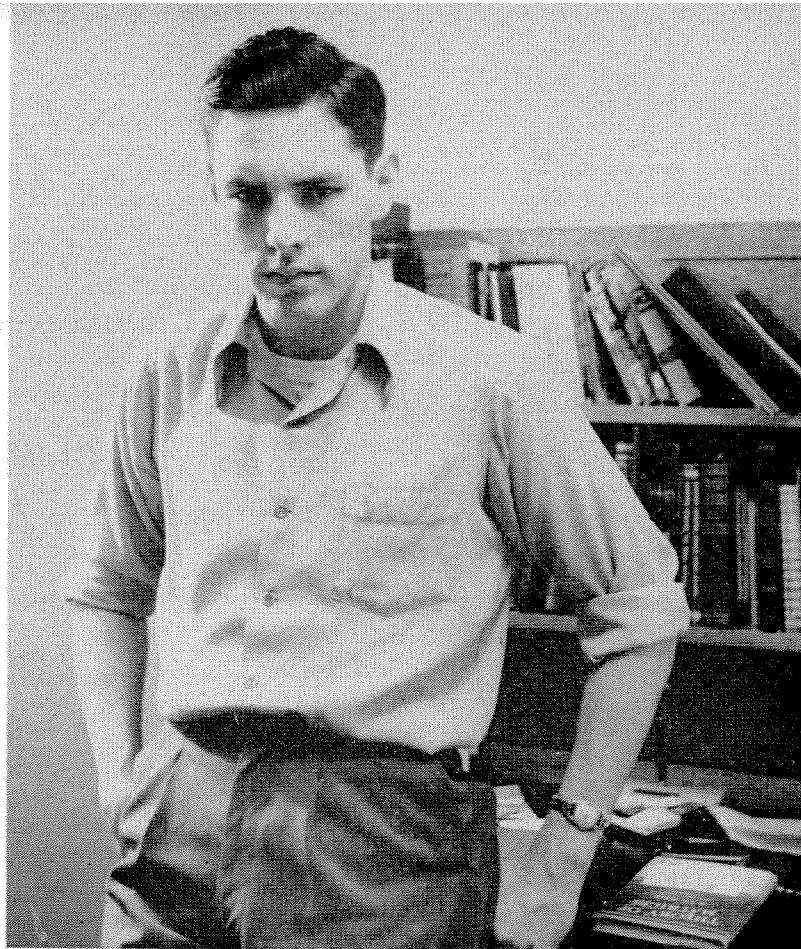


STATE
OF MIND

SHUTTING THE DOOR to his room behind him and tugging at his clip-on bow tie, the sophomore looked sadly at his desk.

Damn, he thought, it'll be hard to get back to work. Two and a half weeks with the gang at home sure can do it to a guy when it comes to studying.

He hung up his house coat and sat down at the desk, his eyes scanning the row of books on the little bookcase in front of him. He pulled out the Theory of Matrices and flipped through it disconsolately. What am I doing, registering for this course? he asked himself. Better that than Physics 20, the answer came back.

What a hell of a way to die! More physics, more calculus, more history (how did that get squeezed in?), biology, and now Matrices and Quadratic Forms.

Suddenly he wasn't sure at all he wanted to be at Tech. When he had shown that exhibit at Students' Day last month he had felt sort of guilty. Look at all these guys, he thought, full to the gills with love of science (being a physicist, he never remembered to think of the engineers), bot to go to a school that's tough, so they could come away with that much better a technical education. Tough! They didn't know what tough was. And here *he* was, an A student all through high school, glad here to get a 2.3—here he was trying to give these innocent high-school seniors a sales talk for Caltech.

That's what *he* needed, the Sophomore thought, a good sales talk for Caltech. If he didn't get one pretty soon the dean's office just might not need to worry about him

after this year. Now is the time to transfer out if I'm going to, he told himself. End of the sophomore year. I'm still passing!—and my record's clean, and lots of schools would be glad to have me now. Next year might be too late.

With a sudden inspiration he pulled out a large sheet of typing paper. Getting a pencil from his desk drawer, he drew a vertical line down the middle of the page the long way. Not a very straight one at that, he noticed.

Then at the top of the sheet, on the left-hand side, he put in bold letters the word "PRO"; on the right-hand side, "CON."

Always look at both sides of an argument, he said to himself. What's good about this place, and what isn't?

He started with the CON side; that'll be easy, he thought.

Academic load, he wrote: I guess that's a con, he said aloud, and was suddenly embarrassed. I may not have the Caltech Twitch yet, he smiled grimly, but already I'm talking to myself.

Academic Load. He underlined it twice. Sure, he thought, half the college kids in the country complain about their load, I guess—but it couldn't be like this. All my friends at other schools are taking four easy courses; but here I am, taking five tough ones—and against more competition.

He thought a while and then put down *Small Campus*. This won't be in order of importance, he thought with another smile. But dammit, I always thought of a college

as being a great spacious park, almost like a forest preserve, with old gnarled trees and ivy-covered classroom buildings and couples in matched sweaters studying together on the great grassy lawns.

Iceplant! he snarled. Why don't they plant grass? A little voice inside him told him that grass was too expensive, that the guys would walk across it and ruin it. It was unconvincing.

He thought back to a 'Y' fireside at Dr. DuBridge's home the spring of his frosh year. The President had told the group of his plans to shoehorn a half-dozen more buildings into the pitiful little four blocks. He was even thinking of putting a library between Crellin and Bridge, where the only grove of trees on the campus held out against the tide of progress. Jizas! Once he had gotten a real thrill when he was walking back to school from the Caltech Barbers and had come around the corner of Mudd and seen the Institute spread out before him—the long portales and those funny little trees, and, way down at the end of the field of view, old Throop Hall overlooking the whole vista, with fluffy little clouds in the sky behind the dome. And he wants to spoil that! the Sophomore thought angrily.

Look what they did to Kerckhoff Jungle, he mused. Could have made that spot into the prettiest, shadiest, greenest spot in Pasadena. So they put up a new bio-chemistry building.

No girls, he wrote, changing the subject. Or maybe that's my fault, he reflected. Certainly are enough college girls in L.A. to satiate the Russian Navy, if I only would kick myself in the butt a few times to make a few dates. He remembered that when ASCIT threw a sock hop in December he had tried for a whole evening to get an Oxy girl on the phone and got nothing but busy signals—and what had he done? Given up and not gone at all. My fault, he sighed. Even when I was home for Christmas I wasn't moving very fast, even with the old gang, all the girls I knew in high school.

Dry subjects. He had been so hot to go when he came to Tech. Now every day's classes set his motivation back another notch. Was it because of the teachers—good scientists and poor educators? Maybe.

Cynical upperclassmen, he penciled with a grin. All he needed to completely destroy his interest in science and in Tech was a half-hour bull-session with any senior in the house. He heard that half a dozen seniors had quit science and were planning to go into medicine. Another gave up physics for law; another, for psychology. Must be dozens more I don't know about, he thought; and that doesn't even account for the flunk-outs who go into other fields. It struck him that Caltech ought to be investigated; every year it drives fifty top-notch scientists out of the field.

Good God, he said, I'd better start listing pro points or I'll be in UCLA in a month.

Good education. No getting around that, he smiled; even the seniors haven't talked me out of that yet.

Small school atmosphere. What hell it must be to go to MIT! All these headaches, and a huge student body

besides! At Caltech he played baseball (at least he hoped he could make the varsity this spring), sang in the Glee Club, helped with the Big T. Couldn't do all that at UCLA, that's for sure. Baseball sometimes seemed like enough fun to make the whole business worthwhile.

Besides, it was nice to know most of the kids, to be able to eat dinner with his prof, or play football with the head of the geology department. He was sure he couldn't get that at any other good tech schools.

Student houses, he wrote; and, as an after-thought, liberal administration. He was really sold on the houses. After New Year's he could hardly wait to see the guys again, even if he had to come back to Pasadena to do it. And he liked the loose honor-system, give-a-guy-a-chance philosophy which stuck out all over the deans and the administration in general. He almost entered student house food on the other side of his sheet, but it struck him that you couldn't expect really too much for what you paid, and besides, all the seniors said the food was much better than it used to be, and the kitchen staff was open to suggestions.

Social program, he wrote, and underlined it. Girls or no girls, he thought, you can't beat it. He had heard from an SC girl while home for Thanksgiving that all the girls in her sorority talked about the fabulous Caltech parties—that is, if you could find a nice guy to go with, you know, 'cause so many of them are creeps.

It had been a pretty rude shock when a friend of his at Purdue had boastfully produced his frat's social calendar at a holiday party. Any house at Tech with a social program that bare would die of sexual starvation in a month. No, a guy at Tech with a steady girl could take her to the neatest round of parties on the Coast; he was convinced of that.

The Sophomore leaned back on the rear legs of his chair and looked over the list.

Wonder what I've left out, he thought. Couldn't have left out any cons, he smiled; I've heard that list from every senior in the house, and they wouldn't forget anything.

He pondered for a while, thinking how just a guy's frame of mind—so flexible—could make him love Tech or hate it. Maybe I can love it if I try, the Sophomore mused. Maybe that's a good resolution for 1955.

Flash! He suddenly remembered that he had forgotten his New Year's Resolutions this year.

He turned over the paper and was on the verge of starting a list when there was a knock on the door. It was a buddy; he wanted to take in a show. Classes for second term started in the morning.

The Sophomore knew without looking at his blue card that he had an eight o'clock the next day. He also knew full well that that didn't mean a thing to him. He was used to getting only half a night's sleep.

When he had his jacket on, he turned and looked again at his desk. Maybe I'll get around to those resolutions over spring vacation, he thought with a smile. Doubt it.

—Martin Tangora '57