

Choices and “What ifs”

It seems as if not a day goes by without reading or hearing about goals, the future, role models, and a clear choice about the future. I must say that as a boy, not much of this was evident to me, nor was it a topic of conversation with either my parents or my friends. It was pretty much keeping up with whatever they day brought, then dealing with it.

Role Models: When it came to role models, I think that I never saw an adult in those terms, but rather people that I respected. My father is excluded here in that I really didn't really know him as a very young boy. He was a busy physician and I cannot remember any instance where just the two of us spent any time together. No playing of catch, going places, or spending any time with me on school work. As I explain elsewhere, he became ill with Parkinson's disease at age 45 when I was 10 years old and could never really be the father that most boys have. He died in September of 1949, the year I graduated from high school.

I liked my first grade teacher, Mrs. Clarke perhaps because she understood kids and was interested in what we did. Other teachers included Mrs. Winfred Dunham, my fourth grade teacher and Mrs. Gail, who took our class through the fifth and sixth grades during the confusing times at the beginning of World War II. (As an aside, one of my classmates and her family were good friend with Mrs. Gail. In 1999 at the Punahou class reunion, I got the address of Mrs. Gail, now in her 90's and remarried, and dropped her a note, to which she promptly replied.) Mr. Hargraves was the shop teacher in seventh grade, and I liked him because print shop and bookbinding was of interest to me, and he went out of

his way to show you. Time went on and as more serious academic expectations came about, the names of teachers becomes clouded in my memory and respect and friendship were not a consideration for me.

My role models shifted now to Boy Scout leaders and others outside of school. Larry Mason a fellow of Armenian decent from Los Angeles was working at the shipyards at Pearl Harbor and attended Central Union Church in Honolulu. He became a pal of sorts to a friend, David Howard, and myself. He would take us to the beach, to movies, and for rides in his Ford convertible with loud "Smitty" mufflers, of which he was very proud. Perhaps he was not a role model, but certainly a sort of father figure. My mother never objected to me going with him, although my sisters looked at him as a working class fellow that they would never consider dating! He was rather flamboyant, wasn't well educated, and liked loud shirts and ties-- perhaps that is what they didn't like. Speaking of ties, he was the one who taught me to tie a Windsor knot properly which I still use to this day. He did have some class!

In my chapter on Boy Scouting I speak of my affection for the Scout leaders who perhaps filled my need for a father figure. As I reflect on the father figure thing, there have been a few older male friends in recent years that have perhaps partly filled that role as well.

Goals & Choices: Many young people know exactly what they want to do and be when they finish their schooling. Our neighbors in Honolulu, the Martins, had access to the Strong Preference Test, a multiple-choice test that indicated vocational or professional preferences. My results indicated that a helping profession was my choice and they listed areas like social work and the like which fit that profile. My mother quickly poo-pooed the idea, indicating that

social workers never would get anywhere. (Read: not a high enough aspiration for a son of a physician.) This concept would surface later in high school when I indicated that I might be interested in teaching, to which she suggested that I might aspire to be a superintendent, as it has more prestige (It never occurred to her that most administrators start in the classroom.)

When I graduated from South Pasadena High School, I didn't do all of the things students do nowadays to assure their acceptance to college. The SAT's were not required and no one at the high school encouraged me to think about college. In fact there were two course tracks at the high school: college preparatory and "other." I was in the "other" track, as my academic performance was rather lack-luster at best.

That summer after graduation we were at my Aunt Myra's and she inquired about what I was going to do for the fall. It turned out that a counselor from John Muir Junior College lived next door, so Aunt Myra sought her advice and I was scheduled to sign up for classes. In that it was so late, I was not able to get some of the required classes that I needed, however. This was not exactly goal-directed activity!

The only thing that I really enjoyed about John Muir was being in the marching band. All of the home football games were played in the Rose Bowl, so I can honestly say that I played in the Rose Bowl—many times! At both South Pasadena and John Muir the bands had the privilege of marching in the Tournament of Roses Parade (almost 6 miles!) and a seat to the game afterwards, albeit in the end zone.

The draft was on my tail as "Truman's Police Action" was underway in Korea, and I was due to be called, as were most of the other young men my age.

I fooled them—I enlisted! My intention was to go into the Air Force, but there was quite a waiting period. I was ready to get out of the school thing and do something else—most anything! I ended up enlisting in the Navy. The waiting period turned out to be almost the same as the Air Force.

I simply quit school rather than disenrolling and was on my way to boot camp January 23rd 1951. That semester's grades showed all F's except for some softhearted gym teacher who gave me a D. All of this would come back to haunt me later when I re-entered college.

Choices in the Navy were pretty much made for you. Toward the last of the rather rigorous nine weeks of boot camp, we got up earlier than usual one morning so we could take the Navy's GCT test, the General Classification Test. Based on the results, it allowed you to apply for a given rating, i.e. Navy occupation, or acceptance to a special school. My overall score was quite good, my mechanical score equaled my overall score, my clerical score was quite acceptable, but my math score as evidenced earlier by school grades was quite lousy. The good overall and mechanical scores could have gotten me into training devices, instrument repair and maintenance, or similar mechanical job rating and even a school.

Now here is where the choices and goals issue comes into play. Up to this point in time, I had really never made such a choice. I had no goals or decision-making training. Perhaps in achieving some goals in Scouting, but that was about it. Someone else entered the picture and suggested goals for me. I have often thought that if those suggestions had not been made, what would I have done? What if?

My brother-in-law, Herb Hynson was a Naval aviator in nearby San Diego Naval Air Station at North Island, and strongly encouraged me to become an Airman, which was much better duty than that of the Seaman. (Later I found out that it was quite true.) The only mechanical rating as an Airman was that of Aviation Machinist Mate, a very popular choice, especially for those who considered themselves some kind of mechanic. As a result I became an airman who didn't make it in to any special school. My fate was to become a gate security guard at Miramar NAAS (Naval Auxiliary Air Station) near Escondido, north of San Diego. Very boring. Since the job came under the Security Department, as did the Fire Department, I requested a change and became a member of the Fire Department, an Aviation Boatswains Mate rating. My Navy vocation was carved in stone. Any change in rating I found was very difficult to achieve.

At first I worked in the base firehouse with a group of civilians doing structural and brush fire fighting. The only excitement we had was polishing the apparatus, the deck, and the head. There was one brush fire just outside of the base which took most of one afternoon, but that was it. Later I was to go to the other side of the base and join up with the crash crew and keep track of all aircraft that were landing or taking off.

Perhaps my only claim to fame was to have our crew appear on the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post* putting foam down under a crashed F-9F Navy jet fighter. I was on the opposite side of the plane with my nozzle, so I'm not really visible in the picture, however. The plane had "flamed-out," or lost its ignition for the jet engine, a not uncommon occurrence in the early days of jet fighters. It was an event that we had gone to Class C Fire Fighting school for and had

done many practice drills pulling out an asbestos dummy out of a flaming old fuselage. Now what if I had gone to school and become an Instrumentman and served aboard some repair ship? What if? Would maintaining typewriters, gauges, and the like have been more rewarding? I do know for a fact that I would have advance further in rank and perhaps had a saleable skill.

After three years, eleven months, and twenty-three days I was discharged at “the convenience of the Navy,” as my four years wasn’t quite up. It did allow me to have a couple of days before Christmas of 1954 to purchase a few gifts and arrange for enrollment in Pasadena City College. PCC had incorporated John Muir, which was now a high school. It was time to make up the F’s and have sufficient course work to transfer to a four-year institution.

The transfer to Occidental College seemed uneventful. I remember having to write some essay as part of the application process, which contained my usual b.s. I think I said something to the effect that perhaps I didn’t have all the qualifications of leadership, but society needed strong followers.... Blah, blah, blah. I don’t remember why I chose Oxy. Probably because it was close by, and my mother was going to pay the tuition! No goals there! I had no plans for a specific major, just to finish college, which was more of a goal for my family than for me.

I had chosen speech for my major, and the general plan was to get a teaching credential in speech and English. In the summer of my junior year I had the opportunity to take a special course. The chair of the department was interested in speech pathology and encouraged me to sign up for this course in “Moto-kinesthetic Speech Training” taught by an aging but spry woman named Edna Hill Young. It was a method by which you manually manipulated the lips,

throat, and jaw to the position of making correct speech sounds. Touching the lip indicated tongue position and the release of the hands suggested the plosive aspect of the phonemes. (I was to later entertain our boys by getting the dog to growl, then shaping her lips to make it sound like an “eee” “ooo” or “ahh.”)

This was a non-credit course, and there were a number of us who met in the home of Mrs. Hill for instruction. Among the class members was George Schaffer, a faculty member from Purdue University who came all the way from West Lafayette, Indiana to Los Angeles for this course. He talked me into applying to the Masters program at Purdue. My goals to teach in the classroom were set aside. This seemed a good opportunity. My future followed the usual “go with the flow” planning. What if I had gone into the classroom? No job in Ferndale for the Humboldt County Schools, no crab fishing, and no learning about small town living. Also no boredom with the job there, prompting the decision to go back to graduate school.

The choice of graduate school was in part due to the influence of Ted Hanley, a Purdue faculty member whose brother Bud (Claire) Hanley was on the faculty at the University of Washington. Other factors were location and the availability of married student housing. After finishing at the UofW, his choice of a job at Eastern Washington University (then Eastern Washington State College) was due mainly because of location. I needed to be close enough to Seattle to return and finish up the writing of my dissertation. What if?

I had a job offer at San Diego State, which might have advanced me more professionally. There were other audiologists on the staff and I would have been better at my trade than as the lone Ph.D. audiologist in Spokane County. What if?

I have often thought that if I had exercised professional choices that would have resulted in a “doing” thing, a creative thing, a “something” that did not require the academic more intellectual thing, I might have ended up being a bit more passionate about my pursuits. I never really felt that I was mastering my studies in graduate school, as I was never a good student. There were always the expectations of me that I felt I could not accomplish. I didn’t want to pursue them for fear of failure. I ended up doing the academic thing, but never at a level that I saw my colleagues accomplishing. Teaching and administrative accomplishments at Eastern were below par in my eyes, for I had this thing in the back of my head that I could really not do any better, and if I tried, I would fail.

Accomplishments, choices, and what ifs. A small turn in the road would lead to a whole different turn of events. Encouragement in boyhood, someone to guide me, decision-making skills, freedom to explore without the judgement of others—all could have made me a quite different person who might have chosen quite a different path in life.

One decision and choice that was completely without influence and judgement of others was the choice of my life’s partner, Pat. But of course that is a whole story in itself!