

## EARLY YEARS

### Basic Information

George and I first met in high school. James Madison had a student body of 5000 and was large enough to have various departments. We were both part of the art department, which performed services such as designing posters for school events, making silk screens, etc. George was a year ahead of me and we took different courses, so our only real contact was with art.

He once lent me a book, "Crime and Punishment" by Dostoevsky with a book jacket that he had designed. Within a few weeks he nervously came to pick it up, worried that I might have damaged it.

George was in his senior year when he asked me out on a date and took me on the subway to Coney Island, which was all he could afford. Unfortunately, he spent the whole evening ranting about a book. It was Tolstoy's "What is Art?". As a young girl of 15, not well read, it was totally over my head, and I was bored to death. No more dates for me.

After he graduated, we lost touch. He was off to Cooper Union, and then, after a year, was drafted into the army. After basic training, he was assigned to the ASTP program (Army Specialized training program) at the University of Pittsburgh. That's where he met Roland Wise. Roland was subsequently sent to Asia.

The program was disbanded when the Battle of the Bulge began. George was sent to a unit in Florida, and went from the schoolroom to backbreaking labor, hauling and mixing concrete to build walls for target practice in the heat of summer. As winter approached, his unit was shipped over to Europe. It was one of the coldest winters in memory, and he was lucky, first of

all, to have survived, and secondly to have recovered from frostbite without any permanent damage.

When the war ended, he didn't have enough points to go home. So he took the opportunity, while waiting, (it took a year) to take courses at Shrivvenham University in England. He studied stage design and painting.

As an aside, in the book "Monuments Men", it describes how, during the war, there was a secret rendezvous of soldiers, all handpicked art specialists, meeting at Shrivvenham. They were chosen to search for the art treasures stolen by the Nazis. Shrivvenham was considered at the time to be a secretive place. That George wound up there as a student was an interesting coincidence. Nobody I knew had ever heard of the place.

He finally accumulated enough points to go home. The voyage was very risky. At one point they thought the boat would break in two. But the captain assured everyone that if that happened, both sides would float. Finally, in March of 1946, he arrived. He and all the other soldiers were sure that the dropping of the atom bomb had saved their lives.

At loose ends while waiting to return to Cooper Union in the fall, he decided to look up an art school and do some drawing. Roland had also returned and they hooked up with each other. It was an interesting coincidence that they both lived in Brooklyn.

The school For Art Studies was a new art school on Broadway in the seventies, funded by the GI Bill, and provided classes taught by well-known and not so well-known artists. So that's where they decided to go.

Meanwhile, I had graduated high school, and because of a foul-up with my transcripts, I was too late to take the entrance exam for Cooper Union. So I went to the National Academy in

their old building in Manhattan on 109<sup>th</sup> street and Amsterdam Ave. After two years, I decided to go to the new Brooklyn Museum Art School. It turned out to be too boring, lots of housewives and not much teaching. My teacher sent me to this art school on Broadway, which he said I might like better. So there I was when George and Roland walked in the door.

That spring we saw a lot of each other. George had reconnected with friends from Cooper Union, and others he had known earlier, like Dan Woskoff and Carl Fischer. They were all waiting to go back to Cooper Union in the fall, except Roland. He enrolled in the Art Students League. They all rented a studio space together in an old building across from Cooper Union, I remember it as the one with the red door. Sometimes life drawing sessions were held, and I attended those. The place became a hangout. In a former life, it had been an apartment and it still had a kitchen with an old-fashioned wood stove, and a bathroom and shower. Lots of social life, and partying.

George and I often took the subway home to Brooklyn together, and he would walk with me to my house. He was living at home some of the time. It was a long walk to his house afterwards, but manageable, considering he had to do it when he was in high school. He was there only part time, just enough to get the laundry done; the rest of the time overnight in the studio.

It was still spring, and my mother was getting nervous. She didn't like me hanging around the studio so much. Never mind that I was already nineteen. So I went and told George that she didn't want me to be there any more, and, to my shock, he said, "Well, you tell your mother that we're engaged." I knew that we were close, but that was totally unexpected. When I went home and made the announcement, to my dismay, I wasn't

taken very seriously. But we had started the ball rolling, and there was no stopping it.

So I was introduced to his parents, his sister Selma, and eventually to his grandfather, aunts and uncles, etc. Our parents met each other and they all decided that I should have an engagement ring. (We had no idea what we were getting into).

Now George didn't have that kind of money. The government was still paying him Veteran's unemployment, the so-called "52-20". But he had to show up every week to say he hadn't found a job yet. Previously he had put down that he could work as a stage designer, thinking that it would be a remote possibility for them finding him something. Was he wrong! A summer job at White Roe Lake hotel in the Catskills turned up, which he couldn't turn down, making sets for the entertainers.

Faced with separation for the summer, I went back to Stony Clove children's camp as a counselor (that was my third year). George came a few times to visit (a very long bus trip), and managed to get me a week's free stay at the hotel over Labor Day.

So he was able to buy me an engagement ring (actually his mother picked it out).

Fall came, back to school for George. I decided to get a job, the first of many. My mother, against my wishes, threw us a big engagement party. She said after that she would fix up the basement so we could live there after we were married. I had tried without success to find a place to live, but it was the post-war housing shortage and nothing was available that we could afford. We set the wedding date for January. Unfortunately my mother didn't follow through and we found ourselves living (that is sleeping) in an upstairs bedroom. When the summer

came, we escaped to the country for two months; rented an apartment in a farmhouse in Franklin, NY.

After three weeks of bliss, both sets of parents followed us for a visit, thankfully short.

But after the summer was over, we had to face the music and go back. After my mother had hysterics one day, we got out of there and moved into an upper floor of the studio building. It was totally illegal, because that part had been condemned. George's grandfather found us a room with an old widow. We got out of there just in time, because the landlord found out about our hidey-hole a few weeks later.

The next rescue took place when my cousin Paul and his wife Renee were giving up their apartment in Brooklyn Heights and were moving to Long Island. This was a rent-controlled apartment and Paul had been paying the landlady more than was required. He threatened her with exposure to the owner if she didn't give us the apartment. An added incentive was the \$500 dollars we paid her under the table, which was common in those desperate days.

Finally settled, George went on to get his degree at NYU, and worked with Dan and Roland at a commercial advertising studio (PAS) that they started themselves. That experience confirmed George's belief that he would not pursue that line of work. After graduation he sent out resumes and landed a job teaching at Michigan State University.