

**PERSPECTIVE
A TRIBUTE TO MY NEMESIS
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Lee Wolfson discovers that, perhaps more so than our friends, it is our enemies that shape our lives.

I arrived home from work one night to find a large envelope in the mail. Upon opening it, I found the program from my 30th high school reunion. While I never attend these events for reasons that will become apparent, I was curious about the fate of some of my classmates. In the back of the program was a list of all 126 graduates. Those who responded or were locatable provided some basic demographic information. I must say there were a lot of names I no longer recognized.

Before I put the booklet down, I went to the front pages that contained the program, menu, etc. On the next page was a memorial. Four of my classmates had died since we graduated. One of them had died shortly after graduation. Two of them I recognized but hardly knew. The last one, Art D., I knew very well.

Art had tormented me through most of my school life. His favorite name for me was Jewboy or Kike. In my younger years, he delighted in this kind of name-calling until I would be driven to tears or fighting, or both. He often would goad other boys into similar name-calling. Most of them were larger than me. I was usually on the losing end of these “encounters.”

My parents tried to protect and comfort me, and would often complain to the school administration, but there was rarely any kind of meaningful intervention from the school or the other parents. As a young boy, I had a difficult time grasping this as bigotry. I just thought everyone hated me.

In high school, it wasn't much different, although by then I was able to grasp the concept of prejudice. It became quite obvious to me, as the only Jew in my school (in a small western Pennsylvania town, population 10,000) that I was never going to be accepted socially, by either gender. I withdrew from any meaningful associations. In my senior year, Art's badgering only got worse.

One day in particular, he was gleefully whispering “Jewboy, Jewboy, Jewboy” in history class. I ignored him. Then we were on our way to band practice in another building. On the street, he kept up his harangue but was no longer whispering. His buddies were laughing and joining in. Finally, I turned to him and told him to “back off.”

By now a crowd had gathered. I could see he was seething. In my first moment of what I thought was psychological insight, I came up with a plan. In an effort to diffuse the situation and embarrass him, I turned to him, looked him in the eye, and said: “Okay, Art. Why don't you prove to all your friends what a real man you are and punch me?”

The crowd fell silent. I stared at him defiantly. Then he did the one thing I never thought he would do. He punched me. Right in the mouth. I thought: “Hey! He wasn't supposed to do that.” However, the crowd grew almost silent. The hate and negativity diffused, and we continued on down the street. He never harassed me again.

Sitting on my patio that night, under the moonlit sky, a chorus of cicadas serenading me, I smoked a really fine cigar (Astral Bellicosa), the curling smoke a reminder of the

transience of all phenomena. I sat with my feelings. I pondered: Art D. is dead. My great nemesis is dead.

I feel no joy, no sense of triumph, that I outlived him, or that somehow he got his just reward. I don't even know how he died. But I did realize this: So much of who I was, and who I would become, was defined in many ways by Art, my enemy and tormentor. Perhaps, it's our enemies — as much or perhaps even more so than our friends — who truly shape who we are, and what we might become. Could it be that through these painful life experiences a seed was planted that eventually led to my becoming a psychologist and a Buddhist?

Embracing Buddhism for the past 28 years has taught me that if I would practice Buddhism, then I must put into action the path of lovingkindness and compassion.

In my silent determinations, following my recitation of the Lotus Sutra, instead of offering prayers for the deceased, I make a promise: to hold in my heart the loving memory of all those individuals who touched my life in some way. Then I pledge that my actions this day will pay tribute to their loving memories. This morning, I held Art in my heart with lovingkindness and made this same pledge.