APPENDIX B

A Binational High School Experience

Note: Originally written as the second chapter of the book, this content was removed to sharpen the book's intended focus on higher education. It is included here as background.

My first year in "high school" was hardly a high school in the U.S. conventional sense of that experience at all. This year was also an illustration of the occasional downside of privilege!

Appleby College

My beginning secondary school experience was at one of the most elite private boarding schools of Canada, at that time in an all-male student environment, Appleby College in Oakville, Ontario. (Appleby College became co-ed in 1991.) My father sent me there because he did not want me attending the local high school in my home residence community of Burlington, Ontario, because in that particular year, 1957–1958, that public high school was experiencing overcrowding and "double shifts." At least that was his stated reason. In reality, I suspect it had much more to do with parental efforts to "track" the oldest child into upper echelons of society.

Most of the boys at Appleby were boarding students and had been there since the second grade, age 7. I mention this because by the time I started there at age 13, my peer group had been living in what I soon learned was a brutal environment in which older, stronger, bullying boys preyed on the younger and weaker. This was also an environment totally devoid of women—no female students, faculty, or staff, other than the college nurse and dietician. The school was a transplanted adaptation of the British public school model for elite boys. The teachers were designated as "masters." They were to be always addressed as "sir," and when they entered a classroom all boys were to stand until being asked to be seated. The principal disciplinary measure was corporal and executed by "the strap," an instrument of true medieval origin.

The system of maintaining order and patrolling for infractions was carried out largely by the "prefecture" system. This was comprised of giving power and authority to the most senior boys, known as prefects. These young men were 18 to 19 and were in what was designated as grade 13. Only prefects and masters could enter the front door(s) of any building. The rest of us were restricted to side door entrances. Discipline was administered through beatings delivered by the prefects in a torture chamber unofficially designated as "the prefects' room." Prefects were easily detected by their distinctive striped blazers that only they could wear. The rest of us were dressed in solid blue blazers with a school crest on the left upper pocket, gray flannel slacks, black shined shoes, black socks, white shirt, and school tie. Athletic participation was required of all students, in what were termed "games." For me as a ninth-grader those consisted of rugby, ice hockey, boxing, and cricket.

The academic curriculum was very challenging. The school day began with mandatory Anglican chapel each morning, and each boy had his shoes inspected leaving chapel to make sure they manifested the requisite patina. Classes were very small, and homework was significant. The subjects were English grammar, English literature, Latin, French, math (both algebra and geometry), geography, history, current events, some type of science I assume but do not remember, but no art and no music. The prevailing pedagogy was almost entirely lecture.

Rugby (really Canadian football) terrified me, and I was finally excused from the actual play and made an assistant manager, which was a glorified water boy and record-keeper position created uniquely for me. I was required to attend hockey practice, but because I had not learned how to skate, unlike all the Canadian children who had learned to skate almost as soon as they could walk, I wasn't really on a team. I did try to learn to skate, but every time I would get up off the ice to try to move forward, I would be body checked by another boy as the real team sport came to be keeping Gardner on all fours for the entire duration of the practice, crawling around the rink as in the myth of Sisyphus. When hockey season was over, we moved into boxing season, which my father thought would be a good character-building experience for me. Instead, it was an occasion for constant nose bleeds until my father had me taken to an ENT doctor to have my nose cauterized so that I could return to the ring to be beaten without further inconveniences of nose bleeding. Finally, the Canadian winter ended, and it was cricket season. This was the only sport I enjoyed, perhaps because it was truly for gentlemen, which was something I aspired to be. We "played" wearing white "duck" slacks and our blue blazers without the school tie.

Overall, I hated the athletics. I still do except for my daily run. Yes, in this environment, which, if you have read William Golding's *Lord of The Flies*,

was the archetypal savage environment of privileged, brutalized, upper-class British boys, I was beaten a number of times by other boys but not through the official disciplinary system. I did not engage in the one unofficial sport of cigarette smoking practiced by the majority of the students in the "upper school" in a kind of cat-and-mouse game where the thrill came not from the nicotine but from hiding from the prefects who hunted the smokers and beat them when apprehended. This was an institutionalized defiance ritual of which the masters were well aware but in which they did not intrude. To understate the matter, I was not being affirmed as a 13- to 14-year-old boy in the informal culture of the place.

But I was being affirmed in the formal academic culture. Even in this environment where there were visible manifestations of sadism and sexual perversion (boys being boys in the absence of any female presence—and for the record, I was never sexually abused by anyone), I still had to find something I could enjoy and at which I excelled. My only outlet by default had to be academic. School years were known as "forms" not grades. Ninth grade was form 5. And I was the top form 5 student in the social sciences and literature/grammar, and I received the annual school prizes for excelling in these subjects. While I cannot factually substantiate this, I am reasonably confident that the academic rigor required of me was substantially greater in this environment than it would have been in a corresponding American high school.

What did I learn from this educational culture? High academic expectations can get high results, at least they did for me. Rather than being in despair each day in this brutal environment, I found a way to excel, to be successfully competitive against the boys who physically could and did overpower me outside of class. If this had been a conventional penal system for adult males, I suspect my fellow inmates might have murdered me.

Admittedly, the American high schools that produce our entering college students are not elite Canadian boarding schools of the 1950s. But there are things higher education student success leaders should know about our incoming college students' secondary school experiences:

- What are the cultures of our high schools?
- How different/similar are those cultures from what you experienced?
- Did your students experience high school rituals and/or abusive behavior in the informal culture that traumatized them?
- How did your students cope and adapt to dysfunctional elements of their secondary school culture?
- Do you have students who were both truly challenged academically and rose to those challenges and succeeded in secondary school?

Returning "Home": My U.S. High School and Adolescent Experience

No question, one of the most negative influences I had in my high school years was that of my alcoholic mother. But I will spare you many tales of my conflict with and mental abuse by her. Overall, during this period, from ages 14–17, I was a bundle of contradictions—becoming what is known as a counter-dependent adolescent, rejecting many of the norms of my parents but still practicing others, and taking small but important steps to move beyond my family to chart a more independent course of life for myself.

After my momentous year in this elite Canadian secondary school, my father's U.S. company transferred him back from Canada to the company's corporate headquarters in New York City. This meant that we could return to my boyhood home in New Canaan, Connecticut. Thus, I was thrust back in the U.S. public school system in New Canaan, albeit one of the most well-funded, academically demanding, and successful school systems in the country. For example, when I graduated from high school 3 years later in a class of 181 students, all but three of us went on to college. My U.S. schooling was a huge culture change for me. For one thing, it was coeducational. There was no prefecture system. Athletics were not compulsory (thank goodness). But it was a privileged school culture nevertheless, where most of the students were of the corporate executive elite whose fathers commuted by train into New York City daily, leaving their wives at home for their country club, golf, and tennis-playing lives.

I almost immediately began to chart a different course of life for myself by changing my peer group. The peer group, of course, is always highly influential. This is true in high school and in college. Fellow students are the single greatest influence on student decision-making.

In my case, my former male friends, in grades 1–3 before I left for Canada, were upper middle–class kids like me who were on the fast track headed for selective colleges. But when I returned from Canada 5 years later, I found that most of those boys who had been my closest friends had already been shipped off to elite boarding schools to ensure progression into the Ivy League schools (the "Ivies") from places such as Andover, Choate, Deerfield, Exeter, and Hotchkiss. And because I was reentering an American high school in the 10th grade, the cliques were already pretty well formed, and I wasn't in any of them. Because I had skipped a grade in Canada, now as a U.S. high school sophomore, I was a year younger than my peers. But serendipitously, I was "adopted" by two boys, Charlie Rucci and Floyd Naylor, who were 2 years older than me. This meant they could legally drive before

I could, needed to shave before I did, and in other ways matured earlier and faster. These guys were lots of fun and introduced me to girls. They also had drivers' licenses and use of family cars, and I could "double-date" with them (which I did very regularly). And they were *not* academically engaged, not on a fast track to an elite college, not sons of corporate executives. And, unlike most all boys of my social class, they worked after school, earned their own money, and did not pursue their social lives on an allowance. They were so different from me and my social class structure that in some respects my friendship with them was forever liberating.

When it came to schoolwork, I was not invested in most of it. I could not connect it to the abstract aspiration of going to an elite college, but that wasn't for my father's lack of trying. His idea of pointing me toward an elite college was to take me to his alma mater's football games where I could experience the whole pregame cocktail socializing culture. Hence, I went to the Dartmouth/Yale and/or Dartmouth/Princeton games and was regaled with my father's tales of fraternity life. In our trips to the Ivies, he did something he rarely did by sharing from his personal life and confessing that he "drank" too much. He would regularly remind me that the greatest thing about fraternity life was that it "would show you how companies are run!"

One day near the end of my very undistinguished sophomore year of U.S. high school, I went to retrieve the mail out of our home mailbox. And there I found a letter to my parents from The Choate School (President Kennedy's alma mater, a truly elite place). I smelled a rat. Yes, I violated their right of privacy and opened a piece of U.S. mail not addressed to me. I found a letter to my mother from the headmaster of the Choate School, whom she had known from a former life, I think through dating. It was a letter admitting me to Choate for my junior year and indicating a date by which my parents had to return a deposit. What did I do with this revelation? I trashed the letter. Some 6–8 weeks later my parents asked me if I had seen any correspondence from Choate. I answered truthfully that I had and that I had destroyed it. Of course, they were furious. But I was furious too in that they had gone for a visit to Choate without telling me to arrange for my enrollment as elite parents did for their elite children of that era. By this time, it was too late in the school year to enroll me somewhere else, so they gave up on that tactic. While my parents never confessed this to me, I suspect that a major reason they wanted to take me out of high school and enroll me in one of the most elite prep schools in the country was because while they "liked" my friends, they were not of my social class—and that really had to be addressed and corrected. What my parents gave me for a reason was their concern for my lack of academic engagement, a valid parental concern for sure.

What was going on here? Here I was, a future leader in my branch of the establishment, U.S. higher education leadership, rejecting a door opening to a life on the elite fast track. What was going on? Even before college, without being fully deliberate about this, I was beginning to differentiate from my parental values and lifestyle. But I was not consistent about it at all, rejecting some aspects of their examples, but retaining others to a fault.

As an example, the elite culture of New Canaan revolved around drinking cocktails. My father would arrive home at night from his day in New York City with thousands of other corporate warriors, and he would have at least three martinis. I could mix an excellent extra dry martini for my parents by the time I was 5. My mother would have more than three and would also drink surreptitiously in the daytime. When I would get home after school, I never knew which mother I would find: the sober one or the drunk one. Throughout my childhood I grew up around their cocktail parties in our home. I learned to be the little coat check boy when guests arrived. I learned to take drink orders. I learned to pass hors d'oeuvres. I was learning how to be an upper-class kid and adult and not a social justice–crusading higher education professional.

So how did I adapt to my life around alcoholic beverages? I abstained from consuming any alcohol all the way through high school, college, and graduate school. I started drinking during Air Force officer training. I have never been more than a moderate drinker, and now am a very infrequent drinker. But not drinking in high school really set me apart from my overall school peer group!

Another way I differentiated from my overall peer group was that I had disdain for all the activities my classmates enjoyed: sports, clubs, student government, theater, band, you name it. When I eventually applied to college I had not one single extracurricular activity. I was not, as we say in the parlance of higher education, "involved." I was not manifesting what we now call student engagement, and my grades showed it.

Was I not engaged in anything? Well, nothing that had anything to do with school! But I was engaged in two other activities: work and girls!

About work: I was the adopted son of a man who loved to work. What I had learned about adult men was that they worked at something (how different from some of our students!). I learned that when you worked hard you got promoted, made lots of money, were independent, had your own money, and didn't have to ask others for money. That was a route I wanted to follow immediately!

The kinds of work I did pursue were working in a plant nursery after school doing back-breaking hoeing (during which I fainted one hot summer day), shoveling manure (the nursery owner also raised sheep!), and

other duties as assigned. I also worked for my father—not in his company but on his "place." That is what we called our home, and the "place" really referred to the exterior property. My father had a caretaker who came every Saturday and Sunday for outside upkeep. I loved this man. His name was Dave. He was a factory laborer in a nearby small city. He had no formal education beyond high school. But he was another man who loved his work—even though he was of a very different social class than my father. He was also a veteran of World War II Merchant Marines and was just glad to be alive and home. He taught me to love my work, outdoor work that is. He taught me that all work had dignity and that I didn't need to go to college to have a fulfilling life—and that certainly wasn't the lesson being stressed by my father. Thus, I became an additional caretaker for my father's "place" working after school.

When I turned 16 in the middle of a winter, I decided I would try an indoor job for a while, and so I became a grocery store stocker. And when I came home after school all excited and reported to my mother that I had gotten a job, she looked at me incredulously (like why in the world would a self-respecting affluent kid like me want a job?) and asked where was I going to work? I answered, "Rosen Brothers Market." She looked at me disapprovingly and informed me, "You will be sorry. Those people will work you very hard and will not pay you fairly!" I was astonished. So of course, I asked her why. Her answer: "Because they are Jewish, and they are going to cheat you!" What was she trying to teach me? Anti-Semitism. I rejected her advice and took the job anyway and was treated fairly in all respects. Like college students, I had to learn on my own and draw my own conclusions. And I had to unlearn the prejudice I was being taught at home.

When the weather warmed, I decided to return to my true love: work outdoors. I formed a small company providing landscaping services to affluent suburbanites. What was my role? I was the point person who got the jobs, schmoozed the customers, gave the estimates, collected the money, and supervised my crew of six other teenage high school students. I had a ball. I loved my team of guys, working outdoors, and the sense of satisfaction derived from a job well done. I was making so much money, relatively speaking, that I didn't need to ask my parents for money for anything! My father admired this on the one hand but was terrified by it on the other as he could see no indications that I would give up this kind of entrepreneurial self-reliance to go to college. More about facing this dilemma later. Of course, I had no idea at that stage in life that I could ever practice a kind of academic and intellectual entrepreneurism in a university environment. But no doubt, some of what I needed to know about running a successful nonprofit charitable organization I learned as a teenager

creating a landscaping business start-up! These work experiences all added up to one thing: character building!

What about my other form of high school engagement in high school—girls? No doubt, I was learning that the kind of emotional intimacy I was experiencing with an alcoholic mother was not going to satisfy me! But in my quest for meaningful female company, I exhibited an important brand of counter dependency that was also a learning experience: relationships that my parents didn't approve of. They didn't approve of these relationships because of the religious and social class status of my choices. For instance, upon returning to New Canaan from Canada, at age 14, I had my first date with a young lady who was the daughter of a prominent public intellectual, the editor of *The Saturday Review of Literature*, Norman Cousins. To the extent that parental status confers status on one's children, the extraordinary reputation of this national thinker, journalist, leader, was not enough to garner my parents' approval. This young lady just had to be Jewish, my parents assumed. I had met her where kids in my town used to meet—in the library after school. And I dated a second Jewish girl in high school—again a no-no. Then I upped the ante. I "went steady" with a girl for 2 years whose father was a highly skilled machinist in a nearby factory and whose mother was from Syria. Double strike out on this one: They were not from our social and ethnic categories. And then I committed the cardinal (pun intended) sin: I again "went steady" with a practicing Catholic. To say that my parents were prejudiced against Catholics was an understatement. The year was 1960, the year we would elect our first Catholic president. All these young women were outstanding students, ethically together, and definitely more mature than I was. I was drawn to them for their own merits and not just to defy my parents and reject my parental value system.

As I look back on my perfectly undistinguished (in the conventional sense) high school experience, my finest high school hours were these. Our class, the graduating class of 1961, had achieved a distinction not met by any previous class. We were in competition with all previous classes in one very symbolic way: to raise more money as a class for our class treasury than any other group before us. And we did: over $5,000 in 1961 money. So, we gathered for a class meeting, the purpose of which was to decide as a group how to spend that $5,000-plus. I attended, of course, and listened to my classmates throw out many suggestions. One I could buy into was the tradition of the annual class gift. We decided to leave our beloved alma mater with a new electrified football scoreboard. Then the question remaining, one of contention, was how to spend the rest of the money on ourselves. It was during this discussion that a suggestion came up that seemed

to quickly gather popularity. The proposal was to give ourselves a "Roman"-style banquet—that is, with rental furniture including divans on which we could eat in a semi-reclined posture while underclass students fanned us! When I realized this grotesque suggestion was being seriously considered, I couldn't contain myself. I requested permission to speak and introduced a formal motion instead to donate all the remaining funds to charity. The vote was called, not even seconded, and my motion was unanimously rejected accompanied by loud boos. I got the message, and I stormed out of the room. But I have gone back to all my 10-year high school reunions! What should you conclude about me from this episode? I definitely didn't fit in. Of course, I couldn't possibly have known it then, but the perfect adult environment for people like me who hadn't been able to fit in as kids would be the higher education academy. Thank goodness for that. This incident was one of my first, to be followed shortly by others in college, when I would conclude that I marched to the beat of a different drum from whatever mainstream I was in; and that I just had to find some way(s) of fulfilling a destiny by doing some really different things that would have in today's vernacular, "redeeming social value." You may find this a touch grandiose; most adolescents have far more mundane aspirations like making lots of money, and more than others in a competitive way.

An Important High School Discovery: A Mentor

Somewhere in the middle of what was a 3-year largely dysfunctional educational experience for me, without knowing it at the time, I did discover one example of a kind of person I could become. I refer to our high school assistant headmaster, James St. Clair, Harvard educated, two degrees in the classics and drama, Mr. St. Clair was my Latin teacher and inspired me to love Latin, the only high school subject I really got into. He was also the one adult in the school I could and did talk to, in countless sessions by appointment where he helped me think and talk through my struggles, particularly with my parents. I credit him for keeping me from going totally off the rails. He was tall, handsome, eccentric, creative, theatrical, joyful, playful, but serious, focused, and passionate about his work and service to students. He was also a bachelor and of a sexuality I could never detect for certain. He became for me the professor I would ultimately strive to become. I never heard the word *mentor* used then. But now I know that's what he was.

As my senior year progressed my father and I could no longer put off a decision about what I would do in life after high school. The one clear

expectation to which we were all committed: No respectable kid of my social class stayed home after high school. That was definitely not an option. In my social class the question was *where* would I go *away* to college, not whether. But for me, of course, the question had to be different. It was, "Would I go to college at all?"

I did not want to go to college. I could not see how it would prepare me for anything I might want to do as an adult. I did not want any more "school." I did not want to lead a life like that of my parents (especially all their booze and marital dysfunction). I didn't want to commute on a train every day and be a corporate executive. It wasn't as if I had something I wanted to do as an alternative. I knew I did want to work. I loved to work! I did have my own vision of my next stage of life. I wanted to continue and expand my landscaping service business full-time. I wanted to be working outdoors and often with my hands. I wanted to please customers/homeowners and my employees. But that wasn't going to happen.

My father was an excellent negotiator and deal maker. For part of his corporate career, he was his company's vice president for what they called "industrial relations," which meant negotiating with the United Steelworkers of America over union contracts. One time when I was about 4 or 5, he spent 3 months away from home negotiating a strike settlement. He hated labor unions, by the way, and thought they were all a communist-backed plot. He held President Franklin Roosevelt directly responsible for the growth of labor unions in America (and in this respect he was partially correct). And here I was, one little steelworker, opposing the contract bargain he wanted to make with me. I didn't have a chance.

Here was his deal: I was to go to college for 1 year to please him. If I didn't like it, I could drop out. All he asked of me was to go for 1 year and try it out (a few months later he modified the deal and asked me to do two more things: Go out for the crew team and join a fraternity—more on this later). The deal would apply to any college, not just where he wanted me to go, his alma mater, Dartmouth. He believed he could "get me in" because of his "legacy" status. I doubted that because I was so far from top of my class. And if not Dartmouth, I could consider his second choice, Williams College. What did I do? None of the above. I applied to four colleges, Davidson College, University of Connecticut, Marietta College in Ohio, and Rockford College in Illinois. My guidance counselor thought I would like Marietta because it had been settled by Revolutionary War veterans from Connecticut and Massachusetts and would remind me of my hometown. But being in Southern Ohio would also get me 600 miles away from my parents, which the counselor knew I needed. I agreed to go out and look at the Marietta campus, my father accompanying me. I was so flip; I didn't really care where

I went. The easiest thing to do was to pick the first place I visited and then call off the rest of the college visits. I already knew what the outcome was going to be. I would go to Marietta College for 1 year, satisfy my deal with my father, drop out, return to Connecticut, and resume my landscape services business. Little did I know what could lie ahead.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Appleby College

Discuss: I have heard it argued that we need to launch a parallel "first-year experience" movement in the first year of high school that could learn from our successes in improving the first college year experience. What do you think of that suggestion? Should your institution be trying to influence what transpires in the first year of high school in your feeder secondary schools?

Returning Home: My U.S. High School and Adolescent Experience

Discuss: We have good reason to believe that secondary school culture and experiences have a profound influence on entering college students. What do you think?

Questions: How does the secondary school experience shape students' attitudes, skills, self-management, and knowledge of disciplinary fundamentals in ways that you see clearly evident in your work with college students?

Does your institution have any so-called "faculty affinity" initiatives between discipline-specific faculty in your institution and your secondary and/or community college feeder institutions? If so, what is being learned and accomplished as a result?

In retrospect, what were some of the influences on you of your own secondary school peer group?

Discuss: One of the biggest differences between high school and college is the ways we go about providing what in secondary school is called "guidance" and in college we term "academic advising." How might you address this to improve college student experiences with academic advising?

What are the obligations, ideally, between your institution and your secondary feeder schools?

How connected is your role to the ways in which your institution works with those faculty who teach your "dual credit" college-level courses in secondary school?

An Important High School Discovery: A Mentor

Discuss:	Do you find any parallels in my experiences in high compared to your own?
Reactions:	What are your reactions to reading this section? Are there any insights or something you might want to consider further?
Decisions:	Is there anything you read or thought about in this section that has led you to make a decision?