that resistance to war was not a matter of disreputable avoidance, but rather of wisdom and in many cases courage. Puller, who died in 1994, recalled Kerrey firmly defending the motives of anti-war protesters to an enraged marine “lifer” at the party celebrating Kerrey’s Medal of Honor. That incident says more to me about the senator’s ability to lead his country than his conduct in battle. It’s not what he did in Vietnam that counts to me, but what he did with what he learned there.

So what am I left with, after trying to recreate what I did in the war and why, daddy? Above all, grief for the victims, then anger at their killers, and finally pride for the boy who tried to take a stand, even if it was never too solid. The victims whose memories I carry certainly include the young men named on the Wall, who were betrayed into killing and dying for a lie. But my heart turns first to those my country’s arrogance sent them off to subjugate. I mourn not just the innocent, the Indochinese civilians, and the less innocent, our unlucky local allies, but also the Vietnamese warriors we killed. If ever a war was just, it was their war of independence against the French, then the Japanese, the American-backed French, and the Americans themselves. Their hallmark was a determination to defeat rather than compromise with colonialism, and it gave a meaning to their deaths that was denied to their enemies. “Born in the north to die in the south” was a motto for NVA troops; that we made it a reality is what makes me saddest.

The years haven’t eased my anger at the System, its minions in the national security apparatus, its apologists in the national security debate, and their co-conspirators, the Silent Majority who watched as their government hauled away some of their children and degraded the rest, all to devastate unruly Indochina and teach the world to quake before America. Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert wrote this of his people’s banal Quislings at about the same time I was confronted by ours:

and do not forgive truly it is not in you power
to forgive in the name of those betrayed at dawn

As Prince Andrei says of the officer who dishonors Natasha, somebody ought to forgive them, but it won’t be me. Consciously in foreign policy debates, and subconsciously probably in all politics, I divide Americans older than me into those who helped the Movement and those who didn’t. Younger Americans I deduce

into the appropriate camp. Why should I trust people who didn't, or wouldn't, stand with me and Dred Scott when the slavers came after us into our free state? And after sadness for the killing and anger for the killers come my feelings for myself, the teenager forced to make moral choices that would vex an adult. For all my belief today that I shouldn't have let myself, the Masters of War on my right, and the Masters of Peace on my left like the draft-board raiding Berrigan brothers define my fight against the war as a test of my manhood and honor, I know full well that I did. So how did I do?

After peeling this onion about as thin as I can, I guess my dominant sense is that of pride that I was one of the men who, as Waylon Jennings sang, "would not fight in a war that didn't seem right." Not only would I not fight, but I acted on my belief that I had to stop others from fighting, and that gives me a membership in a society of honor that nobody can take away from me, ever. Lurking right behind my pride, though, is an awareness that I was also one of Hamlet's legion, those who wait for the size of the straw to justify a honorable stance. My fear of jail kept me from ever saying clearly, as I should have right from the start when presented with the draft, "No!! Fuck, no!!" Well before my father's death and Sarah's birth knocked me out of the Movement and past calculations of courage, I had blinked whenever I thought about breaking the draft laws and looked into the inexorable glare of the System's power. I acknowledge it, I regret it, but on most days I just accept it.

Hell yes, I was scared to be in the ring with that heavy-weight; hell yes, I bobbed and weaved to avoid his frontal assault after I'd stung him with jabs from the side; hell yes, at 18, already battered to confusion, I wasn't strong enough to take him straight up. But until July 1970 I was still in there with him, and even afterwards, I was willing to go down swinging rather than join his team.

To paraphrase my assessment of my father in his Crisis, that's not bad for a young man. Millions of citizens joined me in opposing the war, and we ended it. If more had joined us, we would have ended it that much sooner. With my angry newspaper ad and hand-outs at the draft board, with my bit of marching and load of agonizing, I played my small part, and that is pride enough for me. I don't deserve one of the candles on the Wall like

my heroes who dared go to jail, but for my youthful struggle against the war and another 25 years of fighting the Vietnam foreign policy as an adult, I'm sure as hell qualified to light them and keep them lit.

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