

# C O N T E N T S

## FOREWORD FOR INDIAN EDITION /

The release of the book *Weapons of Mass Instruction* by John Taylor Gatto in India when Indian Government is implementing Right to Education (RTE) is very well timed.

## DEDICATION /

This book is dedicated to the great and difficult art of family building, and to its artists: mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, grandchildren, grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles, cousins, and in-laws.

## PROLOGUE: AGAINST SCHOOL /

I taught for thirty years in some of the worst schools in Manhattan, and in some of the best, and during that time, I became an expert in boredom.

## 1

### EVERYTHING YOU KNOW ABOUT SCHOOLS IS WRONG /

Forced schooling seduces the trapped into believing that inert knowledge, memorized fact bits and sequences is the gold standard of intellectual achievement. Learning to connect those bits into meanings for yourself is discouraged. This habit training is a major weapon of mass instruction.

## 2

### WALKABOUT: LONDON /

Nick Schulman, a neighbor of mine, cut junior high to play pool, and dropped out of high school to play poker. He became a millionaire at the age of 21 this year, on the World Poker Tour. His new goal is to study philosophy now that he's fixed for life.

## 3

### FAT STANLEY AND THE LANCASTER AMISH /

Fat Stanley told me he had to cut school almost every day because he didn't want to end up like me, working for someone else. He was 13 when he said that to me. An Amish man in Ohio told me they could build a rocket to the moon if they felt like it, but it was a stupid idea.

4

**DAVID SARNOFF'S CLASSROOM /**

Sarnoff, the founder of RCA, dropped out of elementary school to sell newspapers on the street. What he learned there he could never have learned in school.

5

**HECTOR ISN'T THE PROBLEM /**

I was the official New York State Teacher of the Year when I quit on the op-ed page of the Wall Street Journal, because I couldn't stand to hurt children any more.

6

**THE CAMINO DE SANTIAGO /**

Inspired by the pilgrimage to St. James's tomb which draws young and old from around the world each year to walk across Spain, I decided to help kids toward lives as producers rather than consumers; as players rather than spectators.

7

**WEAPONS OF MASS INSTRUCTION /**

The trapped flea strategy; ugliness; the horse-in-box effect; the artificial extension of childhood; misdirection; the cauldron of broken time: these and more are some deadly Weapons of Mass Instruction, intended to convert human beings into human resources.

8

**WHAT IS EDUCATION? /**

According to Kant, four questions live at the heart of all educational quests: What can I know? What may I hope? What ought I to do? What is man? School policy in America is made by people who would rather submit to torture than allow students to answer these questions or any that could make a human difference.

9

**A LETTER TO MY GRAND DAUGHTER  
ABOUT DARTMOUTH /**

You just turned 17 this month, granddaughter, and you'll be leaving the nest for college soon, I suppose. I wish you wouldn't, but I know better than to say that, so at least let me try to reduce the stress your elite high school, Bronx Science, has

embedded in your mind. No matter what you've heard, college isn't important to your future, so don't worry about it. Go or not, do well or not. Ten years from now you won't remember a single class or professor. What really matters isn't taught there. The saddest people on Earth are the ones who go back to college reunions – 35 percent of all college graduates regret the waste of time and money, and wish they hadn't attended; 50 percent say they didn't learn anything useful there.

## 10

### INCIDENT AT HIGHLAND HIGH /

Last January, a sixteen-year-old German girl – shy and well-behaved – was arrested in her home in Nuremberg, Germany, by fifteen armed policemen. Her crime was homeschooling. Reading about that reminded me of the time I was almost arrested lecturing to the senior class at a wealthy high school in Rockland County, New York. I was revealing the GPAs and SAT scores of American presidents and other prominent individuals when a squad of police halted my lecture at the superintendent's request. It was the weirdest event of my entire life, something I thought only happened in Germany. I'm still trying to figure out what it meant.

### AFTERWORD: INVITATION TO AN OPEN CONSPIRACY: THE BARTLEBY PROJECT /

The whole diseased empire of institutional schooling is, like the wonderful one-horse shay, extremely fragile. Its most vulnerable point, the glue that holds the thing together, is standardized testing which purports, dishonestly, to determine success or failure in future life. The author invites you, singly or in groups, to politely decline to participate in these tests, saying only, "I prefer not to take this test." Nothing more – no bad language, no violence. If ten percent refused to take the tests, the school world would be shaken to its foundations. Call it an open conspiracy. Be brave. There's nothing they can do to you that matters if you sincerely prefer not to. But don't fake it – if you love to take these tests, take them by all means.

### INDEX /

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR /