## ROBERT S. WITHERS

202 West 80th Street, Apartment 5W, New York, NY 10024  
(212) 873-1353

In the first semester of freshman year some of us took a sociology course with a charming young sociologist whose name escaped me long ago. We studied Sigmund Freud, among others. And in one of the early lectures of September or October, the prof summarized Freud’s professional and social position and prospects when he was in his early forties—he’d been rejected from a full-time university position, had some tenuous part-time academic connection, was generally dismissed by his peers and colleagues. As the prof summed it up, “He was going through an identity crisis.” And we laughed, because we certainly knew about that, Yale was a good place for identity crises. But we were delighted that a big-league guy like Freud might have been doing this as a grown-up person. It was reassuring, encouraging, empowering, though maybe a little bit scary.

Well, some of us embarked on our identity crises with a vengeance. My second wife called us “the wrong Yalies”—the kind she kept meeting—classics scholars from godfather neighborhoods, genius homosexual composers, shortwave radio fanatics, tripped-out lovers of the arts. We sang “We are poor little lambs who have lost our way” and “Hey Mister Tambourine Man” at freshman commons and worked on our lifestyles.

Tim Leary and Leonard Cohen and the Velvet Underground in the sixties, David Bowie and Lou Reed and conceptual Balinese rock and roll in the seventies, lying low, co-opted or dead in the eighties. Well, the laugh from here is a little different—irony the main ingredient, with dashes of bitterness, regret, nostalgia, and empathy for flavor. Twenty-five years of identity crisis, with periods of temporary stabilization as we latched on to jobs, professions, friends, girlfriends, wives, children, projects...and hung on to some of them, let go of others. Still friends with most.

Important people? A kid with tattoos, Uncle Mo running afoul of the law in Paris and New York, three wives, Israeli filmmakers, underground filmmakers, poets, musicians, painters, flamenco dancers, two children. Activities? Making art films and documentaries, ghostwriting, teaching, surfing the Internet, flamenco guitar, trying to make a dollar. What does it all add up to? Well, my ten-year-old daughter says she thinks about death every night at about nine o’clock, and about why everything exists, and about what nothingness is like. But she still loves to sing, and dance, and make up stories. That seems like the right approach.

Those of us still alive don’t know if we’ve mellowed, or just learned to pick our fights more carefully. In any case, happy to shake hands with anyoneelse who’s made it this far. Greetings to the wrong Yalies and the right ones too—the fat lady hasn’t sung yet.