

As requested, DTHW

Before I ever met Erving Goffman in Ottawa at the Canadian Film Board (CFB) I was urged in Toronto by a friend of Ralph Collins not to tell Ralph that his fiancée was "going around with... "this creepy little guy." Working at the Board she, Jane Irwin, made a point of cultivating me when I was on a summer job there in 1944 in order to ask me not to tell Ralph about her liason with Erving whom she did not consider marriageable material. Thus I first met him in her company. During that summer I encountered Erving one day in the Ottawa public library where I was signing out C. E. M. Joad's A Guide to Philosophy and Will Durant's The Story of Philosophy. "Why not read the original philosophers instead of those popularizations?" he asked. I was duly impressed.

Erving was a dropout from majoring in philosophy at the University of Manitoba, taking a government job in order to avoid being drafted for military service, legitimately fearing that his Jewishness and small stature would make him a target for hazing in the armed forces. I don't recall the details but the King government exempted college students meeting a certain grade average from the overseas draft as a concession to French Canadians enrolled in the many small collèges that dotted the province of Quebec, a policy much attacked by his ^(King's) political opposition. After failing to meet the physical standards for overseas service I took advantage of that ruling and returned to university rather than facing the prospect of being assigned to guard a munitions dump in Northern Manitoba. Erving complained to me that summer that philosophy at Manitoba was

too specialized for his taste, so I said "Why not try sociology?" and offered to write a letter to the relevant chairs in the Department of Political Economy at the U. of T. recommending him for admission as an "occasional student" eligible for a B.A. I did so, he was accepted, and eventually received the degree. That autumn when having a drink at the home of Bobby Adamson, another former NFB employee who had returned to university to garner a B.A. Adamson, who I seem to recall had known Erving at high school in Winnipeg, said that "Pooky [Erving's nickname] was a genius." This nettled me and I told him that I was myself a straight A student. He said no doubt, but added presciently that Pooky's genius would be generally recognized as soon as he began to express his own views as opposed to interpreting those of other thinkers. A few years later at an evening party at the American Sociological Association's annual meeting I entered a room having already had a few drinks and espied Goffman from behind sitting on the floor. I shouted "Hi, Pooky" and still remember him wincing visibly, his back stiffening. He didn't want the nickname recalled.

At the U. of T. Erving took up with Elizabeth Bott, a good friend and near girlfriend of mine. Both of them went for graduate work to the University of Chicago like most Canadians seeking graduate degrees in sociology. She rather quickly earned her doctorate and was offered and accepted a post at the University of Edinburgh. Goffman went there with her and worked briefly in a hotel. Observing the abrupt

changes in the facial expressions and general demeanour of serving girls when they moved through the swinging doors from the kitchen where they were angrily shouting at the cooks to smiling, gracious expressions on entering the dining room, he was moved to write a book-length essay on "the presentation of the self in everyday life," the title he gave it. He sent me a copy,

badly printed by the University of Edinburgh press and full of typos, but I was much impressed with it and sent it to Nathan Glazer, a friend and at that time an editor at Doubleday Anchor Books. Unfortunately, either Nat or I managed later to lose that initial copy which might have some value today. But Nat was sufficiently impressed to publish The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. Herbert Blumer, then building an elite sociology department at Berkeley, read it, granted Erving a retrospective doctorate, and hired him to teach. Erving did not like the West Coast and returned to teach at the University of Pennsylvania. I recommended him for the position and also Philip Zieff for another position to the chair, Vincent Whitney, a former chair of mine at Brown. (I was also offered a position there.) Erving married a colleague at Penn, Gillian Sankoff, an anthropologist, but contracted cancer and died two years later after fathering a child. By this time Erving had written in addition to The Presentation... three other books, Relations in Public, Asylums, and Interaction Ritual.

Asylums was his most controversial book seen quite properly as a scathing critique of psychiatry and psychiatrists based on his observations during a stint as ward attendant at Saint Elizabeth's hospital in Washington. My sister, Elizabeth June Rogers who had a job as a psychologist at Saint Elizabeth's helped him obtain the position but certainly didn't agree with his conclusions. The book was inevitably bitterly attacked by psychiatrists some of whom claimed he had violated the confidence of both doctors and patients, often downgrading the former while defending the basic sanity of the latter. He was even charged with having cost some of the doctors their jobs. The book nevertheless won a wide following and became arguably the most famous of Erving's writings. At Berkeley he did not become a supporter of the counterculture but attacked it too.