



# DOCTOR XANK

ROBERT REISS D.D.S.



# **DOCTOR YANK**

**ROBERT REISS, DDS**

**DEDICATION:**

**TO MY WIFE AND FOUR SONS**

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## Introduction

All too often, people live without leaving a record of their knowledge, their accomplishments, of their mistakes. This is an effort to leave some information in all humility to posterity which may be of help to some and of interest to others. The illustrations have all been drawn by the author.

There is a certain hesitancy about putting things in print for fear of errors and Omar Khayam's poetry -- "nor cannot cancel half a line of it."

When I completed this book I thought of rewriting parts of it, improving some of the verbiage and the continuity. However just as a painting will sometimes lose a great deal in the finishing process, and, the original crude strokes have an originality of their own that can be lost in the process, so too, the written word may become overworked.

I wish to thank my son Clifford for collaborating by making corrections, and improvements and for proof reading; and without whom this book may not have been printed.

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HUNTINGTON

1987

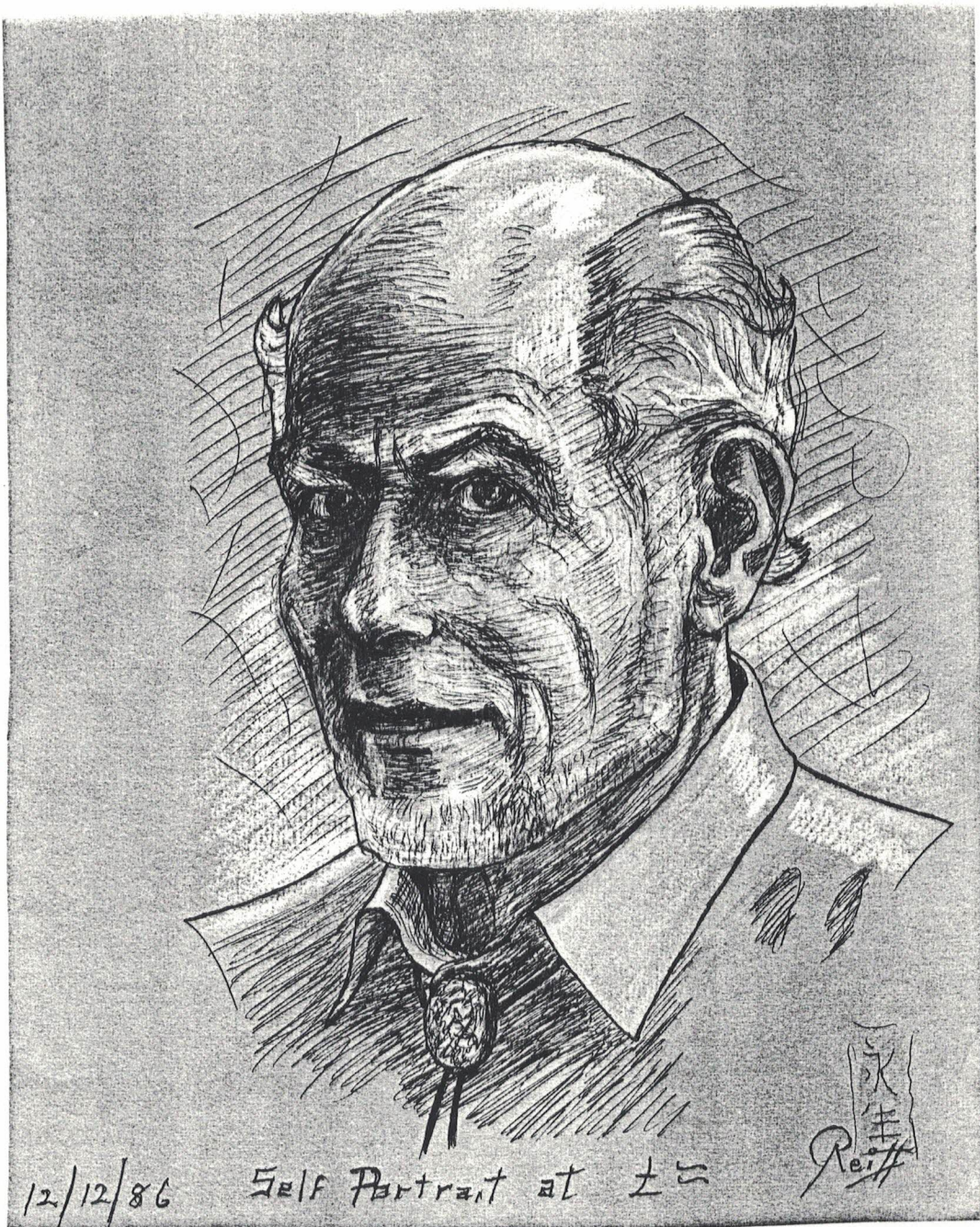
ROBERT REISS D.D.S (← CAN OMIT)

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## Chapter 1

### The Unremembered Years

As the mist unfolded, and hovering faces withdrew, only the painful things of life and the great joys left their impression. Out of the cave like railroad flat, with its dark hallway and out the back door past the odiferous, dank garbage I raced to try out my new toy, a barking dog activated by a rubber bulb. The alley cat I chased ran into a dark corner. I followed her extended my arm and made my dog bark and she gave me a healthy scratch. Education by trial and error.

The usual childhood illnesses left no mark except for one period of delirium and a touch of heart murmur as a result of scarlet fever. The yellow canary kept flying around the ceiling unable to escape. "Open the window and let him out" -----out, and he was gone. Truth and fantasy. The yearning to get well, nothing else mattered but living.

Follow the leader, I want to be the leader! All right, but you must kiss the pretty girl. But that is not enough. You must walk down the street arm in arm and say you want to marry her. Still, they would not let me be the leader. Deceitful childhood minds and the bitterness of being fooled. Let us run. Down the street, away we go, after the gang, there's the park, chase the Indians, follow the leader, jump the high rock, soaring through the air, feeling as if you could fly. Mocking gravity in our light weight bodies. Keep your tongue in or you'll bite it and bleed to death.

Tomorrow it will snow and you'll have your first sleigh ride. No! Its snowing tonight. I've never been out at night. Lets go! Pull me faster Dad! Wonder of wonders! Life is grand. One summer night he showed me how to tie my shoe lace. Who? The man. Which man? The unremembered man. Let me see you do it. See. One, two, three. I can tie my own laces now. Did you thank him? What did he say? "Some one helped me a long time ago."

My son, my son! Where is my son? Call the police! Its getting dark. Where is he? He's playing with his girl friend up in her apartment. No spanking, were just glad you are safe. More joys, more sorrows, but days and days in sick bed piecing jig saw puzzle pieces together. The old red pumper fire truck with four white horses was a beautiful jigsaw puzzle. Watch the big parade through the window or out on the fire escape on "The Grand Concourse and Boulevard". Cowboys, Indians, WWI Tanks, Soldiers, Sailors, Bagpipers, Red Cross----- Pick up two pennies, taste them, ummm good, swallow them, glubb, glubb----. Ma! Maaa! Turn me upside down and shake me, a human slot machine. I'm no longer turning blue.

The old brass bed with a thousand tiny springs showing because the mattress is off. Lets bounce on it standing up, whoops, off balance, bang, almost lost my eye on the sharp post. Slide down the wall between two houses, bang, almost lost the other eye. Sing me



to sleep Mother -- "Rufus, Rastus, Johnson, Brown, Watcha gonna do when the rent comes roun?" You have a beautiful voice. Tell me a story or recite a poem Mother. "Dorkin's Dream" -- Gooda fader peetruah, I commah to you at last, my banana days are over, my appla nights are past" -- another -- "Curfew shall not ring tonight! ... ruffian bands with bloody chains ... smiling the (Polish) boy dropped dead...." The vocal emotion reached my heart like a surgeons blade. I still remember one of my mother's favorite songs "I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles" pretty bubbles in the air. They fly so high, they almost reach the sky, then like the clouds they fade and die. Fortune's always hiding. I've looked everywhere. I'm forever blowing bubbles, pretty bubbles in the air. The love, care and devotion she gave me could never have been sufficiently returned. She never had a chance to express the beautiful thoughts she carried in her soul except in song and through her children.

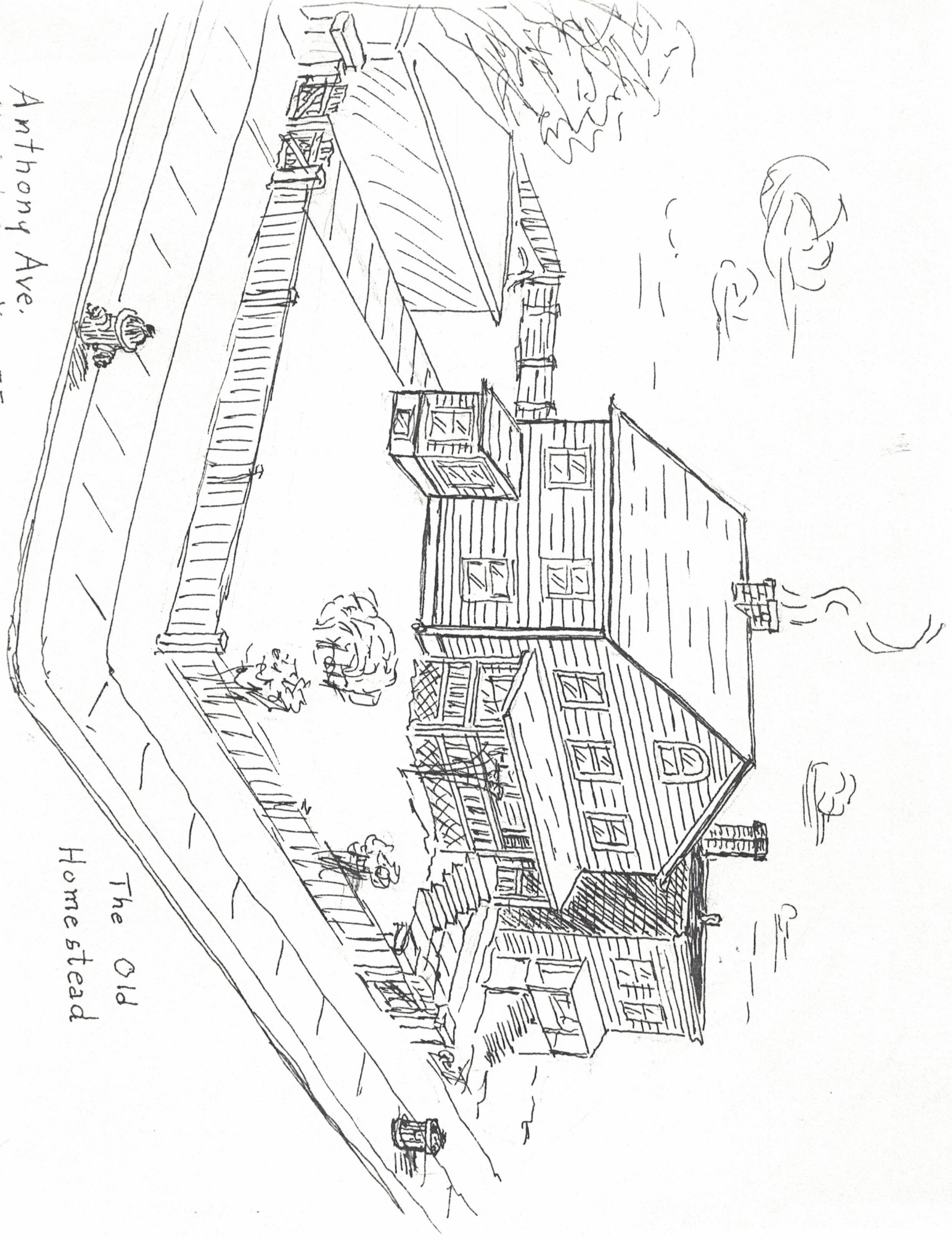
Tomorrow I start school. One minute late and the door is closed. I run all the way home and am never late again. You mean that I wasn't born in a hospital? A coldwater flat in the East Bronx? Our kindly, white harried, white van dyke Dr. Mittleman? He has such a friendly, understanding voice. Forceps? What are they? I was Yanked? My father was there and almost lost his temper.

"Pepper, salt, mustard, cider, how many bullets killed the Kaiser." Those were the jump rope words when I was young. Toe, Knee, Chest, Nut. One, two, button my shoe (ladies shoes had buttons in those days), three, four, open the door, five, six, pick up sticks, seven, eight, lay them straight, nine, ten, a big fat hen! What are you going to be when you grow up young man? Let me count your buttons and I'll tell you. "Rich man, poor man, beggerman, thief, doctor, lawyer, Indian Chief".... The last one appealed to me most as it was in capital letters. This may be related to my choice of favorite novels by Altsheller about Henry Ware and his adventures in Indian country. More likely it was due to the fact that I started in the library at "A" and read most of the books that appealed to me as I progressed up the alphabet.

My maternal grandparents lived on Rivington Street on the lower east side and I remember walking up the dark, gas lit stairs toward a colored glass door and entering a studio-like apartment. Grandma wore a sheitel and gave me mandel bread. Grandpa wore his beard and said that "God was angry with him for staying around too long". He also beat me at casino. My paternal grandparents were still in Poland and I used to hear lurid tales. But lets stick to my childhood. "Fox in the bush!" That was the cry when kids saw someone with a long beard before beards came back in style. I incurred the usual boyhood injuries; tape on a head wound, neuroma due to scar tissue pinching a nerve in my finger cut by a glass butter dish, etc. I learned to roller skate around our round oak dining table. Stuck my head out the dumbwaiter but was lucky. Years later, I heard a woman scream when her son was decapitated trying the same thing.

When we moved into a private house (ILLUSTRATION # I), it was a very old one that my father updated. The coal stove was removed. The walls were replastered. A new icebox was put in the pantry, etc, etc.





Anthony Ave.

The Old  
Homestead



My mother was a marvelous cook. One day, she baked a pie and left it in the pantry on top of the ice box. That night, I took a piece without turning on the light. Lo and behold, when I walked into the kitchen after several big bites and an odd taste in my mouth, I saw the pie was swarming with red ants! Being young, in the only part of the city on the mainland was fantastic. You could walk down the street safely at night and you mind felt as if it was disconnected from your body and floating in space.

"Up in dear old Mount Hope town, there's a school of great renown, and through the land why it is known to fame. It has friends on every hand and by it they'll ever stand and they'll ne'er forget its name. Dear old school house, good old friends, happy be your fate. And we'll breath a sigh when we have to say good-by to twenty eight." Happy days in Evander Childs High School "Evander Childs, Evander Childs, our school our youthful glory. Evander Childs, Evander Childs till old we grow and hoary" and, then, the crash of 1929 left us high and dry. A job as an artists apprentice at ten dollars a week made me realize that you can't make big money with your hands. A few childhood bouts with the grim reaper: pulled in by the undertow at ten, diving off a row boat into a man made lake just missing the tree stumps at twenty, a steel awning rod falling ten inches in front of my head at twenty-two, a steel rivet falling off a new construction site (the fashion institute on 27th street) missing me by inches at thirty five and still alive.

My father had purchased a victrola and some Victor records which introduced me to Caruso, Galli Curchi, Humoresque etc. My sister played the piano and I learned all the old jazz songs from her. I was part time janitor for the old homestead, (Illus # I) building a fire at 6:00 in the morning, taking out ash barrels, cutting grass with a hand mower, painting the fence, repairing the roof, etc. My sister gave a party one year to save the starving Armenians. At that time cans of condensed milk, etc. were being collected at the schools for the same purpose.

Do we recall incidents or do we recall the memory of our recalling these incidents? Are we conscious of the fact that we are conscious? Is the superego a watchtower that looks down on us and says I am watching? Is man the only living creature that is conscious of being conscious? Memories of the past flood back but what controls our biological computer? Am I a butterfly dreaming that I am a person? or visa versa? He who fights and runs away comes to fight another day. Pat phrases sound good but that does not make them sound advice. For example, the Beatles "If it feels good it's OK to do it". A terrible bit of advice. Language is one of our few means of communication and, at times, is woefully inadequate. My favorite pat phrase is taken from George Washington -- "When you think of something that should be done that's the time to do it". Another is "Life is what happens to you when you make other plans."

In the great depression of twenty nine my brother-in-law found a job for me with his brother's art department in a penthouse on 31'st. The firms name was The Scientific Photo-Engraving Company. From the roof of that building I saw the Roma and the Conti de Savoia on their maiden voyages flying up the Hudson River. Also, the German DOX airplane with twelve propellers when it crossed the Atlantic, circa 1931 was seen



from there. Motivation has always been an interesting problem to me. There were several things in my life related to it. 1. Lack of money. 2. The mystery of life. 3. The concrete threat in Mein Kampf. 4. The example set by my parents. 5. The need to overcome poor health by active exercise. 6. Some emotional state, like unto Poe's words - "Once upon a midnight dreary, when I pondered weak and weary --". 7. A type of existentialism - the struggle for existence amidst the ignorance, selfishness, bigotry, and evil in the world. 8. The rapture of love.

Even as a college graduate, I found difficulty in thinking things through clearly. To understand things, one must first observe carefully and obtain all the facts. John Stuart Mills principles of Induction and Scientific Method are very useful. Then mathematics and logic must be applied to clarify true meaning. Cohen and Magel's Logic and Scientific Method comes in hand. Early forms of Boolean algebra are found therein. However, remember the old French saying, "The more advancement of the intellect the greater the loss of human feelings". Social advancement in 3000-5000 years has not kept up with the machine age - Ten commandments and four freedoms (freedom from fear, freedom from want, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion) are not sufficient. Thomas Aquinas reconciled religion and science. Both are up against an unknown wall beyond which is metaphysics and faith. The search for truth is not easy. Courts insist on a yes or no answer, whereas "You have said it" is a masterpiece of paradoxical reply. Some questions cannot be answered by a plain yes or no.

O'Henry speaks of things men seek -- appearance, power, money, women -- one might add knowledge or learning -- but the bible says that this too is vanity. None goes his way alone, all that we give into the lives of others comes back into our own. Incidentally, money is a common denominator and an efficient system which Russia and China are finding out by their reversion to some "capitalist" methods. My first introduction to dentistry was the use of cotton thread by my Uncle Tony who tied it around a deciduous tooth and pulled it out for me. The standard joke was that you tie the thread around a door knob and wait for someone to open the door. My second bout with dentistry was a bad deciduous molar which took me to Dr. Ducker's office off the old Third Ave. El (short for elevated) at 110th Street. He said he had to go in the back room to look my name up in a big book, and when he came back behind me, he must have had a tiny forceps which he used very quickly to remove the tooth.

As a child I spent a number of summers in the country with my Mother and sister. My father used to come up on weekends. There was a terrific storm one night and we watched the lightning from the porch of the hotel behind the glass windows. My Mother told me of the time she was in the ladies room and a ball of lightning came right into the room through the window, traveled around the wall, which was tiled, and went back out the window.

Because of serious illnesses when I was young, because of my father's past desire to become physician and because of a book given to me by my cousin called "The Microbe Hunters" I had a burning desire to become a physician. However, in those days, it was