The pretty one of the Haffner sisters had suggested I take a Teachers Training Course, though I'm pretty sure I had, or would have considered doing this myself. A time came in 1947/48 when I had to consider whether I could carry on helping Sam in the business. Although I had no doubt I had been useful to him I felt, and Sam agreed, that there was no future for me "in the bags."

As Sam said, a business had to be a bloody good business to support two families. It's true Sam had no children and I was not married and hence - this was before the permissive sixties - had no children either. But if I was to stay in the business it had to be on the assumption that it would be able to provide a living for Sam and Lily, his wife, and for me and a wife and family of mine.

To feel confident of being of permanent use to Sam I would have had to be able a) to drive - big orders were sent by carrier, but it would be essential to be able to deliver small orders to the "core" customers who would have been essential to the stability of the business, b) to "sell," and c) take for granted the "dozen on, dozen off" basis of the core customers' orders, in other words to engage in "Yiddisher business."

As regards b) I thought I'd try my hand at salesmanship. I called on Littlewoods, I think it was. The buyer said the lines were all right, but the prices were not competitive; provincial manufacturers had lower labour costs and could quote much lower prices. "Yes, of course, I quite understand," I murmured, and came to the conclusion that salesmanship was not for me.

Actually I was a qualified teacher in any case, by virtue of my degree. With typical English eccentricity, the Ministry of Education assumed that anyone with a degree or professional qualification - solicitor, chartered accountant, whatever - was qualified to teach. I suppose the thinking was that to be a teacher you had to be educated,
and b) that graduates and professional people were educated. Most of
the "elementary" teachers I encountered were semi-literate at best,
though with a wide range of interests, and in any case a high degree of
literacy was not essential for elementary school teaching, and b) I suspect
that a good many chartered accountants and solicitors would think that
Proust and Kafka were something you got at the deli — not that that made
them any the worse accountants or solicitors.

Anyway, I could have started straightway, without benefit of a training
course, teaching at a Modern Secondary School, as the 10-14 year-old
section of the old elementary schools were to be known. The minimum
school leaving age had been, or was soon to be raised from 14 to 15, then
16, and a vast increase in the number of teachers was necessary.

But I thought it would be wise to go through the training mill.
I felt that without it I would be exposed to hostility from the staff.
In fact there was some hostility to the "emergency" trained teachers,
but there were too many of us for this to be much of a worry. I got
a grant, by the way, which was adequate.

So I decided to take an "emergency" teachers training course,
13 months instead of the normal two years. I went to Forest Training
College, so called because it was sited on the premises of the South West
Essex Technical College, Forest Road, Walthamstow, an hour or so's bus ride
from Clapton.

The Principal of the college was Dr. Plummer, a historian with
seventeen letters after his name, and the Deputy Principal was "Percy"
Miss Percival, who had been, I believe a/the Director of the Women's
Land Army. I was interview by both, and accepted. I asked whether
a job could be guaranteed on completion of the course, to which the
answer was, in effect, "yes," and this turned out to be the case. I also
asked whether a non-graduate modern secondary headteacher might not be
prejudiced against a graduate teacher on his/her staff; they couldn't see
any reason why he/she should be.
I also saw Dr. Collins, Head of English. A propos of something or other he said the course was "purely cultural," I imagine I had asked whether there was any instruction about teaching techniques. I must have felt like saying, but don't suppose I did say, I had culture coming out of me bloomin earoles. I do remember saying that in my essays he might find wandering off the rails occasionally, to which he responded amicably: "Don't worry, I'll soon put you back on them."

The prospective modern secondary school teacher had to choose two subjects. I chose English and French. English was taught by Percy and Dr. Collins. Percy had said Dr. Collins's lectures were an educational experience, which I think was a bit perfervid. I think the "experience" consisted in his quoting from Old English writers, complete with "shit." However, I owe to him my introduction to Beowulf, which he quoted, obviously sparingly, in the original Old English.

On the English course we had to do some five or six essays. I chose for my first "Nineteenth Century Drama," since this was in effect Oscar Wilde - I think the only other 19th century drama was Trelawney of the Wells, which had Wildean touches. I got an "A" for it, Dr. Collins observing: "Nice writing, Witriol." Another essay for which I got an "A" was The Old Testament Considered as Literature, which I had written for the old Anglo-Jewish Monthly, and for which I had got two guineas.

The French tutor - call him Mr. Walker - had been a master at Watford Grammar school. My French was very rusty, and I was at the bottom of my group of eight. However, I pulled up, especially after we did a fortnight's course at Grenoble. I think was due to the initiative of Molly, a charming girl, a qualified secretary, I believe, unfortunately with a hare-lip.

There were lectures for the whole studentship, about 120, including lectures by Dr. Plummer. I remember him saying the emphasis was no longer
on "drum and trumpet" history, and that the Victorian gin-house had signs up "Drunk for a penny, dead drunk for tuppence."

There were three teaching practices. My first was at Monoux, Sir Walter Monoux Grammar school, in Walthamstow. I gave English, French and German lessons. The staff were typical unreconstructed grammar-school-teacher types. Overheard in the staff room: "Miss — of the girls' school is giving the school-cert girls 'coffee and maths' on Saturday mornings. I ask you: 'coffee and maths.'" The head of English: "I don't know any science, but I'm not proud of it." Imagine the head of science saying: "I don't know any English, but I'm not proud of it." Perhaps, on reflection, the science man would feel justified in making his confession of ignorance — though I doubt whether he would — if by "English" is meant "Eng Lit."

Dr. Collins was essentially the grammar school type. The College was all for "visual aids," all for bringing "Eng. Lit" to life. To this end one of the students had constructed a model of an Elizabethan theatre, another had made a horn book. I offered to bring along the model to the Monoux lads. The Head of English didn't want to know.

In a French lesson I gave. I went to town on the direct method. I decided to teach toucher. Normally, one would get the kids to write toucher (reg.) = to touch, but I touche-d the table, Je touche la table, told the kids to touche their desks, Touchez le pupitre. Est-ce que je touche la table, Oui, je touche la table. Est-ce que tu touches le pupitre? (pointing to a boy): Oui, monsieur, je touche le pupitre. The French master was impressed: "You got them through toucher, right enough." He told me in a friendly fashion that "Face the class," was "Faites face a la classe, not Facez la classe."

One afternoon I heard I was to do an English "crit" lesson, a College tutor (who turned out to be Dr. Collins) would be sitting in. I mentioned this to the Monoux staff. Someone said: "Give 'em a poem, that's best for a crit lesson." So I decided to do a war poem.
I hastily looked up the one in the kids' poetry books with "Orion's sword" in it - as usual, can't remember title, author. I read the poem to the class, paused at the end to let the effect sink in, before asking the class: "What did you think of that?" Boy: "Please, sir, you haven't finished it." I hadn't, there were a few verses more overleaf.

The school head, a scientist, was present. He asked the class if they knew what "Orion" was (a legitimate question, I would have thought, though I hadn't, and haven't, a clue myself), but when I mentioned this to someone on the English staff, he replied "Typical." Anyway, Dr. Collins was satisfied. In college, he said: "I was glad to see Mr. Witriol did not use any visual aids."

I also took a/some German lesson(s) at Monoux. The German master, a Yekke (German Jew) was impressed. "Ich mussen mir beichten, welche Sie Ihr Deutsch gelernt," he said to me, "Now you must confess, where did you learn your German?"

The Head of Monoux said he imagined I'd be looking for a job teaching German. This would have been the sensible thing to do, but such jobs would not have been within commuting distance of Clapton, and I could not envisage leaving Sam on his own to cope with boobbe. Or, again, perhaps I did not want to face setting up on my own in what I thought of as some God-forsaken dump.* (Moreover, German-teaching jobs then, 1949/50, would be scarce; one would have turned up, eventually, no doubt, but when I would have been already a few months into mod sec teaching, or rather, as it turned out, primary teaching. I don't think it would have affected my chances of the German-teaching job, but I didn't want to wait months before getting a job at all.)

* Boobbe expressed it with her customary down-to-earthness: "What do you want to go somewhere for vee oodem hurishen at nish gepisht?, where Adam never urinated.
My next school practice was at a mod sec school in East (West?) Ham. The Head was Jewish. Said he had asked his son if he wanted to go into teaching, but he preferred bags, more money in it. I didn't do badly, I seem to remember the English master, who was deputy head, saying words to the effect that I was obviously good. I remember he told the kids, a propos the banqueting scene in Macbeth where the guests are seated in order of precedence, how he had been present at some dinner or other, with the Mayor at the top table, next to him the Town Clerk, next to him the Education Officer or whoever; much more sensible than nattering about the effect of repetition in tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, the alliteration in creeps in this petty pace from day to day, the metaphor of the brief candle.

I think it was at this practice that I gave a lesson on the French Revolution. I got a sheaf of pictures from the local library, expatiated on the guillotine. The kids loved it. Mr Walker was present. I said that the last time we had executed a king was in 1649, and quoted: "He nothing common did or mean upon that memorable scene." Mr. Walker wrote in my "Lesson Notes" book: "It was good to hear Marvell's famous lines being quoted.

My third and last teaching practice, also at a mod sec school, was disastrous. Admittedly, I probably only spent a few minutes on preparing a lesson, but for one (English) lesson I think I looked up the textbook used by the kids and made a note of what I would take with them. It was a lesson about "adventure." I believe I even thought up a few "adventure" possibilities to put to the kids, but the teaching-practice tutor for this lesson put a note in my book: "This was supposed to be a lesson about adventure, you killed it at the start." I'm sorry, he just wasn't a gentleman. Percy, at least, was a lady. Obviously, she hadn't thought much of a lesson I had given (without any, or very little preparation), but she couched her criticism in ladylike terms: "Perhaps you could have brought out the sense of doom permeating the play" —
Mr. Blunt — another alias — was the only member, or one of the few members of the Forest staff, who was a non-graduate. I imagine he wanted to take that cocky blighter Witriol down a peg or two. I grovelled — it was possible he could have me fail the course.

Percy was good. Typical ascetic, intellectual features. I can see her now, looking out through the window, talking about textual criticism (too, too solid flesh, or too, too stilled flesh?), returning our essays, saying this was the first chance she had of seeing what we could do "with a pen in your hand." (Reminded me of boobbe: "If only I had a pen in my hand," referring to her inability to write to a newspaper criticizing some article of which she disapproved.) She gave me A — for one essay, saying it would have been a pure A but for something or other. I'm afraid I was a bit naughty. During a tête-à-tête she had with me, as she had with all the students in the English group, she said something about how valuable it was for young people at College to stay up, talking the stars down, without having to worry about getting the last bus home. I disagreed, said they all talked bosh, anyway. Actually, I agree that youngsters should have the opportunity of putting the world to rights, even though they talk bosh in the process; so do the oldsters.

She produced two plays, in both of which I had a minor part. One was about Shakespeare, placing him in the context of his mundane pre-occupations with his players' group, the other Twelfth Night. She was keen on us making our own costumes, "more fun." I had an agonising time, sticking bits of silver foil on my carpet slippers, getting boobbe to make me some kind of turban...

Towards the end of the course I developed a painful condition in my leg. I was worried I would not pass the medical which prospective teachers had to undergo. One of the girls on the course told me that as long as I could breathe they would pass me. She was right.
Girls. One - call her Mary, how's that for originality? - once told me I had a "disturbing effect" on her. I was such a dope I wasn't sure what she meant; but we went on a ramble together once, and I had gone to a party at her house. She told me her mother was Jewish, married out. She hadn't exactly swept me off my feet, none of them had, though I had nothing against them, but I told Sam, who shook his head. I don't think anything would have come of it, in any case. She was on the sec mod course. For reasons which I shall explain I was, in the event, to do 10 years primary teaching, and the feeling of failure which I experienced during this period - a male primary school teacher who was not a head or deputy head was a rarity - and subsequently when I taught secondary mod - would have led to friction with a spouse who not only coped with her job, but loved her work.