The Library of America • Story of the Week
From *War No More: Three Centuries of American Antiwar & Peace Writing*
(The Library of America, 2016), pages 432–43.

PAUL GOODMAN

Paul Goodman (1911–1972) was a counterculture hero when I was growing up, not for his antiwar work but for *Growing Up Absurd* (1960). That book, more than any other writing I encountered as a young man, suggested why certain modes of respectable life felt meaningless.

In "A Young Pacifist," he mourns his son's death, and as a mourner draws on the part of himself that wrote novels and poems, the open-hearted, sharp-eyed, loving observer. We have no better portrait of a pacifist growing up (non-absurdly) than the one Goodman offers us here.

* * *

Goodman had astonishingly numerous interests, careers, and talents. He grew up in New York, got a B.A. at City College, majoring in philosophy and studying with Morris Cohen. He began to write—poems, plays, stories. He taught drama, became a graduate student in literature, published his first novel in 1942, taught at Manumit Preparatory School, and was dismissed for "homosexual behavior" (later he was dismissed from Black Mountain College for the same reason). He published essays and novels, studied and practiced psychoanalysis, wrote about urban planning and gestalt therapy and education and sexuality. The Living Theatre staged his plays, and everyone read *Growing Up Absurd*.

A Young Pacifist

1.

My son, Mathew Ready Goodman, was killed mountain-climbing on August 8, 1967, age 20. Burton Weiss, a close friend of his at Cornell, has sent me an account of Matty's political activities there—to which I will preface some memories of his

similar activities before he went to college. Matty was essentially an unpolitical person; his absorbing intellectual interest was in sciences—in which he had gifts, and he wanted to live and let live in a community of friends—at which he remarkably succeeded. Nevertheless, he was continually engaged in political actions, against war and irrational authority. This pattern is common to many hundreds, and in increasing numbers, of brave and thoughtful young people these days; it is worthwhile to describe it in a typical example. In any case, the group at Cornell—Burt, Jerry Franz, Tom Bell, Bruce Dancis, and a few others whom I did not know personally—have managed to make that unlikely school one of the most radical in the country, with a strongly characteristic style: undoctrinaire yet activist, deeply communitarian and imbued with an extraordinary honesty and good faith. In this group, Matty was an important spirit.

Emotionally, from early childhood, Matty's pacifism was certainly related to his unusual protectiveness of his many animals. He identified with their lives. I remember him and his mother medicating and sometimes saving sick little turtles, tropical fish, white rats. Yet there was nothing squeamish or sentimental in his attitude. If he needed to feed his lizards, he calmly caught flies, tore their wings off and offered them; but otherwise he would not kill a fly but adroitly catch it and let it out the door. He gave up fishing around age 10 and began to rescue the fish and return them to the river. Mostly he liked just to watch the fish and pond life, for hours, in their natural habitat.

More intellectually, he was an ardent conservationist, indignant at the spoliation, opposed to insecticides. The focus of his scientific interests (in my opinion) was ecology, the community of living things in the appropriate environment. And in method he strongly favored—so far as the distinction can be made—naturalistic observation, letting things be, rather than experimenting and imposing programs. These were also his political biases.

My first political recollection of him is when, in junior high school, he called my attention to corporation advertising being used in his class. He collected the evidence and we succeeded,

temporarily, in having it expelled. This involved his being called down and rebuked by the principal.

During his first year at Bronx Science High School he wrote a report on the life of Gandhi, who impressed him deeply. For a reason known only to himself, he took to fasting one day a week—and continued this sporadically later.

He was active in the antibomb protests in 1960–62. He used to take part in the "General Strike For Peace" thought up by Julian Beck. Since people were supposed to leave off work for a day and picket for peace, Matty took off from school and picketed the Board of Education on Livingston Street. Naturally he was captured as a truant and I had to go and rescue him. This was one of the few moments of pure delight I have ever had in the peace movement.

He was at the Times Square demonstration against the bomb-testing when the police rode their horses into the crowd. Matty was in the line of fire and came home shaken, saying, "This is serious."

As a junior in high school, he refused to take part in a shelter drill and he and three others who would not recant were suspended. But there was considerable newspaper publicity and they were reinstated and allowed to stand aside during the drills, which were soon discontinued. His reasons for nonparticipation were (1) the shelters were unscientific, (2) the drill was an insult to intelligence in its form and (3) it predisposed to accepting nuclear war.

When reinstated, he was told he had a black mark on his record. I wrote to Admissions at Harvard asking if this was a disadvantage; when we received the expected reply that it would rather be judged as a sign of critical independence, Matty had the letter copied off and distributed around Bronx Science—which sorely needed the nudge.

By now he was a seasoned radical and when he was again threatened with punishment for pasting antiwar stickers in the school subway station, he faced down the administration by pointing out that the subway was not in its jurisdiction.

At age 15 he and other high-school students formed a citywide association to protest against nuclear war. This came to nothing.

When he applied for admission to Cornell, Professor Milton Konvitz phoned me in alarm that he was likely to be rejected because he had sent a photo of himself with uncombed hair. Matty said, "If they don't want me as I really look, they can keep their lousy school." They admitted him anyway, but sometimes they may have regretted not following their routine impulse. Matty loved Cornell and therefore fought it tooth and nail.

At 18, he refused to register for the draft. I shall return to this later, but I recall that, the following summer, he distributed antiwar leaflets in front of the Army recruiting station in St. Johnsbury, Vermont, near where we have a summer home. This made me anxious, since of course he had no draft card. But he explained, "I can't live in fear every day. I must act as I ordinarily would." My guess is that he loved St. Johnsbury and wanted to redeem it for having a recruiting station.

2.

Burt Weiss writes as follows about Matty at Cornell (my own comments are in brackets):

"Students for Education, SFE, organized themselves in late February, 1965. Matty was in almost from the beginning. He was most active in the Grading Committee, whose only proposal he and I hammered out. The S-U option in it has since come to be offered in much weakened form by most of the Cornell colleges.

[In fact, insisting on another option in the proposal, Matty got his professors not to grade him at all, or to keep his grades secret from him. Later, to his annoyance, he found his name on the Dean's list, and crossed it out with a crayon and complained.]

"Astonishingly, Mathew attended all meetings and rallies of SFE and its steering committee. Such an attendance record was unique for him. He had little toleration for contentious political meetings, especially when the contention was made by those he loved. When he guessed that a meeting was likely to be angry and unfruitful, he usually stayed home. If he went despite his guess, or if the angry mood of a meeting took him

by surprise, he left early. Several times, when he stuck it out, he was moved to the point of tears or actually cried. I loved him then very much, and respected his ability to mourn. He mourned that people were acting stupidly, timidly, or dishonestly. He mourned the sudden vanishing of community spirit.

"Later that spring, Matty took part in the 24-hour vigil in the Arts Quad and in the walkout while Rockefeller was speaking at the centennial celebration. Nobody got in trouble for either of these actions. But then came the Harriman lecture and the resulting fracas widely reported in the press. Before Harriman spoke, he received the enclosed letter written by Matty and Jerry Franz. [The letter complains that official spokesmen evade real questions and warns that the students will insist on real answers. Harriman's behavior did turn out to be insulting to college-level intelligence and the students sat down around him.]

"In May came the sitdown to block the ROTC review in Barton Hall. All (70) participants were prosecuted by the University, but Matty and Jerry walked out of the hearing before the Faculty Committee on Student Conduct. Here, according to the Cornell *Sun*, is what they said: 'The members of the group made a definite commitment to stand by each other if there was anything like differential punishment. Tonight they went back on their commitment. The group agreed that it was necessary to have a collective hearing so that past offenses could not be taken into account. Tonight the group agreed to let them take past offenses into account. Therefore we can no longer be associated.' They were summarily suspended, but reinstated when they appeared, just the two of them, at the next meeting of the Committee. They were placed on Disciplinary Probation.

"That was an exciting spring. We kept rushing about in no particular direction, although everything we did seemed to be of a piece. Most important things happened late at night, leaflet-writing, mimeographing, emergency meetings, passionate revelatory dialogue among friends.

"During our months in Europe—fall of '65—Matty had little to do with politics. One day in Paris—I think it was an International Day of Protest, Oct. 1965—he picketed the American Embassy. He had expected to meet others there. As

it turned out, he was all alone, but picketed anyway. In Seville we went to see the American consul to register our protest against the Vietnam war. We did nothing to end the war, but did get a good idea of the sort of person who is appointed to American consulships.

"At Cornell in the spring of 1966, Matty and some friends founded the Young Anarchists. The group never did much, but it put out some neat broadsides. Nevertheless, as I later learned by accident, the very existence of a group of that name intimidated the administration and extensive files were kept, including glossy blown-up photos of every member.

[It is touching that I, a long-time anarchist, never heard of these Young Anarchists from my son.]

"In May a hundred students sat in at President Perkins' office to protest against Cornell's complicity with Selective Service. Matty was one of the first seven to get there and so was able to enter the presidential suite before the campus police locked the doors. The latecomers were kept in the corridor. Only the 'inner seven' were prosecuted by the University. The Undergraduate Judiciary Board, composed entirely of students, voted 'no action' and made us all proud. The Faculty Committee, however, changed this to 'reprimand.'

"The day after the sit-in, the University Faculty met in special session to discuss the relation between Cornell and Selective Service. As faculty members entered the meeting, they were handed 'A Plea Against Military Influence at Cornell,' written by Matty and Jerry.

"In the last year of his life, Matty was deeply involved with two groups, Young Friends and the Ithaca We Won't Go group. He was committed to the people in these groups and to the fraternal and community spirit among them. This was the only time since SFE that he was so committed.

"In the fall Matty helped organize the Five-Day Fast for Peace, explained in the enclosed leaflet that Matty helped to write. The fast was very successful in terms of the number who participated, the interest and sympathy roused on campus and in town, and the amount of money raised for medical aid [for North and South Vietnamese]. For some reason Matty gradually became the chief PR man for Young Friends. He was rather inept in that position.

[Again, I was surprised to learn of his Quaker connections. His mother and I had never been able to interest him in religion at all, even to read the Bible as literature.]

"Also that fall, Matty, Tom Bell, and I began talking about starting a local draft resistance group. The group grew slowly and beautifully, just as Tom Bell explained in *New Left Notes* last March. When Matty returned from inter-session in February, he was excited about the possibilities for mass draft-card destruction, and the desirability of starting on April 15 in New York. Everybody was interested, yet nobody seemed moved to action. Finally, Jan Flora and I were startled to realize how soon it would be April 15. We called Matty, rounded up a small meeting, and decided to go ahead. I was going to New York later that night and so I was asked to find out what people there thought. You were the first person I saw. The rest you know.

[I tried to rally help for them by a letter, to academics who had signed Vietnam ads in the *Times*, of which Matty distributed six thousand copies. On April 15, about 160 students burned their cards in the Sheep Meadow. Matty, who had no card, held up a sign—"20 Years Unregistered."

[And proud Matty would have been on October 16, that so many who were leaders of the 1500 who turned in their cards had been his fellows in the Sheep Meadow on April 15.]

"For Matty, the most painful occurrence in connection with the draft-card destruction was the breakdown of community spirit that it, and the Easter Peace Bridge demonstration, occasioned in Young Friends. SDS was soliciting pledges in the student union. The Proctor was citing those responsible to appear before the Judiciary boards and suspending those who refused to give their names. Matty and others tried to get Young Friends to solicit the same pledges at their own table, in solidarity with fellow war-resisters. At first Young Friends went along, but then began to talk about backing out. At about the same time, Matty saw the official 'instructions' for the Easter demonstration at the Peace Bridge, in which Young Friends, including Epi and himself, had planned to participate. This document had nothing to do with love, fellowship, or respect for the individuality and holy spirit in every person, what Matty conceived to be the essence of Quakerism. There were strict rules governing both the demonstration itself and the personal

behavior and attire of the participation. Worse, the document advised male participants to bring along their draft cards to show at the border. The whole thing made Matty sick. Yet his feelings seemed to be shared by only a minority of Young Friends. The group was falling apart in front of his eyes. . . .

"Matty had planned to go to Brazil this summer as part of a Cornell anthropological project. His main purpose, as he explained at the first meeting, would have been to work politically with Brazilian students and thereby help to foster an international community of radical students.

[This project was abandoned when, at the disclosure of C.I.A. tampering with American students, the Brazilian students had to dis-invite the Cornellians. Matty told me that previous South American trips had been exciting and useful. He had worked hard learning Portuguese.

When Brazil was closed off, Matty at once proposed that the entire group should go to Cuba; this would be a reasonable and necessary retaliation to the C.I.A. system and was also worthwhile in itself. Dr. William Rogers, who was the director of the project, has written me as follows: "I won't detail the debate that followed Matty's proposal. It was the age-old struggle of the soul between the single act of moral purity and courage, and the prudential and tactical considerations of effectiveness. We spoke of Jesus' parable of the Pearl of Great Price. Was this act the pearl for which a man will sell all that he has, in order to possess it? Matty, with an eschatological sense akin to the New Testament, seemed to think so. Considerations of the future did not weigh heavily with him. The important thing was to be moral, thoroughly moral, now. How much longer can we wait?" Unfortunately, Matty did not persuade them.]

"Early in the spring Matty took part—as who did not?—in the riotous demonstration which defeated the DA when he came on campus to suppress the sale of the literary magazine. Matty's battle-cry was entirely his own: 'Fuck you, Thaler,' he said to that unfortunate man's face.

"Later in the spring he made it his business to operate the printing press in the We Won't Go office. He intended, next year, to spend considerable time there doing routine work."

On August 7, Matty and I drove down from Expo in Montreal, where we had attended the Hiroshima Day youth rally.

In his sleeping bag Matty had hidden some contraband, a book of short stories bought at the Cuban pavilion as a gift for his teacher in a course on Mexican revolutionary novels. However, we decided to declare it, in order that the book might be seized and burned and we could complain to Robert Kennedy. The Customs offices obligingly acted up in the face of our high literary disdain, so we had fun planning our indignant letter. Next day Matty died on the mountain, but I have sent the letter.

3.

Matty refused to register for the draft on general pacifist grounds—the subsequent worsening of the Vietnam war merely confirmed what he already knew.

His method of refusal was not to recognize the draft system at all and to continue as usual, including, of course, his overt antiwar activity—now without a draft card. In fact, he stepped up this activity, but I think this was because of Vietnam rather than to force a showdown. I never saw any sign that he courted going to jail. He did not regard himself as a Witness in any way. On the other hand, he was entirely too open to live "underground." And the "tactical approach," of trying for C.O. or accepting II-S in order to carry on revolutionary activity, was also against his disposition: he could not live on an ambiguous basis. Besides, he believed it was bad politics; his enthusiasm for the mass draft-card burning meant that he believed in open massive noncooperation and active nonviolent resistance. His eyes twinkled at the idea of "nonviolent terrorism": if one is arrested, five others burn their cards on the courthouse steps.

The F.B.I. first got in touch with him in November 1966, purportedly about a classmate applying for C.O., for whom Matty had agreed to be a reference! (This was part of his "business as usual.") They visited him as a nonregistrant in March 1967 and set the wheels of prosecution going.

Matty's approach—to "do nothing"—is appropriate, in my opinion, only to young people who are sure of their own integrity and the human use of their own developing careers, who just need to be let be. Matty had this confidence. Besides, he was a balky animal: he would have found it impossibly

humiliating, paralyzing, to try to move his feet toward anything he strongly disbelieved in, such as filling out a draft form. He was not, in my experience, "rebellious," defiant of authority as such. But he had learned that authority was very often irrational, petty, dishonest and sometimes not benevolent, so he was antiauthoritarian. (The school administrations he had dealt with were certainly not models of magnanimity, American democracy or even simple honor; and these are the only officials that a growing boy knows, unless he is a juvenile delinquent or on relief.) Matty was also unusually stubborn in general. He had to do things his own way, at his own pace, according to his own slowly developing concern or fantasy. This was often too slow for other people's wishes, including mine, but there was no hurrying him. Once he cared, he acted with energy and determination.

He refused to be a leader—at Cornell, as at Berkeley in its best days, leadership was regarded as a poor form of social organization. Yet it is clear in the above accounts that Matty often did lead. But this was because he acted according to his own inner belief, without ambition or ideology. He was frank, loyal and consistent, and his integrity was legendary. If, in an action, he was among the first, or seemed to be the most intransigent and unwilling to compromise, it was not that he was brash or doctrinaire, but because of some elementary human principle. Naturally, then, others found security in him and went along. So far as I can discover, he had no enemies. Even administrators liked him personally and have sent me touching letters of condolence. His lust for community seems to have been equal to my own, but he had more luck with it.

After he became seriously illegal at 18 he, like others in a similar plight, showed signs of anxiety, a certain tightness, a certain hardness. This roused my indignation more than anything else, that the brute mechanical power of the State was distorting the lives of these excellent youth. For nothing. For far worse than nothing—abstract conformity, empty power, overseas murder. Nevertheless, in Matty's case at least, his formula of dismissing fear and acting as he ordinarily would, seemed to work spectacularly. Once he had made the hard choice, he threw himself into all his activities with increased enthusiasm; new energy was released and during this

period—whatever the causal relationship—he embarked on an uninterrupted and pretty happy love affair with Epi Epton, who shared his convictions; this of course must have immensely increased his security, assertiveness and courage.

As I said at the outset, Matty was not essentially political; he was politically active only by duty, on principle. Rather he was a daring swimmer, a good handball player. He ground his own telescopes. He jeopardized his nonexistent II-S deferment and took off for Europe for a semester. He had found a method of meditation that suited him. Hungry for music, he sat for hours at the piano and was in charge of selecting the records in the library. He was an Honors student in anthropology and he was, I am told by Professor Joseph Calvo and Dr. Elizabeth Keller, beginning to do original work in genetics. But his political activity also blessed him with friends and community.

My own hope was that, after he was arrested, he would—having fought through to the end—skip bail and go to Canada, since jail did not seem to be the best environment for him. He said he would make up his mind when it was necessary. He had looked into it and made connections so that it would be possible for him to work politically in Canada.

Every pacifist career is individual, a unique balance of forces, including the shared hope that other human beings will become equally autonomous. Most people want peace and freedom, but there are no pacifist or anarchist masses.

As I tearfully review my son's brief pacifist career, the following seems to have been his philosophy: He had a will to protect life in all its forms and to conserve the conditions for it. With this, he had a kind of admiring trust in the providence of natural arrangements and liked to gaze at them. He felt that human beings too could form a natural and wise community and he was daringly loyal to this possibility. He was astonished to see people act with timidity, pettiness or violence. Yet he was not naive. He knew that people in power and people bureaucratized are untrustworthy and one has to be prepared for their stupidity and dishonesty and confront them. (I don't know if he thought that people as such could be malevolent.) As for himself, he felt that there was plenty of time to brood and mull and observe and wait for the spirit; it did not delay, and there was no need for pressuring or forcing votes. What he himself

could do to help was to be open to the facts, honest in speech and as consistent as possible. When a practical idea occurred to him, it was never complicated or dilatory, but always a simplification and a way of immediately coming across.

It is a beautiful soul we have lost, who behaved well and had a good influence.