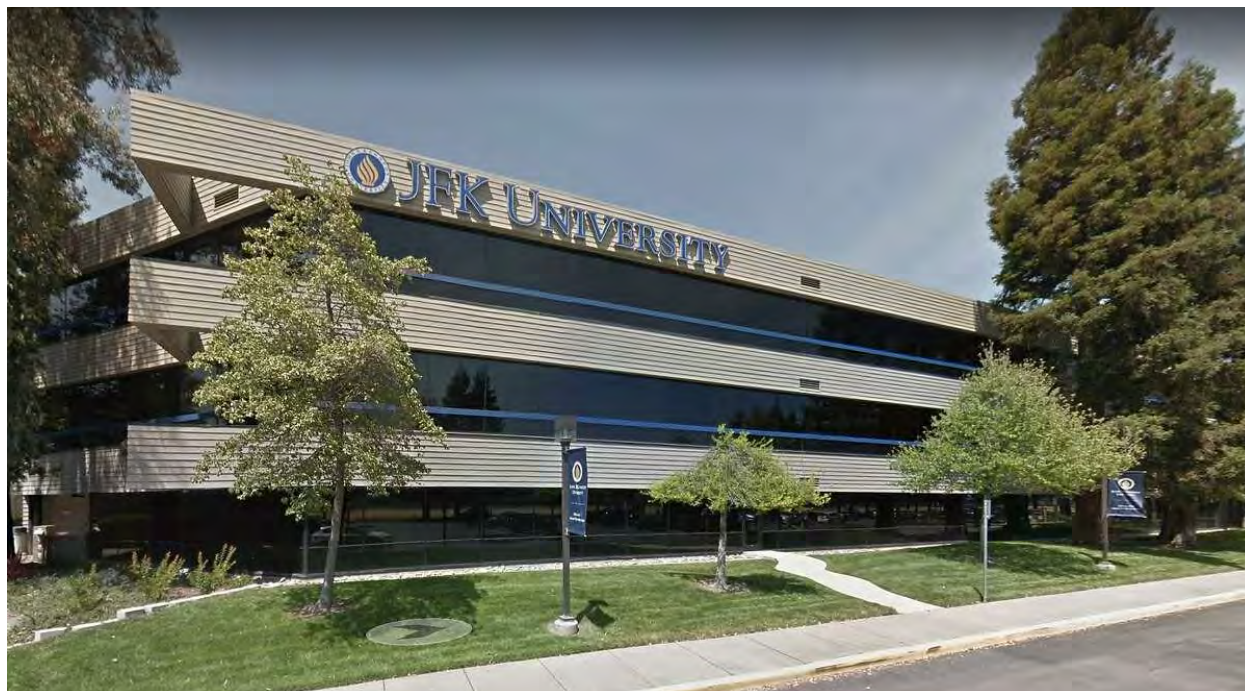


## Studies and More - Foster Kids and EST

Paul Carlson  
August 27, 2022



### Studies and More

When it came time for me to start 9th grade, and for reasons I still don't quite understand, I wanted to try public high school. So I enrolled at nearly College Park High School.

I hated it, and lasted one week. There were jocks aplenty, and probably nerds but I did not meet any. The philosophy class was best, a young teacher who launched the year by asking us whether genuine altruism was possible. (I had no idea, however these days, could answer more readily.)

Sports was all right. I signed up for Cross Country, which was a natural, but I disliked the macho attitude of many students.

In meeting with a school counselor, I could've arranged to accomplish everything necessary in half a school day. Instead, I signed up for Pinel one more year. Much more comfortable, and interesting.

Mom tried several jobs, and had enough time to go for her Master's Degree. She's gotten her initial degree at the University of Minnesota, where Saul Bellow was one of her professors.

She enrolled at John F Kennedy University, brand new at the time, which held classes at a former funeral parlor in downtown Martinez. A group therapy class met in an upstairs room at a nearby church.

After a while I got curious, and tagged along. The first evening I sat and browsed in the school library. The professors heard about this, and invited me to sit in on their classes. Thus I unofficially audited Advanced Psychological Testing with Prof. K Johnson, and Adlerian Group Therapy with Prof L Achenbach, for two quarters.

The second quarter, Dr. Johnson assigned one psychological test to each student, who was to administer it to five people. Almost all of the 20-or-so students chose me as one of their subjects. That way I got ink blot and word association and personality categorization and IQ and other sorts of testing.

Since then, I've joked, they actually let me go. More seriously, it wouldn't be fair to give me those tests, anymore, because I got to see their inner workings.

The group therapy class met in a large circle, with plain folding chairs, and each week it was someone's turn. The students, and then people they brought. Including, of course, me. The professor, a German lady, guided each session with wisdom and compassion.

A lot of personal things came out, and even the most pragmatic successful man would soon be reduced to cleansing tears. My session was not easy, but as I recall, went really well.

Downtown Martinez featured a late night diner, nearby, so after evening classes many JFK students

would gather there. I'd always have a cheeseburger and a hot chocolate.

Several of mom's fellow students remained as longtime friends. One middle aged guy, Marion, was the first openly gay man I knew. He was deferential to me, no stereotypical actions. I'm pretty sure he is the man who Gov. Jerry Brown appointed, a few years later, to head the state's Mental Health Department.

The graduation ceremony was held in the city park, across the street from the school's quarters. One JFK University founder, and its best known Trustee, was Shirley Temple Black. She gave the commencement address, and was soon to become US Ambassador to Ghana. I don't recall many details, however it was an honor to see her.

So I didn't gain any college credits, rather a lot of useful experience. I also learned my IQ score (still high) and a bunch of other personal aspects. I wasn't doing anything to knock down my mental capacity, either. I knew kids who drank, smoked weed, and some did harder drugs. For me, Mom's health food ethos remained strong, and somehow I wasn't mired in teenage anguish, so I simply felt no need for chemical additives.

Our house on the hill was costly, and mom decided we ought to get a smaller, less costly, place. Oddly enough, apparently another local family had the opposite notion, so it's my understanding we traded houses. But paying the real estate agents and banks and title companies full freight, on both ends. Oh, well . . .

We got a place on Carolyn Drive, farther from Pinel but closer to the shopping areas. The following school year, this would place me closer to my choice for 10th grade, an even more unusual school in Concord.

All four of us wanted to replicate our Pinel adventures, and we did so, to a certain extent. Mom signed us up for the Sierra Club, just as Earth Day and recycling and similar efforts were getting underway. We weren't big activists, but loved to stay at the Sierra Club Lodge in Norden, up on Donner Pass in the Sierra Nevada mountains. A genuinely rustic place, a large old wooden building, where everyone chose a major chore or two, and could sign up for several current activities.

We liked to visit the railroad's "snow barn" covered structures, which stretch for miles along the pass, in an area where snow can get twenty feet deep some winters.

I watched, in that pre-cell-phone era, as the Norden railroad dispatcher held up a written-and-folded message for a passing train crew, and the engineer held out a thin hook and snatched up it, as they zoomed on past. My love of model trains, brought to real life!

We also learned to backpack. The Pleasant Hill Recreation Department sponsored the Diablo Hiking Club, named after Mount Diablo, yet also expressing their anything-goes attitude toward backpacking. Bad weather never stopped our hikes. Although the threat of a dirt road washout, in the remote Ventana Mountains, did cut one of our expeditions short.

One summer, around 1972, mom drove us back to the Grand Teton mountains. We planned a 3 day trip, up a canyon into Alaska Basin, then up onto Static Peak, just south of the more photogenic Teton crags. From there it's steeply downhill, into Jackson Hole and civilization.

This began well, all four of us keeping a good pace, and we set up a creek-side camp for the night. Unheard by us, a bear snuck into our camp site. As advised, we'd hung our food high in a tree, but that clever bear snagged the rope and brought it down.

Nobody was hurt, but almost all our food disappeared. We decided to continue anyway, and live on whatever dried stuff that was left. No problem, as things turned out.

Mom was, if anything, too casual. At one point, high above Alaska Basin, I wanted to detour and see a pond near the trail. So I cut across the snowy rocks, and saw a beautiful waterfall from above, just beyond the pond's outlet. Then I circled around, and came upon a shadow-preserved snowbank, along the edge of the pond.

I decided to continue, and went sideways along the sloping snow. I know it might give way, and had plenty of experience with icy water. But it was sturdy enough, and I got past then above the pond. I called out, and found mom and my sisters on the trail, nearby but hidden among snowy boulders.

Soon we got to Static Peak, actually more of a long ridge, and Jackson Hole spread before us, with the Wind River Mountains in the distance. I emptied out my pack, including 2 or 3 hardcover books I'd been reading, to find a pair of binoculars.

We could see our car, about a mile below and a couple of miles eastward, while for real, the people seemed like ants. The trail down, at one point, was narrow and icy, with a drop-off to one side. (The same winding cliff which hosted the waterfall I'd seen earlier.) Thankfully we made it past there, and returned to our car a couple hours later.

We visited several other scenic places, at other times, though my memory isn't always clear as to which year and which place. (As in: before or following my parent's divorce.)

### **Foster Kids and EST**

My interest in spirituality continued. I wasn't old enough, perhaps not confident enough, to do much in-person visiting, so I read a lot. I enjoyed one excellent classic, Huston's *The Religions of Man*. (Years later, I sat near him at a large event, really should have said hello.)

I read two or three Herman Hesse novels, and a biography of Ramakrishna. Of course I read popular Christian titles, such as Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*. While openly Christian science fiction is rare, many novels feature strong religious faith, even profound discussions. This included some CS Lewis books.

At one point I bought some Tarot cards, a Rider deck and guidebook, and learned to give readings. Pretty soon I hardly needed the book, could give an abbreviated reading with ordinary playing cards if that was all we had. I never took money, but would trade with my clients. (I kept a list with each one, then later, impulsively threw it all away. I wish I'd at least have saved the list.)

Later in 1971, mom came across Werner Erhard's Erhard Seminars Training (a.k.a. 'est') organization, headquartered in San Francisco. My sisters and I attended the 'third teen training' at the old Jack Tar Hotel on Van Ness, then stayed involved for several years. I learned to work with new attendees, and sometimes we volunteered at the main office. It was good business training, if not, as I now realize, particularly spiritual.

One of the main ladies was European, and an open lesbian, the first such individual I'd known. The group became controversial, though there weren't any titanic scandals.

These days, Erhard/Rosenberg lives in Costa Rica, and his brother runs Landmark Education. Which, attendees have informed me, teaches precisely that same things as 'est,' which I have come to regard as profound selfishness, and subtle mockery of the Divine. Yet they do have great insights into human character and relationships, also on how to live an accomplished secular life.

Erhard brought together many different secular and eastern-faith insights. In my view, his teachings were very similar to those of Dianetics (part of Scientology), but without the space alien part.

The group also did serious charity work. The whole 'est' spirit was quite messianic, a newer New Age outfit for those practical secular yuppies who were coming up to succeed hippie spiritual seekers.

One thing I appreciated was that Erhard had close connections to local academia, and he'd sponsor speakers from the local scientific and medical organizations. I remember some doctors from UCSF, who spoke about their groundbreaking work on "left brain, right brain" mental functions.

Again like Scientology, 'est' had a lot of celebrity support. One year, probably in December 1972, they rented a large arena for a Christmas party. (Wish I could recall more details.) John Denver was a big supporter, and he sang a few of his songs. One lady sang a bawdy song, I'm not sure but it may have been Valerie Harper. (She sounded a lot like Bette Midler.) Comedian Bill Dana performed his 'Jose Jimenez' routine, hilarious at the time, though nowadays it would draw angry racial activists to his front yard.

This kept my idealism high, and my thinking global in scope. Bigger, even, though my wish to travel to distant stars was not happening any time soon.

We needed finances, and I thought of a few money-saving ideas, sincere though, I now understand, comparatively trivial, even the more practical stuff. Through her JFK U contacts, mom decided to become a foster mother.