

Tracks

Family Life

An important ingredient to knowing oneself is to know one's predecessors. I offer these recollections of my own emotional and intellectual development in memory of the parents I am proud to have been shaped by in the hope that it will help my daughters, Sanna Lee and Karen Ann, to better know themselves.

Dedication

I dedicate this collection of thoughts and remembrances first to you, Sanna Lee and Karen Ann, with thanks for sharing your lives with me. Being your father, and watching you both develop over the years, has been my most joyful life experience.

I like to tell people: “I raised my kids to be nonconformists like their dad, assuming that they’d think as I do, and share the same interests. They turned out to be nonconformists, all right, but with entirely different ideas and interests.” Why didn’t I see that coming?

I salute you both, and eagerly anticipate your next surprises.

Memoriam

Let me take this opportunity to remember the antecedents who helped to shape me as I have endeavored to shape my own children.

My grandfather, Halvor Solem, whom I was lucky enough to know until he deceased when I was six years of age. I see Grandpa clearly even now, always dressed in white shirt and necktie, upon going out donning a vest and jacket while holding a cane in his right hand. Grandpa taught me to draw as we sat together in his old wooden rocker with the wide, flat arm perfect for laying out my coloring books and drawing paper.

My grandmother, Caroline Jacobson Solem, who became disoriented upon losing her husband of 48 years, and found it ever more difficult to remember simple things. I know Grandma loved me because she had a standing offer for me to come to her house to cut the grass, with scissors, presumably so that it would take a long time to finish. She would regularly interrupt my labors with requests to join her for “lefse” (Norwegian flat bread) smeared with butter and sprinkled with sugar, or for the occasional dish of ice cream. Some of the older kids said that my grandma was crazy because she couldn’t remember who anyone was. I just thought that was the way grandmas were.

My mother, Evelyn, who always knew what to say and when to give support. I remember Mom best for being there when times were hardest, always accepting, never questioning. As I grew into manhood, the pain Mom felt from the inevitable intellectual and emotional separation was clearly visible, but she never protested or even remarked on it, always putting her sense of what was best for me ahead of her own feelings.

My father, Custer, the person from whom I take much of my identity and my sense of what a man should be. Dad seemed always to be present, teaching through example and quietly encouraging me to take on new challenges. On reflection, years after the fact, I can see that his gentle hand was behind most of the big events in my life, as I moved reluctantly from a timid mommy’s boy to a warrior ready to confront life in the world outside our home and community.

Preface

I received my sister's call on a Tuesday afternoon in the summer of 1992. "Dad died this morning. We're going to bury him on Friday. Will you pull together some kind of obituary to hand out at the funeral?"

My heart and mind raced . Dad, finally free, after years of vegetating in a nursing home bed – twenty-five years after Mom died and he began to let go himself, losing interest and memory. He and I hadn't had a satisfying communication since that lucid moment in the summer of 1976, as we drove across Eastern Montana. He spoke then, from the front passenger seat where he had been sitting in silence: "Son, when my dad died Mom lost her memory, and your mother and I had to take her into our home. It was difficult for the family. If I ever lose *my* memory I want you to know that you won't have to look after me. I'll shoot myself first." "God I miss him!", I thought. My heart felt like it had been torn asunder.

I focussed on my sister's request. "Put together some kind of ... handout." That should be easy. My father had led an interesting and very public life. But wait! What did I have on paper to show any of that? I wasn't sure that I had anything. On further reflection, I realized that though my father had touched many lives, and was respected by everyone who knew him, there was almost nothing he had written that mirrored his views and personality. *He had not left many tracks.*

After some scrambling through files, I found the following paltry materials I could use to memorialize my father's long life of service to family and community:

- o one letter written to Sanna, the girls and me in 1972 – possibly the only written communication I ever received from him;
- o one brochure touting his plan to preserve the family farm, a remembrance of a 1958 political campaign; and
- o a college sophomore paper he wrote in 1924 chronicling his family history.

I worked with those few materials, and a handful of old photos, and put together a satisfactory memorial. However, the experience got me thinking. I knew from growing up in his home, watching him relate with my mother, and experiencing him as a parent, that my father had been a fine human being. I wished, though, that I had known more about him as a private person; how he came to the values he lived and sought to instill in my siblings and me. I also wished that my own kids could know him, if not in person, at least in thought.

Too late now.

Today, after years of putting it off, I'm setting out to do better for my own children and their offspring. Interested or not, I'm determined to leave them a trail that can't be missed. *Passing along the culture*, I called it, as I told my children stories of my own childhood. Usually told with a purpose, whether to instruct or simply give comfort, I brought my daughters up on the remembrances that follow.

For what it is worth, girls, *these are my tracks*.

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Once My Children**

PART I: CHILDHOOD

1. Potty Training

My earliest memory is of potty training. I have a clear image of sitting high on a cold, white ceramic toilet in a tiny white bathroom. My feet dangled above the floor, and my mother crouched on one knee facing me. In my mental picture Mom is wearing a green print house dress. Behind her, high overhead, is a small window. Even now I can feel the cool toilet seat on my backside and thighs, and I can hear Mom coaxing me in her soft, gentle voice. Thirty years later, while visiting my father in Alexander during his last years of living alone, I looked into that upstairs bathroom. It was precisely as I remembered it, though the window no longer seemed so high.

2. First Day Of School

My first day of school was a time of high trauma. I was fearful about leaving the safety of home to join all those other children. The school was directly across the highway from our house, perhaps fifty yards distant, but it seemed (and was) a world away. The other children, particularly the boys, appeared hard and aggressive. They had short haircuts, were mostly blond or light haired, and scary looking.

3. Taking A Name

I also recall, though about this I am less certain, a period of at least several days prior to commencing my public school career, when I worked with Mom to learn how to spell my first name. I was going to have to tell it to the teacher, she said. It must have also been assumed that I would have to know how to write it, because that is what we were doing. My first name is Richard, and I could not remember all the letters. My second name, Ray, was more manageable. It is my recollection that at some point my mother gave some welcome advice. She suggested, and I agreed, to offer up my second name, and thus I have been officially called Ray ever since.

4. Socialization

I was a timid child during my early years. Though from photos I can see that my parents gave my siblings and me frequent opportunities to socialize with other children (birthday parties, church events, and the like) I was most comfortable at home with Mom. I have a vivid memory of an early experience venturing out on my own. I walked the several blocks downtown to the public park in Alexander and, while there, perhaps playing on the swings, I noticed three or four boys my own age playing in a very large mud puddle. Unable to resist mud, I walked over to where the boys were playing (attempting to row a makeshift raft), and I watched without speaking. After a time one of the boys, Keith Iverson, took notice of me and challenged me, saying: "Get out of here, Solem, or I'll kick your ass between your shoulder blades." Though Keith was my own age, and smaller, I knew from his confident demeanor, and the strong language, that he could surely do what he proposed. Not wanting my ass to be relocated between my shoulder blades, I turned around and ran home to the security of my mother's company. These occurrences of cowardice in the face of aggressive boys my own age were humiliating, of course, and

I took care to never tell my parents for fear that they would be disappointed in me or, worse, ask me to return to face my tormenters.

5. Compassion For Underdogs

At about age ten I was began to feel enough confidence in myself to hang out on the street with other children. Along the way, I was learning about the "pecking order" and that the worst place to be is at the bottom. At the bottom of the "pecking order" in Alexander, among kids my age, were Marie Albrightson and her younger sister Marsha. Both girls were unattractive, socially timid, and to make matters worse, their mother (no father) was rumored to be crazy. So when Marie and Marsha grabbed my bicycle from wherever I had left it on the street, and took it to their own home, it provided me with an easy opportunity to organize vigilante justice and, with luck, establish myself as a leader of sorts.

I rallied several of my friends, and they others, and in time we had a small mob of kids standing on the sidewalk in front of the Albrightson's home demanding justice. Mrs. Albrightson, in defense of her girls, turned a garden hose on us. That only made us more bold, so we began to heckle, making up a clever song, something like: "Myrtle the turtle, ran so fast she forgot her girdle." Growing more agitated by the moment, Mrs. Albrightson then went into her house and came out brandishing a large butcher knife. At that point we all fled in terror, I to my home to report the incident to my father, assuming that he would gallop to my rescue and bring back my bicycle, which was still parked behind the Albrightson's home.

My father, however, saw things differently, and seized the opportunity to do some parenting. After listening to my breathless summons for assistance, he spoke quietly and firmly. His message hit me like a punch in the face, and resonates still today. Mrs. Albrightson, my father said, has a difficult life, trying to raise two girls without a father, and on a very limited income. For me to single out her and her children for ridicule was unworthy, and he was disappointed that I would behave in such a way. Theft of the bicycle, he felt, did not justify my shameful behavior. He would go to Mrs. Albrightson and apologize for me and the other children, would get the bicycle back, and by the way, as punishment for my unworthy behavior I would be confined to quarters after 6:00 p.m. for two weeks.

Dad gave my siblings and me a lot of latitude, as we grew up, believing that kids need to find their own way in life. About values, however, he had strong feelings, and shared them very effectively by taking advantage of situations such as the one I had just presented to him to teach. I developed, from that moment, my lifelong distaste for bullies, which has since evolved into a nearly blind passion for defending underdogs. No matter how despicable one's behavior, if I view a person as an underdog I am likely to jump to his defense. I have my father to thank for this idiosyncrasy.

6. Tracks

My father grew up in a time when western North Dakota was being settled by European homesteaders. The land was taken from the Indians who had treated it as a gift on loan from God, to be used momentarily, then left as they found it. Dad's parents and their neighbors had a very

different perspective. For them the land signified an opportunity to personally own something that, with nurturing and development, would enable them to feed their families and pass the fruits of their labors along to their children and grandchildren. The land, which the Indians had left undisturbed, was carved by these new settlers into rectangular shapes that had nothing to do with the natural lay of the earth, nor with the animal and plant life that inhabited it, nor with the rivers and creeks that ran over it.

My father's parents, Halvor and Caroline Solem, were among the first wave of such settlers, helping to found Alexander when they were young newlyweds in search of a place to raise a family. When my father arrived at the tiny community, created at the site of an artesian spring, he was two years old. Along with his brother Ray, Dad was one of Alexander's first children.

Growing up in an environment on the cusp of change gave my father a strong sense of his own modest role in causing that change, and a sense of nostalgia for what had been lost. He felt a strong sense of empathy for the Indians who had lost their freedom to wander at will across the land, and he envied their then dying skill at making a life without the tools of their European successors.

Dad took pains to teach my brother and me what he knew of the Indian's knowledge of hunting and trapping, and how to move across the land leaving minimal traces of having been there. Some of my warmest memories are of these early experiences camping, hunting, and walking my winter trap line as I fantasized about being an Indian or mountain man.

As I reflect, I can see that my father never believed in leaving tracks, but rather he wished to make them disappear. He didn't like to boast, and if he helped someone, it was done as quietly and inconspicuously as possible. Dad didn't seem to feel the need of others, myself included, to leave behind a visual testimony to himself and his accomplishments. My father lived in the moment, like the plains Indians he admired, always challenging himself to behave with honor, but in the end content to disappear without a trace except in the minds of those who knew and loved him.

7. Learning to be a Good Lover

My mother's approach to parenting, like my father's, depended primarily on providing an example we kids would subconsciously emulate. Each of them, however, had a secondary method. My father's was to draw upon his conceptualization skills, and explain things analytically. My mother's was less direct. She taught by making very brief, gentle comments, usually giving praise, about behaviors she observed.

I recall many little instances which, I realize on reflection, were meant to teach me about girls; how they are different from boys, and how to please them. At an early age, when I was still at the stage of showing affection by pulling a girl friend's braid, or putting an earthworm down her dress, Mom occasionally suggested that as an alternative approach I deliver a "May basket" to someone I liked, or simply say something nice. These suggestions seemed, on the one hand,

“sissy” to me, yet I found it hard to “blow off” my mother completely because she always seemed to know how to handle situations.

On several other occasions she spoke to me about hitting my sisters and their friends, or playing too rough. It was never a negative scolding, but rather a gentle comment suggesting that as a boy I was much stronger than the girls, and I needed to remember this and treat them gently.

My favorite lesson, taught over a period of years, was to show affection by giving flowers. Mom accomplished this by occasionally suggesting, when I would ask permission to hike out to the buttes north of Alexander, that should I see any flowers along the way I might bring her a handful. When I would comply, usually gathering crocuses or sweet peas which grew wild in the Spring, she would show great pleasure and give me such compliments that I felt ten feet tall. I smile, even as I write this, feeling Mom’s praise wash over me.

8. Facing The Music

At age ten Dad allowed me to purchase my first firearm, a BB gun. For a time I was never without the new weapon, shooting at everything from sparrows to tin cans to, unfortunately, on one occasion, a neighbor’s window. It seems that Denny Fjelstad, a neighborhood boy three years my senior, and I were playing soldier in the trees near Mr. Taylor’s house, and for some reason we elected to aim my gun at his basement windows. We eventually hit one, heard it break, then fled to the safety of our respective homes. I hid the gun, worried a lot, and waited to see what would happen.

Several hours later, after my father had returned from work, he called me in to see him. The neighbor, it seems, knowing of my new weapon, and seeing Denny and me playing in the trees, had put two and two together, and called my dad to talk about it. Dad asked for an explanation. Having had several hours to plan for this confrontation, I readily admitted the deed, but said that it was Denny’s fault. This seemed entirely plausible to me since Denny was so much older than I. My dad didn’t seem to care about Denny’s purported role. Instead, he ordered me to go to the neighbor, apologize, and offer to pay to repair the window. Yikes!

I did as my father asked, and got a bill from Mr. Taylor for four dollars rather than the whipping I feared. Over the next several months I paid for Mr. Taylor’s window from my allowance and whatever other earnings I could arrange.

From this experience I gained valuable insight into how my father viewed responsibility, and also learned that I could not expect him to protect me from my own mistakes. I was disappointed, at first, because I felt that many of my friends’ parents would have defended them under the circumstances, but after reflecting a few days I concluded that my father was right. In choosing the “high ground” he was showing me a more honorable form of behavior. From this moment I began to develop the notion that behavior standards are tied to your position in society, and those who are better educated, or better placed, have a higher obligation for worthy behavior than others; that, in fact, they should set an example for others.

9. Discovering The World Outside

In the summer of my eleventh year my best friend Butch and I learned that if we searched the weed-filled side yard of the Alexander Improvement Club (beer parlor) early on Sunday mornings, we could generally find little treasures dropped by Saturday night revelers; items such as half-smoked cigarette butts, snus cans not quite empty, and the occasional coin. On one particular Sunday morning I experienced my first clearly remembered awakening to the outside world.

Alexander was always portrayed by our teachers as the “bread basket” of the world because we, the citizens of Alexander and environs, thanks to our wheat fields, were feeding America; indeed the planet. From that I concluded that everyone in America, and perhaps the whole world, must know about us, and must surely be grateful. So, when a car stopped in front of the bar early one Sunday morning, as Butch and I searched the weeds for treasure, and the driver exited, looking decidedly drunk, and indicated that he had a question for us, I approached his car comfortably. Then he dropped a bomb that changed my world view forever. He asked “Is this a town? Does it have a name? Which way is Williston?”

My mind raced. “Is this a town? Does it have a name? Where is this guy from, Mars?”, I thought to myself. All the while, though, my mind was racing, processing the event, trying to make sense of it. I responded defiantly: “Of course it’s a town. Alexander, North Dakota. Population 300. Didn’t you see the sign when you drove in?” A part of me thought the man must be incredibly stupid not to know about Alexander. At the same time, a realization crept into my consciousness that there are folks out there who don’t know about us. Drunk, perhaps, but unknowing nevertheless.

The man then got back into his car, backed out, and “peeled rubber” as he set out again on his journey to who knew where. Perhaps Butch put the amazing incident out of his mind. Perhaps he didn’t even realize how amazing it was. For my part, I couldn’t leave it alone. For days I processed that incident, trying to make sense of it. I had undergone an epiphany from which I would never recover. It was the signal event that began my preparation for life in the wider world beyond Alexander.

10. Collecting License Plates

One of the great advantages of growing up in a small town located on a highway is that you come into contact with the outside world every few minutes. My young friends and I spent the endless months of our pre-summer job years (ages nine to eleven) hanging out at the Alexander spring, which was strategically placed on the Northwest corner of the town park, right along side U. S. Highway 85, which ran through town from north to south. It was my understanding at the time that Highway 85 was the major north to south road in the western hemisphere, running from the northern tip of Alaska to the southern tip of South America. It was no small treat, having such an important highway running through one’s town, and all of its travelers having to slow to 25 miles per hour, some of them even stopping to drink from our famous artesian spring, or to purchase gasoline at the cooperative gasoline station across the street and one block south.

One of our favorite activities, next to seeing how much water we could consume, and then lying on our backs and sloshing it back and forth by pushing on our swollen stomachs, was to take note of the license plates, and keep score on cars from out of state. Curiously, I don't remember how many out-of-state tag sightings I collected in those years. Perhaps others were better at the game I so I am blocking the memory.

A vivid recollection, however, was what we did when one of those passing cars would stop for gasoline. Seeing an out-of-state car pull over, we would all wait a brief interval, not wanting to look like we had nothing better to do, then we'd sort of run/stroll over to the filling station, walk around the car in a self-consciously, off-hand, evaluative way, sometimes commenting on the brand of tires and, if the hood was open, looking over the front fender at the engine. The idea was to appear knowledgeable, and at the same time assess the visitors reaction to us as we also looked them over. It was fun seeing what people from out of town looked like. In the course of repeating this routine many, many times, it slowly dawned on me that the visitors were also looking at us, and I began to suspect that they saw us in the same disassociative way that we saw them. I even began to suspect that some of them wondered if we were like little monkeys; not really fully human, like them. I didn't feel like a monkey, but I could see how they might think I was.

11. First Love

At age twelve I fell in love for the first time. Terry Nice was the daughter of a "custom combiner" who came up to Alexander early in the harvest season (from Kansas), and stayed for the summer.

I'm not sure how I met Terry, who was eleven years of age, but it must have been shortly after her family arrived because it seems that I knew her a very long time. She was slender, had short blond hair, very blue eyes, and was just beginning to show evidence of perky little breasts which I could see through the fabric of her cotton sun suit tops. I was shy, so our relationship was initiated and nurtured by her. For my own part, I couldn't imagine why such a beautiful, graceful, intelligent girl would have any interest in me.

It started with normal playing, and hanging out. Basically, she was cutting into time normally spent with my best friend Butch. Then one day, seemingly out of the clear blue sky, Terry suggested that we have a DATE. Yikes! I asked her what she meant, and she said that I could come by to get her Saturday evening after dinner, and we could go together to Ohnsager's soda fountain and share an ice cream sundae. Dutch treat, she said. I had to ask my mom what that meant.

It was too much for me to cope with, coming so unexpectedly. I stammered an excuse and fled to the safety of home. But it started me thinking, for the first time, about boy-girl stuff in an entirely new light.

Some days later my friend Butch, Terry, her ten year old sister Nicole and I went on an outing to Ragged Butte. While playing there, among the rocks and caves, Terry announced that she and Nicole wanted to have some privacy so that they could remove their "tops" and feel the cool

breeze. Butch and I assented, and walked away about fifty feet, leaving Terry and Nicole in a circular depression where they could not be seen by accident.

After a moment Butch suggested that we return and peek. I hesitantly complied, and we crawled over the rocks to a point where we could see the girls. Indeed, they had removed their “tops,” and the sight of beautiful Terry was almost more than I could bear. Even as I felt the thrill of seeing her budding femininity, however, I was washed by a flood of guilt, so quickly crawled away, blushing with shame. Butch stayed at his post perhaps a full minute, then crawled back to me, boasting of what he had seen. I never admitted to Terry what we had done, and from that moment felt diminished by my behavior. At the same time, I also I felt more excited than ever about our relationship because I realized that I was being taken seriously by a person who was almost a woman.

Over the days and evenings of that endless summer, my feelings for Terry grew ever stronger, but I lacked the courage to speak about it. She was ready for a real boy friend, and I was afraid to graduate from playmate. Something had to give. Then one day, probably as a result of early coaching from my mom about how to treat girls, the dawn came. I would purchase Terry a beautiful gift, perhaps jewelry, that would do my talking for me. I had the money. I only needed to deal with the mechanics of buying the gift, and then making delivery. Sigh! How would I ever manage either of those tasks?

I began to steal looks in the glass case where Sam and Velma Ohnsager displayed jewelry at Alexander’s one and only drug store, soda fountain and gift store. I had to be sly about it because I didn’t want to have to explain my interest. Finally, I settled on the perfect item, a silver plated bracelet that came in a nice little box and could be purchased for \$3. With an allowance of 25 cents per week, and “bottle hunting” being my only other significant income source, that was not an inconsiderable sum. Frankly, I would have gladly paid ten times \$3 to please Terry. Summoning my courage, I went into Ohnsagers early one morning when no other kids or adults were around, walked to the case, pointed, and ordered the item. Mrs. Ohnsager looked at me, smiled, said it was a nice selection, and asked who it was for. I blushed and lied, saying it was for my mom.

With that dreaded task behind me, the next step seemed insurmountable. No way could I summon the courage to just hand Terry the gift. If I did that she would probably kiss me, then run and tell the other kids, and I’d be mortified forever. Several days of agonized deliberation passed. I, with this huge secret, playing with Terry but unable to speak, praying that my mom wouldn’t talk to Mrs. Ohnsager, hoping no-one would find where I had hidden the gift. Then it came to me! I would sneak into Terry’s house when her family wasn’t home and simply put it on her dresser where it couldn’t be missed. That night, as Terry and her family drove to Williston to see a movie, Butch and I opened their back door with a knife, pacified their dog, and sneaked into Terry’s room with the gift. Then I ran home, praying for strength to face the consequences.

The next morning, as I lay on the living room rug playing solo monopoly, I heard Terry and Nicole crossing the driveway to our rear (kitchen) door. Suddenly Terry squealed delightedly to my mom: “Look at what I have, and I know who it’s from!”

The whole world came crashing down on me. My heart pounded, my head flushed, and I shot out the front door of our house like a bullet. I ran as fast as I could, down to the center of town, then left at the city park and east across town into a wheat field about a quarter mile to a tall, single cottonwood tree which was surrounded by five foot high pig weeds. This was one of my hideouts, With luck I would be safe here. So I huddled there, in the weeds, and cried and prayed, trying to figure out what to do next.

After a time – it seemed like a very long time – I composed myself, and feeling like a doomed man going to the scaffold, I walked home. As I reached the steps to our kitchen door, my mom appeared, looked down at me, and said: “Son. That was a nice thing you did.” Then she let it go. Later Terry, to my eternal relief, reacted similarly, thanking me but saying nothing else. My mom always knew how to handle things like this and, on reflection, I suspect that the two of them talked, woman to woman, and worked out a strategy to smooth my once in a lifetime transition from playmate to lover.

12. Learning To Face Fear

Ironically, just as Terry was the person who inspired me to begin to understand love, she was also the central player in my awakening to the importance of learning to face, rather than run from, fear.

During our wonderful summer together, Terry and I had developed our own little hiding place in a railroad box car that my father kept behind Grandma’s and Grandpa’s home. After harvest season it was often filled with wheat. This particular summer it was empty, so we used it as our special place.

Small town life for a twelve year old boy is anything but placid, as writers like to portray it in movies and books. For me, at least, it seemed more like an ongoing war to avoid humiliation and physical destruction, with the enemy my fellow children, ready to pounce at any moment. In Alexander there were two groups of boys my age, and these groups seemed always to be at war. Butch, who was the toughest kid in town, was my best friend, and afforded me protection when we were together. Also on my side were Johnny Skedsvold, Alan Quale, Johnny Hagen, Punky Melby, and a few others. On the other side, unfortunately, were a host of very bad hombres, the most fearsome of which was Keith Iverson. Keith’s dad was a very big man who coached baseball, didn’t mind swearing in public (my own father never swore anywhere) and through association probably gave Keith an edge in terms of developing a confident, tough guy demeanor. A number of other kids hung out with Keith – Dewey Ihli, Jimmy Hett and Andy Eikren, among them.

On the fateful day I am about to describe, Terry and I were playing together at our hide-out, fixing it up with room dividers. There was a need for something, a cardboard box, I believe, so I set out on my bike to find it, leaving Terry unprotected. Unfortunately, Keith and his band of marauders had seen us playing there, and decided to investigate. Just as they approached Terry, I rounded a corner on my bike, en route back to our hiding place, and saw her facing them like a

warier goddess. Brandishing a pig-weed, she seemed to be beating them off. Then she spotted me, waved, and shouted: “Help me!”

My heart pounded. I was being called to fight the most fearsome guys in all Alexander. I would certainly be beaten and humiliated in front of my true love. Any one of those guys could “have me for lunch” if he chose to. Thinking fast, I turned my head and bicycle away, pretending not to have seen or heard anything, and peddled home.

When Terry ran to get me, fifteen minutes later, breathlessly describing how she had fought off the bad guys to protect our hide-out, I felt a searing shame that is with me still. I never admitted to Terry that I had seen her but was a coward, and we carried on our relationship just as if I were worthy of her, but I knew differently.

From that date to the present, I have never faced fear without thinking of that incident, and how much more painful it was to run away than it would have been to face my enemies and deal with whatever pain they might inflict. I can’t say that it cured me from cowardice instantly, but it started me down a path from which I have never departed. In my adult life I have faced many threats, both personally and professionally, and though feeling fear, like a normal person, have never allowed it to influence my behavior. Is this because I’m insensitive, or naturally courageous? Not on your life! I recall how terrible I felt when I abandoned Terry, and the rest is easy.

13. Life After Life

In the fall of my twelfth year I had an adventure I never understood until more than thirty years later, upon reading a book review in *The Washington Post*. A physician/psychiatrist, Dr. Elizabeth Kubler Ross, had published a book recounting hundreds of interviews with patients who had been either clinically dead, or unconscious from accidents that might have killed them. In the interviews many of the patients told of encountering God, Jesus or sometimes simply a being or light, and undergoing a “judgement-like” experience in which they reviewed their past life in a gentle, reassuring way. The experience matches well with descriptions of the first stage of after-life made in the Tibetan Book of the Dead, published around 600 AD, and was called, by Dr. Ross, life after life.

Now, on to my own experience.

Late one night, Butch and I were on top of Alexander’s Masonic Temple, at the crown of the pitch roof, attempting to open a window so that we could gain access. We had heard that the Masons had boxes of costumes, candles and miscellaneous ceremonial paraphernalia and we wanted to check it out. Suddenly, we heard a noise somewhere below us. Fearing detection, we ran the several steps down the side of the roof and jumped across the five foot alley to the flat roof on my father’s appliance store next door. The plan was to cross the flat roof, race down an outdoor fire stairs, and then flee to safety somewhere on the street.

As I landed on my father’s store roof in the dark with one foot beside the other, my forehead hit a wire clothesline, knocking me backward toward the alley. I must have known that I was a

“goner” because, as I flailed my arms, trying to keep from falling backwards to the alley below, I had my very own after life experience.

It was a wonderful, leisurely encounter with a higher being, all of it in Technicolor. My life was reviewed in a loving, reassuring way. It seemed to me that I was talking to God!

Whatever it was, it couldn't have lasted very long because, as I caught my balance on the edge of the roof, Butch was only two steps closer to the staircase. I ran behind him down the steps and to the edge of town. As we ran for the cover of darkness, I gasped breathlessly: “Butch. You'll never believe this. When I hit that clothesline I saw my whole life.” Butch looked back over his shoulder briefly and responded: “Big deal.”

So --- I never brought that up again, putting it out of my mind entirely until I read about Dr. Ross' research.

14. A Model For Marriage and Parenting

I can't close an accounting of my childhood without talking about my mom and dad, and how their relationship impacted me. All of us learn our most important behavior models from our parents, and of the many models I learned thus one of the most important was a concept of marriage and parenting.

As long as I knew my mother and father I never witnessed an argument between them, and I never once heard one say an unfavorable thing about the other. I think that they must have also enjoyed their intimate moments together, because I recall, as a very small boy, from time to time running into their bedroom unannounced, early in the morning, and they always seemed to be tangled up with one another, sheets and blankets awry.

My dad had a problem with binge drinking. However, at the time I didn't see it as a problem. I just assumed that is what father's did. On the 17th of Norway (Norwegian Independence Day), for example, he and his cousin Dean would abandon their respective businesses (Dean his farm implement dealership and Dad his appliance store) and spend the day eating raw hamburger with limburger cheese at the community grocery store while standing behind the butcher counter washing it down with beer, then later they'd adjourn to the Alexander Improvement Club, which I know almost nothing about because children were not allowed entry. My mother was uncomfortable with these incidents, I sensed, but I never heard her find fault with my father. Often, when he would come home for dinner after drinking with his friends, he would be very jolly, joking with we children about one thing or another, and I thought him very amusing and wondered why my mother was not more impressed.

My mom had lady friends, and occasional activities outside the home, but as far as I could see her life really revolved around we kids. She, like my dad, always made me feel special, and that was important because I didn't particularly like being just one of four children. Mom had such a gentle, sensitive way, and to me she was the most beautiful woman I could imagine. On one occasion, probably when I was about seven, I walked into her room when she had just emerged from the bath, and caught her naked, in front of the mirror, brushing her shoulder length, brown

hair. She was so beautiful, and curvy and slender that I felt stunned. It didn't seem like a mom should be so magnificent.

Evenings, when we weren't planing games together (there was never a TV in our home), Mom would read to us children. She would sit in the stuffed arm chair, and we'd either pile on the arms, or on the floor at her feet, and listen to her soft, gentle cadence. My favorite story, which she read many times, was *The Littlest Angel*.

So I had parents who loved one another, a mom who was always sensitive to my feelings and made me feel safe when the world threatened, and a dad I worshipped, who provided strong ethical guidance yet, in so many small ways I am still discovering, while encouraging independence and resourcefulness, was quietly giving me support or encouragement where needed.

I had a lot of problems, as a child, timidity probably being the greatest of them, but no matter how ominous the world seemed, I always took comfort in knowing that my parents were the best in town. I learned from them the meaning of a really good marriage; the need to work at a relationship, emphasizing the good parts while protecting one's children, as much as possible, from the bad. And I learned a model for parenting that I strove, less successfully, to emulate when my own turn came around

Part II ADOLESCENCE

1. What Do You Do When You Can't Throw A Ball, Catch A Ball, Sing Or Dance?

They say that every child, upon entering adolescence, is crushed with personal insecurities. Whether they emerge from real or imagined inadequacies is probably unimportant. I know that now, but as I experienced adolescence I did not, and goodness was life hard!

In small towns like Alexander and Zap, where I spent my youth, there aren't enough kids to enable one to separate into like-minded groups, so there is only room for one ethos, and it is what it is. If you want to fit in you accept that ethos, and take your appropriate place in life's pecking order. In small towns, populated for the most part by humble people from working class backgrounds, inevitably male success revolves around athletic achievement and assertiveness. Overlay that ethos with the culture of public schools anywhere, i.e. emphasis on group participation (How else can one manage large numbers of children?) and you get the picture. If you wanted to be respected as a "guy" in rural North Dakota you participated in, and hopefully excelled at, group sports such as baseball, basketball or football.

Along side the world of sports/games, there was another world, where "guy" life intersected with "girl" life. This world took on increasing importance as you matured. In this world we kids stood side by side in school and church choirs or public social events and sang in unison, or we met on the dance floor to practice the delicate arts of dating and courtship.

So where did I fit into these parallel worlds? Well, for reasons that are still not clear to me, I could not (and can not to this day) throw a ball, catch a ball, sing or dance. I was one of the larger boys in my classes, and probably of average strength, but seemed to lack the eye-hand coor-

dination to throw and catch. It didn't make sense to me, so I kept trying for many years, but to this day have not mastered the art. I could stand right under the net and miss shot after shot with the basketball. I could rear back to throw a baseball from right field toward home plate, and inevitably it would land somewhere between first base and the pitcher's mound. I could stand under a fly ball, analyzing my position, wind vector, and direction to a fare-thee-well, and inevitably the ball would land behind me, or bounce off my glove.

Inability to throw or catch a ball was no trivial matter. Think about it! Four times a day, at morning recess, lunch hour, afternoon recess and after school, sides were chosen among the boys to make-up the softball or basketball team of the moment. I had friends who wanted to choose me, of course, but just how much loyalty can one expect? Everyone remembers losing the day before because I dropped a fly ball for an easy out, or I went 0 for 5 at the plate in a game with a final score of 25 to 21. So what was it like for me? Four times a day I'd be chosen last, or next to last, and then sent shamefacedly to right field, where I could do the least damage. I would stand out there, praying that no one would hit the ball my way because I knew that I'd let down my buddies again, facing further humiliation.

The social events involving singing and dancing were also difficult, though less serious because there were viable strategies to minimize failure there. When being asked to sing, I could mouth the words without actually making a sound, or I could sing very softly so as not to be heard. Avoiding humiliation on the dance floor offered even more options. One such option was to pretend that I wasn't interested; that I was too tough to dance. There were always a few guys on the fringes of dances, often school dropouts, or lonely guys from other towns, who hung out at local dances smoking, sporting leather jackets and long hair, and trying to look vicious. I could always stand with them, pretending to be tough and indifferent myself. I was not comfortable there either, unfortunately, because it put me at risk of being abused by them, maybe having to fight someone. Nevertheless, on more than one occasion I chose to risk possible humiliation among the tough guys in preference to certain humiliation among the popular kids I would have preferred to join.

Another dance strategy, which I eventually made my own, was to specialize in slow tunes where one could cope by simply holding the girl close and moving about one step at a time, trying not to crush her toes. As I grew older I discovered that this worked rather well, and by my late teens, when I had overcome most of my shyness around girls, I found it preferable to standing on the fringes with the tough guys. The girls, at that point, seemed not to mind. They seemed to view dances as much an opportunity to interact with guys as to demonstrate their agility and rhythm.

That pretty well captures my adolescence. A constant struggle to avoid, or minimize humiliation, and a constant reminder that I was not good at any of the things that seemed important. It was confusing. Deep inside I felt special; that my destiny was to do something significant. All the evidence around me, however, pointed to the conclusion that I was a dead loser in every way that was important. My parents didn't seem to regard me as a loser, but I was fairly certain that if they knew more about what my life was like outside the home they would feel differently. So I made it a practice to keep my failures secret, or at least pretend that they were of no concern to me. I had to keep my parents believing in me or I'd be truly alone.

It didn't help that my brother Bob was good at sports. Why was I so alone in my failings? Had my Dad been a loser too, and now he was able to fake it because grown-ups aren't constantly tested like kids are? Was this some sort of genetic flaw? Maybe I was actually homosexual, whatever that means, and hadn't figured it out yet. My prospects for a rewarding life seemed very bleak during my early teen years, yet somehow, in the back of my mind, I had this feeling that life would get better, though I knew not how.

2. Politics

In 1955, when I was twelve, my father opted to pursue an ambition of many years and run for a seat in the North Dakota state legislature. McKenzie County had long been represented by another local citizen, Art Link, who farmed south of town. Art was a Democrat, and my father a Republican. I was not yet able to understand much of what transpired, but I remember that Dad seemed very excited and happy during his campaign, that he printed various leaflets and brochures, and he spent long days and evenings away from home. He said it was important to shake hands with the voters, so was driving from farm to farm talking to people.

In the end Dad lost to Art, as did everyone else who opposed him during a lifetime of politics. I didn't know if I'd ever met Mr. Link, but assumed that if he had beaten my father he must be a bad man. When I expressed this opinion to Dad he surprised me with a mild rebuke, saying that Art was a very fine man and a capable legislator.

In the end Dad's political defeat proved an important experience for me because it taught me, at an early age, that rejection doesn't just happen to kids. Even my dad, who was the biggest man I could imagine, could be rejected. It helped me to feel less alone, and at the same time piqued my interest in public service.

3. Style Verses Substance

In 1956, at age thirteen, my siblings and I were uprooted from our lives in rural North Dakota to face a new world unlike anything we had imagined. Dad sold the family farm, business and life-long possessions and moved us all to Boulder Creek, a small tourist community in the Redwood Forest just south of San Francisco, California.

Following his poor showing in the campaign for the state legislature, and the death of his mom (grandpa had died several years earlier), Dad kept what I imagine was a life-long bargain with Mom and agreed to relocate. She had always wanted to live in a place with trees and less provinciality. California seemed to be that place.

For we kids, California could have been Mars. I began to see my siblings as more than an annoyance. We felt so different from the other kids at Sunnyvale Elementary and Junior High that I was glad they were nearby. Dad may have been even more terrified, though he put on a brave front for the rest of us. He was trying to master California's highways, large and crowded cities, a new career as a real estate broker, and an occasional gig as a substitute teacher at Sunnyvale Junior High.

School was terrifying. Accustomed to a class of twelve kids I had known almost from birth, suddenly I was thrown in with a class of thirty-five complete strangers. And there were different groups. For the first time I could see the opportunity for choice among friends, and subsequently among cultures. Here was a world where one could be a science dork and be popular in his own little circle, or alternatively an athlete, tough guy, mainstreamer, etc. Hmmn! Where would life put me, and what would happen if I were separated from my siblings?

I found myself drifting, looking for the niche. There was a group of about twenty kids who seemed to form the core, popular group, and they reached out to both my brother and me. I think that it was the girls that chose to include me. I couldn't tell what my brother's appeal was. He was having even more trouble than I adapting to the new culture, despite his athletic ability. I surmised that it was because he had left an environment where he had status. I had been an abject failure in the prior environment so basically had nothing to lose.

For a time I accepted the invitations of the popular kids, but stole moments with some of the tough guys on the fringe. I sensed that I had a better chance of acceptance with these guys because they were less popular. J.D. Martin, a small, leather jacketed boy from Texas, was my friend for awhile. He taught me to kick open lockers, and tried to coach me on attitude. I don't think I learned much.

Later I hooked up with a stocky little guy named Jimmy, whose dad was a policeman. He also had a tough attitude and was happy to mentor me. The price I paid for a relationship with Jimmy was constant harassment. Though I was much taller than he, he was more aggressive and enjoyed bullying me. Until that point in my life the only person I had ever fought with was my brother, who similarly "ragged on me" for my many failings, mostly in athletics. One day Jimmy wore me down and I "snapped." We were climbing over an eight foot fence into a tennis court and as Jimmy lowered himself to the ground, while insulting me, I turned toward him and popped him in the groin twice with my right knee. It was a very short fight. I was amazed at how quickly Jimmy's attitude changed, and I felt elated at my new found power. Then the other shoe dropped.

One of Jimmy's friends was an older kid, Tom Reese. Where most of the eighth graders at Sunnyvale were thirteen years of age, Tom was sixteen. Though not bigger than the rest of us, he was vastly more mature physically, looked really convincing in his black leather jacket, and rumor was that he carried a knife and he and an older brother were professional burglars. No one messed with Tom Reese, and when I learned through the grapevine that Tom planned to avenge my assault on Jimmy I knew I was a dead man.

The word came to me during shop class. Bob Dunn, one of the popular kids, whispered to me that Tom planned to wait for me after school. Bob wanted to know what I would do. I felt like I'd been hit by a train when I learned of my fate, and could only think that I wanted to be safely home with my mom and dad. At the same time, I needed to get through that moment without disgracing myself. So I bluffed. I told Bob I was not concerned. If Tom Reese wanted to wait for me after school, so be it. Bob warned me about the knife, and I just shrugged. I wanted to plead that he form a posse of popular kids to walk with me, but knew that if I did that I'd be branded a coward forever. So I stayed with the bluff all through shop which was the last class of

the day. Then, consumed by dread, and wondering if I'd ever see my parents again, I set out on the half-mile walk to our home.

Shortly into the journey, sure enough, Tom appeared on the other side of the road, following a parallel path. I looked at him, saying nothing, and continued toward home. Nothing happened. I couldn't believe it. I began to think I might actually pull it off. Maybe he doesn't want to challenge me. Maybe he thinks I'm a tough guy. This is amazing!

For me it was an important realization. I understood, for the first time, that you don't actually have to be tough to be perceived as a tough guy. All you need to do is convince others that you are tough. The world of perceptions was opened to me. All my father had taught was substance. Now I was beginning to understand that there is another thing called style, and that the real world of relationships is composed of both elements. I had learned a powerful new tool for coping.

4. Pinky's Wife

The summer of 1957 was the first truly happy period of my life. The year in California had done wonders for my self confidence. I had learned, in leaving the cocoon of my childhood, that the world was vastly larger than I had imagined, and that the culture I had grown up in was only one of many. That realization freed me of my terrible fear of failure, or of non acceptance, and in the process gave me the confidence to find my own role. So, when Mom and Dad drove us home to Alexander to explore the possibility of a return to North Dakota, I was a different person. I was ready to self-realize in ways I had not imagined.

The circumstances couldn't have been better. Shortly after returning to Alexander Dad found a position as a public school administrator in a small town about 150 miles away, so he announced that he and Mom would return to California to pack our possessions and we kids could stay in Alex. My brother and I, along with several other kids, had established a permanent bivouac at an abandoned log cabin in downtown Alexander, so we were given permission to remain there. It was a little boy's dream. Six weeks in a shack with a half dozen other kids, a wood stove for cooking, and no parental supervision.

The first thing we did was start a poker game, and this continued, with interruptions for eating and late night mischief, for the entire six weeks. We would roll out of our bed rolls at about 7:00 a.m., scrounge up breakfast somewhere, then sit down to the card table. We would play all day, with the aforementioned interruptions, and into the evening playing by kerosene lamplight, only stopping when it was time for the last dirty deed of the day. Usually that translated to raiding someone's garden for sweet peas, carrots, watermelon – whatever was good to eat uncooked. Our second favorite late night activity was peeping into windows, usually targeting the homes of girls our own age, but in true outlaw fashion, if an easy target presented itself we couldn't pass it up.

So it was in the summer of 1957 that I and my colleagues, most of the seventh and eighth grade boys of Alexander Public School, did the most disgusting deed of our young lives.

One of the local citizens, Pinky Webber, had recently come home with a young bride. Neither of them were really young, mind you, but she was fit. So when we walked past Pinky's house about 2:00 a.m. that morning, and saw a light on in Pinky's living room, we were curious. We cautiously approached from the front, where a light was shining through the living room window, and saw Pinky sitting at a table looking sad and tired, a half-empty liquor bottle in front of him. When you grow up in a place like Alexander, you know what drunk looks like, and so we knew that Pinky wasn't going to be very dangerous to us. We then quietly sneaked around to the side of his house facing the street to check out the bedroom. What we discovered there set my young heart racing.

Lying on the bed, covered only by a sheet, was Pinky's wife, and it was clear that she was not wearing night clothes. We had, in our sights, a **real, live, naked lady**. My first instinct was to run for it, but my role in Alexander had changed since my return from California. I was now viewed as a kid who could find and handle mischief as well as anyone. Timidity was no longer allowed. And frankly, once I overcame my initial shock, and noted that the other kids were also holding their ground, I decided that my role in this caper was to provide leadership.

What was needed, at this point, was for someone to figure out how to get that sheet off of Mrs. Pinky. How could that be accomplished when she was on the other side of a screen window? A tree branch, I thought. Whispering among ourselves, we broke a slender, eight foot branch off of a nearby tree, and with the help of my colleagues we were able to pull the screen window open several inches; just enough for me to pass the branch through. Once in, it was like a surgical procedure, however with a patient who was only lightly dozing. I lifted the sheet ever so carefully, and slowly inched it down her body about half-way. At this point, there were a half-dozen young noses pressed to the screen window, about three feet from Mrs. Pinky's head, and our hearts were beating so loudly you could have heard them from the other side of town if you were still awake.

The whole incident lasted about twenty minutes, with Mrs. Pinky stirring, pulling the sheet back up, me nudging it back down, and finally her getting up, standing and stretching in front of the window as we collectively wet ourselves, and then her sensing that someone was out there and shouting for Pinky to come. Her shout scared us all half to death, and we ran en masse into the darkness. One of the kids, Alan, I think, turned so fast that he lost a shoe so had to return and retrieve it. We were thrilled beyond description by the amazing deed we had accomplished, but we also knew that we'd done wrong and if caught the price would be very high.

The next morning, dreading that our "gooses might be cooked," the group of us that shared the summer bivouac, decided that we needed to get out of town until the trouble had blown over. We hitchhiked north from Alexander, eventually ending up in Fairview, Montana, about twenty miles distant, where we were able to persuade a bartender to allow us to shoot pool all afternoon in his establishment. When we returned home that evening there was talk on the street of an incident at Pinky Webber's house, but the consensus was that it had been Mrs. Pinky's imagination. Whew!

5. Holding On To God (Part I)

From the earliest years I can remember I have had a relationship with God, and when life was most difficult that relationship was most important. In the beginning my communion with God was rather trivial. As a small boy I attended Sunday School classes with the other children, learned the usual Bible stories, mostly New Testament lore that emphasized love and forgiveness, and sang those wonderful hymns that were prominent in the American Lutheran Church hymnal of the time. My dad's cousin by marriage, Dorothy Jacobson, played the piano for us, and another cousin of dad's, Jan Hinman, directed the singing. I thought of both women as aunts, though I never called them that, and felt quite proud of the relationship because, between them, they seemed to keep the entire Sunday School operation running.

My favorite song, which I was able to sing on key so long as I remained a soprano, was: "I love to tell the story. 'Twill be my *fame and glory*. To tell the old, old story. Of Jesus and his love." I knew that I wasn't much good at anything, and liked the idea of achieving *fame and glory* by telling folks about Jesus. It started me thinking about a career in the ministry.

As I matured, so did my relationship with God. It seemed that the further life took me from my Mom's and Dad's reassuring protection, which public school and street life inevitably did, the more I filled the vacuum by talking with God. It worked well for me because no one else had to know that I was doing it. I could talk with Him about anything, including my greatest humiliations, and I didn't risk losing face with my friends, my parents or anyone else.

So God became my constant companion. When it was time to choose up sides for a softball game, I would pray not to be chosen last. When I was chosen last, I would pray not to reveal my humiliation to my colleagues. When I was sent to right field, I would pray that nothing would be hit toward me, and when the ball did come my way I would pray not to fumble it. At the end of my worst days, I would pray for God to show me something that I could do well (deep inside me I knew that there must be something about me that was redeeming), and when all else failed I would thank God for giving me the most wonderful parents in Alexander.

This spiritual relationship, in which God helped me but demanded nothing in return, worked for me until, at age twelve, I began formal religious instruction per the dictates of the Lutheran Church. I enrolled in confirmation classes, along with my colleagues, where we were treated to adult instruction as to what it means to be a Lutheran. From that moment forward my tidy little religious world began to unravel.

The first thing that confused me was the lack of respect from my pals and me that was tolerated by the pastor. Where Jan Hinman had brooked no "horseplay," the main man, the pastor, seemed confused by it. Every session grew worse than the one before it, and I joined the mayhem enthusiastically. For reasons I could not understand, God did not intervene. Before long the entire confirmation class at Alexander's Lutheran Church had developed a thorough disrespect for religious authority. I still talked to God regularly, and felt strengthened by the relationship, but I didn't see him in confirmation class. How could that be?

My confirmation debacle was interrupted for a year, as our family relocated to California for nine months, then resumed at Hettinger Lutheran Church, once again in North Dakota. Classes there were orderly, but the emphasis on learning ritual, as opposed to spiritual growth, left me feeling increasingly disconnected with this Lutheran God. I also was troubled by the pastor's penchant for jokes about Catholics, and the impression I received from him that Catholics had no shot at getting to heaven because of their reliance on prayer through priests and idols (presumably statues of the Virgin Mother) rather than direct communication with Jesus. It all seemed vaguely bizarre, though absent anyone to talk to about it I never moved beyond feeling troubled. What about my friends Danny and Marilyn Sjedsvold, in Alexander, who had been raised Catholic? Did this mean they would burn in hell? Shouldn't someone warn them?

The culmination of my formal religious instruction was a confirmation ceremony at which all we new member applicants were invited to participate in our first communion, consume the body and blood of Christ alongside the grown-ups, and be received as adult members of the church. Unfortunately, like so many things in life, the right to join that ceremony came with an elephant sized condition – one that was only revealed to us in the last lesson of our two-year curriculum. We had to ask God's forgiveness for past sins (that was easy) and RESOLVE NEVER TO SIN AGAIN.

Yikes! Why wasn't I warned? At age thirteen there were so many things I hadn't yet done, and wanted to do desperately, that were surely sinful. For starters, I wanted to have sex with a girl some day, and I knew that would be sinful. Sigh!

Weeks of tortured self analysis followed from the time of the fateful revelation to the final ceremony. I knew that I couldn't lie to God, but I also knew that if I accepted communion I would be unfaithful to my church. Meantime, none of my confirmation class colleagues seemed bothered by this condition, and all the while the adults in the church were professing pride and confidence in us all.

I couldn't "buck the system." I went to the ceremony consumed by shame and dread. As I drank the wine I sneaked a look at my classmates, and they seemed untroubled. I waited for God to strike us all with lightning. It never happened. I left the church that night knowing that I had lied to God because of social pressure, and vowed never again to take communion as a Lutheran.

6. Second Love

Our return to North Dakota was facilitated by my father taking a job as Superintendent of Schools for the tiny village of Haynes. With a population of about seventy-five souls, Haynes boasted a grain elevator, a general store, and a school building. The streets were gravel roads, and the houses were scattered about with lots of vacant spaces between them.

Among the first people we met in Haynes were our neighbors across the road, Janis and Deedee Carter. Deedee was my age, cute and flirtatious, and rather well developed for a girl of fourteen. We hit it off instantly. In fact, Deedee liked me a lot. Given my legendary inadequacies, and the many other boys who were more confident, could run faster, jump higher and throw a ball farther, I was mystified that she found me interesting. I certainly liked her.

There was another problem with the relationship – a deeply personal problem. I was fourteen, and still not in puberty. Deedee, at fourteen, was built like the proverbial “brick shithouse.” Everyone wanted to date Deedee. Even Jake Mitchell, a senior and Haynes’ top athlete, vied for her attention.

As usual, I didn’t know how to be any more than a friend, so the relationship never went even so far as a kiss. Deedee drove me crazy with her magnificent cleavage, and by leaning up against me in the library so that I could feel her whole body, and I did nothing. I ached to be a man for her; to take her by the hand, hold and kiss her. All the while that small voice inside me said: “Ray, you can’t. You aren’t even in puberty. You don’t deserve her.”

I never saw Deedee again, after that year in Haynes. I thought of her at least a thousand times, and followed her career as she finished high school, moved to Denver, where she worked in ladies fashion, and then, at age thirty-five, died of cancer.

7. The Summer of 1958

Where the summer of 1957 was my first truly happy time, the summer of 1958 was perhaps my most glorious. It was a seminal time in the growth of my self confidence; a time when the transition from boy to man accelerated to light speed. Finally I was making my mark.

a. My First Bank Robbery

The summer started with a construction job. Pete Bitterman, a local contractor in Zap, was employed to build a sidewalk along the length of the road on which my family lived. He also had the usual portfolio of barns to move, foundations to build, etc. Pete offered me employment shortly after school adjourned for the summer, and I eagerly accepted without discussing remuneration. The minimum wage in 1958 was \$1.00, so I figured that a hard working kid of fifteen should be worth \$0.75. I was too timid to discuss the matter with my new employer.

I was pretty raw, and I remember fighting Pete for two days on the issue of how to throw a shovel of dirt. He insisted that I was doing it wrong, scattering the load unnecessarily, and I thought him a foolish old man, not to mention short. I was around 5’11” by then, and Pete about 5’1”. Superiority in height should count for something, I reasoned. Somehow, after two days of scolding, Pete got me to throw dirt correctly. Once I understood the technique I felt ashamed, and a little voice inside warned me to check my arrogance. Maybe Pete’s lifetime of experience really was worth something.

After two weeks labor in the hot summer sun, Pete gave me my first paycheck. When I divided the hours worked into the amount received, I discovered that I was earning only \$0.50 per hour. Disappointed, I decided to try to do better elsewhere. I didn’t want to worry my parents, so opted for deception.

On the Saturday morning after payday I gave all of my money to Mom except \$10, and told her that I planned to hitchhike the 100 miles to Alexander to spend the week-end visiting with Butch and friends.

It was a four hour trip across western North Dakota's gravel and scoria roads to Alexander, usually about five rides, and by the time I arrived I had a plan. Butch and I would set out together to find work, and we wouldn't stop until we were successful.

I found Butch hanging out, with no summer job, and game to go along with my plan. Unfortunately, he had no money. Not even a dollar. Butch and I had long fancied ourselves budding young outlaws, and during our many earlier adventures sneaking into buildings, shoplifting comic books, raiding gardens and the like, we had even adopted street names. He was Blade, connoting brawn, and I was Slade, connoting brains. So it was not too much of a stretch for us to come up with the idea of financing our prospective adventure by robbing a bank.

Alexander had recently become the site of the newest branch of Williston National Bank. Sam Ohnsager had partitioned off the rear corner of his variety store and installed a safe, change trays and a glass window with a small opening for passing through bills, checks and change. Our plan was simple and, we thought, brilliant. We would enter the store when Sam was alone, I would occupy him elsewhere in the store looking at merchandise, and Butch would slip to the rear corner, extend his skinny fifteen-year old arm under the glass opening, and clean out the quarter tray.

We entered the Alexander Branch of Williston National Bank as planned, when no other customers were present, I nervously bid Sam's attention to the display case furthest from the bank window, and Butch, the bravest kid I had ever known, disappeared to the back of the store. A minute later, Butch strolled by, saying he was going out, I excused myself, and we hit the street as full fledged bank robbers.

The fear and elation were almost more than I could bear. Without packs of any kind (clothes, toothbrushes, etc.) we set off on our adventure to find gainful employment. Five minutes after making outlaw history, we were on the side of Highway 85 overlooking Alexander, thumbs out, \$10 in my pocket and \$5 worth of quarters in Butch's, feeling like Jesse and Frank James.

b. Looking For Shorty

When I came up with the idea of putting my thumb out and traveling until I found work, I didn't have any particular destination in mind. I just figured the more people we asked for employment, the better the chance of finding a job. Whether we traveled East, South or West was immaterial to me.

Butch, however, had a plan that seemed to be the proverbial "no-brainer." His dad, Shorty Ohm, was making big money as a "cat skinner" on a very large construction job, an Air Force base, in Great Falls, Montana, just 400 miles west of Alexander. All we had to do was find our way to Great Falls, Shorty would welcome us with open arms, and the rest would be easy. We could imagine ourselves returning to North Dakota in the fall with pockets full of money, and reputa-

tions that would make us legends in our own time. Meantime, on the way we'd look for work as well. Heaven knows how long we could travel on \$15.

So, off we went. The drill was simple. We'd hook a ride, tell the driver we wanted work, and if he didn't have work for us we'd ask him to let us out the first time we came to a construction site, someone loading a truck, men with shovels, whatever. We'd approach our target asking for work, they'd look at the two gangly fifteen year-olds and tell us to "beat it", and we'd put our thumbs out again. At meal times we'd find a restaurant with hiding places nearby, sit near the door and order whatever suited us. When we finished the entree, we'd order a dessert that required a trip to the kitchen, usually ice cream. When the waiter went to the rear for our dessert, we'd bolt for the front door and the predetermined hiding place. When folks were finished looking for us, if indeed they even tried, we'd dust ourselves off, hike to the edge of town, and put out our thumbs. Life was so sweet we couldn't stop grinning.

After several days travel, and more employment turn-downs that I can remember, we arrived at the outskirts of Great Falls, Montana. I felt scared. First, I didn't really know Butch's dad. Shorty only came home to Alexander during the winter, when construction work was impossible due to snow and ice. When he was there he was usually in the bar drinking, and on the few occasions I'd seen him at home, while Butch and I played, he had little to say to us. Nevertheless, Butch was confident that we'd get help, and there was no one I trusted more than my best friend.

We believed that Shorty was staying in a hotel, and because he was making big money as a "cat skinner" we figured it would be a nice one. So we started out at the best place in town. We entered the lobby, walked to the desk, Butch introduced himself (he was a much better talker than I), giving his name and saying that he was looking for Shorty Ohm, his dad. Folks didn't know Shorty at the best hotel, nor the second best, and so on until, as evening approached and we worried about where we would sleep, we were visiting some nasty looking "flop houses" on the wrong side of town.

Then we hit "pay dirt." The desk person at a seedy little hotel in a dreary neighborhood listened to Butch's presentation for a minute then exclaimed: "Shorty? You Shorty's kid? Shorty really has a kid? God damn! Mother fucker! You really Shorty's kid? Hey! This guy says he's Shorty's kid! Shorty really does have a kid! I'll be God damned!"

At the end of all the exclaiming and cussing between the desk clerk and the several drunks that were hanging around the lobby, we were presented with the keys to Shorty's room. It had been a long day, and we were both worn down by the difficulty we'd had finding Shorty's lair, so we fell asleep.

I awoke to the sound of an explosion accompanied by blinding light, bolted upright in bed, and beheld a terrifying image. Five feet from where I and my outlaw companion cowered was a short, burley, profile wearing a sleeveless undershirt, hair rising from the arms and shoulders, and square shapes at the end of each arm. Shorty, with a six-pack of beer in each hand, had kicked the door open, flooding the room with light from the hallway. Seeing movement in the dark room, as we bolted upright in the bed, he shouted in a voice that could have filled a gymna-

sium: “God damn! Mother fucker! Son of a bitch! What the hell is going on here?” and so on. Butch cried: “Dad! Dad! It’s me, Butch!”

From that turbulent introduction to Shorty until he drove us to the eastern side of Great Falls with instructions to “Get the hell back home to your mommy.” only about six hours passed. Turns out Butch’s instincts were wrong. Shorty was not impressed by our moxie, traveling across Montana in search of employment, and he had no plans to help us. Once again we were on our own, but this time thumbing in the direction from which we had come.

c. At Last A Man

The summer of 1958 had a happy ending for me, and marked the beginning of my transition to manhood. Butch and I continued to ask our driver benefactor to let us out every time we came to a sign of economic activity, and on a dusty road twenty miles south of Watford City, North Dakota, just north of Theodore Roosevelt National Park, we found a crew that was so hard up for laborers that they’d take a chance on us.

We couldn’t believe our good fortune. The pay was \$1.35 per hour, the work week was 65 hours, with time and a half for over-time, there was a milk barn near the work site where we could join some of the other men and sleep for \$2 per night, and there was a cook wagon on-site where we could eat for \$3 per day. We were ecstatic.

That evening, after our first day’s work, I called my mom to report. It had been many days since I told her I was traveling north to Alexander for the week-end, and I had not checked in because I feared that my parents would not approve of our little plan. They were amazing! Mom picked up the phone and I blurted out that I was ok, had a wonderful job paying \$1.35 per hour plus overtime, was sleeping in a barn, eating in a cook shack, and would be home Sunday to tell more. She sighed, and then passed the phone to Dad. My dad asked about the sleep arrangement, and the men who shared it with us, and said that he looked forward to seeing me Sunday. No one, I marveled, had parents as understanding as mine.

Butch and I were too immature for the responsibilities we were given, so when the crew was cut back several weeks later we were among those released. It was nearly summer’s end anyway, so it didn’t matter. Meantime, we’d had adventures cleaning culverts, raking rocks off of hillsides, laying pipe, jumping stakes for the survey crews and holding stop signs to prevent highway traffic from running into our equipment. Each day my confidence grew, and I began to understand that my physical inadequacies (throwing, catching, singing and dancing) were relatively less important in the working world. All these guys cared about was could I get up at dawn and work in the hot sun until dark, and if I could they would pay me more money than I’d dreamed possible. I was beginning to get a glimmer of my own self worth and it felt really good.

d. A Chip Off The Old Block

Late one Sunday afternoon that summer my father offered to drive me the sixty plus miles North, back to my job site at Theodore Roosevelt National Park. I preferred to assert my self reliance

by hitching the whole distance, but also wanted to spend some time with Dad, so agreed to be driven about halfway, to the highway intersection at Killdeer.

On the way we talked quietly about life, me too shy to really divulge much of what was on my mind, and my father careful not to be intrusive. As he pulled over to the roadside, at my getting off place, I must have said something that touched him, because he chuckled, and said: “Son, you’re a chip off the old block.”

I felt such a rush of pleasure from what I took to be a high compliment that I flushed. I couldn’t look at him, or acknowledge his remark, because I would have cried. The rest of the afternoon, while walking and hitching back to my little bivouac in the milk barn, I mulled over what my father had said, and felt good and secure. Things were coming together for me.

8. My Athletic Career

In the small town North Dakota of the 1950s, high school sports was the primary community activity in which all citizens could join. There was still no television, so leisure activities consisted of drinking and/or playing cards or other parlor games with friends and family, or joining with the entire community to cheer for the local high school sports team.

This had the effect of putting tremendous pressure on all children, from an early age, to prepare for, and then play, their expected role in the community’s “sports machine.” Kids were looked upon as assets to be nurtured and developed for their role in this system. Three or four boys in a farm family might commonly be referred to as “a basketball team” as they sat side by side in church at Sunday service.

As a result of this sports culture, I knew from a very early age that I absolutely must learn to play at least one sport well. I was tall, so from about age eight I worked diligently on my hook shot and jump shot, figuring that my sports destiny, if I had one, was to play center or forward on the basketball team. I watched older kids play, trying to copy them, and I practiced, practiced and practiced. Unfortunately, even though I could visualize shooting the ball into the basket, I simply couldn’t make it happen. Nor, I learned later, when we kids started being organized into teams, could I throw, catch or dribble the ball.

By the time I entered high school, I understood that there was no hope for me, and would have willingly moved on to focus on other less interesting activities like books, music or debate, but these options, if pursued seriously, would have made me a social outcast. Worse, the adults who watched us all mature, were waiting for each of us to assume our roles in the community sports franchise. They had no way of knowing that I was a hopeless case, so would regularly open painful psychological wounds with their words of encouragement.

In my freshman year at Haynes High School I hit the wall of expectations like a head-on car wreck. The sad thing is that I saw it coming, but lacked the self-confidence to avoid it. Defiance was made doubly difficult because my father, as the only male among the three teacher faculty at Haynes High School, was elected to serve as coach of the local football, basketball and track

teams. Standing up to my father was simply not possible for me at that age. Two specific incidents stick in my mind.

a. Football

Our school participated in a six man football conference comprised of very small schools in Southwestern North Dakota. I had endured practice all season, not able to master any of the arts required (throwing, catching, running or blocking), and sat on the bench every game until the last of the season. On the day of the incident I am about to recount, our team was playing Rhame, which had six young men averaging perhaps 30 pounds in excess of our team's average weight, we were hopelessly behind, and with a half-minute left to play, and Rhame preparing to kick-off following their latest score, my father looked to me and said: "Son, get in there."

His words shocked me, setting my heart to pounding. I had coped with being a "bench warmer" all season by dividing my attention between monitoring the play, listening to Deedee and her cheerleader girl friends giggle and chatter just behind me, and praying to God for the strength to endure the humiliation of being a benchwarmer while others battled for the glory of Haynes High School. I jumped up, looked wildly around the field to see where Dad wanted me to go, and saw Jake Mitchell jogging toward the bench from his position at the center of the receiving team. Somehow I managed to jog out there without stumbling and assumed my position facing the Rhame kick-off team. I prayed frantically: "Please God, don't let the ball come to me." The kicker, a giant blond fellow, lumbered toward the ball, kicked, and the ball was launched up, up and straight over the center of the field toward me. I thought to myself: "Oh my God, its coming to me." I opened my arms, felt a thud as the ball hit my chest, closed my arms around it and ran straight up field. As I ran I felt elation that I hadn't dropped the ball, and a sense of doomed purpose as I closed in on the six blond giants just ahead.

When Rhame's center tackled me, I was stunned by the force of the contact, yet felt a flood of relief that my ordeal was over. I remember seeing mucous, or possibly saliva, fly around me in a semi-circle, and I heard Deedee giggle from about fifty feet away. After that moment the memory fades. I was alive and I hadn't dropped the ball.

b. Track And Field

The second athletic moment from my freshman year at Haynes involved a track meet. When I learned, early in April, that Haynes was going to field a track team, I dedicated myself to choosing and learning a sport in which I could surely excel. My thought was that something simple like running long distances might not demand the coordination I lacked, so I ran every afternoon on a one-mile course around town. No one else was training for long distances, so I had no marker as to whether or not I was competitive. Always the optimist, and desperately wanting to be fast, I made myself believe that I was.

Our first track meet of the season was at Reeder, our rival school, and my father asked me to run in the half-mile. I was scared, but figured that if there ever would be anything I could do in sports it would have to be this, so acquiesced.

During the hour before my event, my nervousness turned into an upset stomach. I ran to a nearby restroom a half-hour before starting time, then again fifteen minutes before the start, and then to my horror had to make another dash to the toilet five minutes before start. As I sat on the toilet the third visit, my intestines roiling violently, I heard voices calling runners to the half-mile. I raced from the rest room to the start line just as the official shouted: “On your marks.” With the firing of the starter’s gun we were off, and by the time we reached the first turn it was clear that I wasn’t going to win the race. By the time we completed our first lap around the quarter mile track, I was well back from the pack, and I realized that I was about to be humiliated once again. My father was waiting at the finish line, as well as Deedee and all the other kids whose opinions of me were so important. I spotted a tree and bushes on the far side of the course and, thinking fast, slipped into their cover where I hid for the next ten minutes. It was an imperfect remedy to avoid embarrassment, but my choices weren’t good. Running across the finish line 40 feet behind the other boys would have been even harder for me. This I could represent as a clever little caper; something no one else would ever think of.

When my father spoke to me about my disappearing act, later that day, he didn’t scold, but he said that I should not have quit. His message was something to the effect that there is less dishonor in finishing last than in quitting. I understood the sentiment, but for the first and only time in my memory I felt that my dad wasn’t being fair. From that moment I knew that I had to find a way to face down the pressures to participate in activities for which I was so ill suited.

c. Daring To Say No

I don’t have a clear memory of how I weaned myself from the destructive weave of expectations that high school sports placed upon me. Probably I have blocked the details because they are too painful to remember. I recall only that little by little, as my self confidence grew, I found the courage to say no. I had a general understanding that the one masculine alternative to participation in sports was to be a “tough guy,” so I looked for ways to develop that image. A lot of my friends who had been willing to join me for late night raids on the neighbors’ gardens were fearful to take the next steps to shoplifting, so I learned to do that. After finding myself able to work alongside men on construction jobs, at age fifteen, I was able to drop the shoplifting, which I never felt very comfortable with because it was too much like stealing, and simply styled myself as tough. Then, at age 16, I found myself able, thanks to my height and a practiced “attitude,” to buy beer. That did wonders for my image and self esteem and I was ready to stand-up to the social pressures to play team sports.

By this time my family was living in Zap, North Dakota, where my father was Superintendent of Schools, and we had a coach, Ray Thielman, who had actually studied physical education in college. In small town high schools, where there were typically only three or four teachers and thirty to forty students in all four grades, it was the exception to have a coach who had studied physical education. Mr. Thielman was a nice and fair man, and this only made my job of breaking out harder. One of the twenty-odd boys in high school, Donald Walsh, had managed to excuse himself from the regimen without being outcast by the other kids, and was serving as team manager. Don was a very tough kid from a hard drinking, hard fighting Irish family that had always played by its own rules and didn’t seem to care about social acceptance. I think this made Don’s rebelliousness easier. Defiance was a tradition in his family.

Afraid to simply say no, I went along with team practice, but played the “cut-up” until, after months of trying to get me under control, Mr. Thielman told me to shape up or ship out. That was the opening I needed, and I took it, walking out of basketball practice that day never to return. During the remainder of my high school days in Zap I was able to maintain the minimum amount of dignity I needed to face my classmates by pretending to be too proud to submit to Mr. Thielman’s discipline.

I’m not sure what I learned from my years of struggling to maintain self-esteem in an environment in which I was genetically engineered to fail. They say that what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger, and I can see now that my inability to throw or catch a ball did indeed help me to develop the toughness to face adult difficulties with ease, but at the time my prospects for a happy life seemed very dim indeed.

9. Holding On To God (Part II)

From the time that I was confirmed as an adult in the Lutheran Church until around age twenty, I struggled tenaciously to hold onto the traditional notions of God and religion I had grown up with and which were meaningful to my friends and family. It was bad enough that I seemed to be drifting away in so many other ways. I did not want to be isolated also by my religious views and practices. Fate, however, had other plans. My destiny was revealed to me in a series of small incidents, none of them critical by themselves, but cumulatively having an impact that was to change me forever.

a. Jezebel

I was brought “front and center” with the pettiness of what passed for traditional church values shortly after my family’s move to Zap. Our new home, with a population of just 300 souls, had four churches, two of them Lutheran. All were starving for lack of membership, of course, but the insignificant differences in ritual practiced by each was apparently more important to their membership than any thoughts of merging, sharing facilities, or other such compromise. That struck me as peculiar right off.

My parents took us to each of the two Lutheran Churches, and we found ourselves more comfortable in the American Lutheran Church. Its counterpart, the German Lutheran Church, held its services in German, a language we did not understand, and its members also seemed uncomfortable having six Norwegians sitting among them.

Shortly after our arrival in Zap our American Lutheran Church began recruiting a replacement for its pastor of several decades, and I began to monitor a fascinating process. The current pastor, it seems, had labored for a wage of just over \$2,000 per year plus food donations from his congregants. When our church advertised for a replacement, there were no takers on those terms. Even new seminary students were uninterested. So the church fathers faced a horrifying reality. No longer could they attract a pastor called by God alone. Now pastors were also in search of riches. “Mammon” was the term used by the church fathers.

Eventually, by agreeing to “pony up” a salary of \$5,000, and to build a new parsonage for the pastor and his wife, our church was able to attract a young couple who had just graduated from a Lutheran college in Iowa, the Reverend and Mrs. Buhs.

The Buhs started out in Zap with the deck stacked against them. Everyone knew that they were money hungry, and there was also considerable resentment about the new home built for them. Then, as the summer weather heated up, the town was shocked with a new revelation. Mrs. Buhs, it seemed, had been seen by a neighbor in her only partially fenced back yard WEARING BERMUDA SHORTS.

This new revelation about the already suspiciously regarded pastor couple traveled around town with lightening speed, and set everyone’s tongues wagging. None of the men or women in Zap had yet adopted this radical new style of dress. It was too much for the good church people to take, and retribution was swift. Two days after the first report that the Pastor’s wife was a Jezebel, the Buhs’ German Shepherd puppy was poisoned. Mrs. Buhs, choosing not to accept this as God’s just retribution for her indiscretions, took to the street, going door to door tearfully seeking justice. Soon the whole town was in crisis.

I, as a boy of fifteen, watched this drama unfold, and marveled. Could it be that willingness to live on \$2,000 a year, reside in a broken-down house, and dress conservatively are legitimate requisites to serving God? Based upon my own relationship with God these matters seemed unimportant. Maybe the church fathers themselves were confused. Maybe the whole darn system was built on misunderstanding of God’s important truths.

b. Resolving Never To Sin

As Pastor Buhs settled into his new “calling” at the American Lutheran Church of Zap, he organized a sort of teen club for the local kids called “Luther League.” Basically, it functioned as a wholesome alternative to shooting pool on Wednesday nights, but only included kids whose parents attended our church. I had mixed feelings about the exclusivity, but wanted very much to grow spiritually so was a willing participant. Part of each evening’s meeting was a period of religious instruction, and I found myself asking ever more critical questions about matters of ritual. It was thus inevitable that I would find myself once again confronting the issue of resolving never to sin again.

It came up in the context of an evening’s lesson, and I made what I hoped would seem a casual inquiry during the formal session. My thought, at the time, was that Pastor Buhs, having just graduated from seminary, would have “state of the art” knowledge about church instruction, and might solve the dilemma that had kept me from partaking in communion the past several years. Unfortunately, when I posed my question in class about the reasonableness of a promise not to sin again, Pastor Buhs brushed me off. I felt, therefore, that I must confront him in private. I reasoned that he might deal with me more thoughtfully if it were just the two of us, man to man.

I was wrong. When I approached him after class with my concerns about making promises one couldn’t realistically keep (not admitting, of course, which sins I fully intended to commit), he

once again brushed me off. Basically, he said: “These are the rules, Ray. You just do your best to obey them. Only Jesus was perfect, but you need to **try** to be perfect.”

Now I was getting “pissed.” At fifteen, I was too mature for that kind of answer. I thought: “If this is all that the Lutheran Church has to say on the subject, I can’t in good conscience be a Lutheran. I sure don’t want to leave my church. I’ve got to find someone with more wisdom.” After thinking about it for a few weeks, I concluded that perhaps a visit to a pastor in a larger Lutheran church might yield a better result. So I put out my thumb, caught a ride to the nearby, much larger community of Beulah, and walked up to a large Lutheran church building there one Saturday morning. Churches were always open in those days, so I let myself into the sanctuary, looked around, and eventually found a door to an office in the rear. There I confronted the pastor, who was working at his desk, with my dilemma.

The meeting did not go well. The pastor’s primary concern seemed to be why I was talking to him rather than my own pastor. When I told him that I couldn’t accept the answer I had received, he looked very uncomfortable, mumbled some generalities which I don’t recall, and suggested that I return to Pastor Buhs for guidance.

As I hiked across Beulah, en route to the edge of town where I could hitch a ride home, I knew that I had reached a crossroads. My comfortable reference point for God, the Lutheran Church, would no longer serve me. I knew God was real because he helped me deal with the stresses of life every day, and I could and did talk to him often, but I would no longer try to do that in a church context. For me the rituals and traditions of church worship were no longer helpful; indeed they had become impediments to my spiritual growth.

10. Winning Carole’s Mom (Honesty Works)

During my junior and senior years at Zap High School I dated a girl named Carole. She was two years younger than I, shy, very pretty, and one of our school’s cheerleaders. I was so attracted to Carole that I could never settle my heart in her presence. She turned me into jelly, yet at the same time made me feel noble, protective and manly.

Dating Carole was a challenge because she was from a strict Baptist family. Translated, that meant that we weren’t allowed to go to movies or dances when on dates. The only other thing that kids in Zap did on dates was “park” – i.e. sit in their parent’s car until the wee hours, listen to the Top Forty music station, and “make out.” When kids were as attracted to one another as were Carole and I, this was a recipe for disaster, and it is a commentary on the sense of responsibility my parents had instilled in me that we never crossed the line.

As spectacular as Carole was, her mom, Katherine, was even more amazing. She was beautiful, like Carole, and also gifted with social skills. Whenever I visited Carole’s home, usually to pick her up for a date, Katherine made me feel good about myself, and many was the time I thought she’d be a great mother-in-law. Her dad was harder to figure out, and a bit fearsome. A short, powerful man, he spoke little, but had a reputation as a tough businessman and also a gifted flyer of small aircraft. Folks said he been a “barnstormer” back in the early days of aviation.

One night, in the second year of our relationship, Carole and I were returning from one of our dates (kissing and listening to our Top Forty radio station while I drank the requisite beer that proved me to be a man despite my athletic shortcomings) when my father's car was caught in a policeman's spotlight. Already sophisticated in these matters, I calmly drove on another quarter mile while I grabbed the balance of my six pack from the back seat and, when my side of the car was out of the policeman's view, threw it into a field. Then I pulled over.

The cop was also sophisticated in these matters, unfortunately, figured out what I did, found the beer, and informed me that I was busted. My first instinct was to get Carole out of this, and do what I could to preserve the relationship. For me to get arrested for illegal possession would be like receiving a badge of honor among my peers, more than compensating for any punishment my parents might visit upon me. For Carole to get busted, on the other hand, given her parent's religious convictions, might put her into real trouble, and also make me unwelcome as a suitor.

My first priority, therefore, was to get Carole off the hook. The cop seemed unconcerned about her, but very interested in who had sold me the beer. Not wanting to put my favorite bar owner into a bad spot, I used a cheeky line I'd heard in a movie: "I'm sorry, but I'm not at liberty to tell you that.", then asked permission to take my innocent girl friend home. The cop agreed, so long as I would meet him immediately thereafter, at my home, where the cop, my parents and I would talk further.

As we drove to Carole's home my mind raced. I couldn't just leave her there and drive away. In a town the size of Zap, it would be common knowledge by noon the next day that I had been arrested, and that Carole had been with me. On the other hand, facing her parents with the news seemed impossible, maybe even dangerous given my inability to predict her father's reaction. In the end, my feeling of responsibility to protect Carole was the deciding factor. I parked the car behind her home, we walked into the back door, I announced that I wanted to talk, and with very grave expressions on their faces Mr. and Mrs. Helms sat down at the table with us.

In retrospect, I suspect that when they heard my announcement they were relieved. They had probably been prepared for us to advise of an unwanted pregnancy, and the beer bust story would have sounded trivial by comparison. At the time I didn't think that way. I only knew that they listened gravely, thanked me for facing them, and I drove away thinking that I might never date Carole again. My later face-off with the policeman and my parents seemed "bush league" by comparison with the meeting just completed.

The next morning the other shoe dropped. As I made my rounds to see friends, along the way bumping into various adults, the message on the street was that Katherine Helm thought Ray Solem was a fine and brave young man for stepping up to the plate and facing her and Fred with the news of his indiscretion. Not only was I not banned from seeing their daughter; I was more welcome than ever.

It took many weeks for that little lesson to sink in, and I shall be forever grateful to Katherine for teaching it to me at an early age. Honesty can be a powerful weapon in life, particularly when it is unexpected. Under the circumstances (that I only chose honesty because I couldn't see any other alternatives) it was a lesson I learned all too easily.

11. Lessons From Outside The Cocoon

Growing-up in rural North Dakota in the 1950s was a very insular experience. Television was not yet common, and the local newspapers focussed on the community, county and state, in that order of emphasis. As an elementary school student in Alexander I recall feeling some skepticism about American Studies classes, where the teachers talked about events in Washington, D.C. and Europe. I, personally, didn't know anyone who had seen these places. How could I be sure that the whole thing wasn't made up? During my nineteenth summer, reading Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" while recovering from a construction accident, I was intrigued to see that even my noted Greek predecessor had his doubts about believing things not experienced directly.

In many ways, life in rural North Dakota was like living in a cocoon. Everyone who touched my life was familiar; local farmers, teachers who were from farm families, and businessmen who provided services to farmers and often were farmers themselves. Few had gone away for any length of time, and those who did had done so in the context of military service in World War II, and weren't talking about it, or they went away briefly to college in North Dakota or Minnesota.

My world was also a cocoon because, thanks to parental and church nurturing, it was tightly structured around ethical guidelines. I had very little specific information about anything, yet possessed a strong sense of right and wrong. I and my young friends knew who we were and what we stood for. Lacking, for those of us who sensed that our destinies lay elsewhere, was where we were going and how we would get there.

As I traveled around the world later in life, spending a lot of time in traditional, third-world environments in Africa and Latin America, I came to see that my childhood in North Dakota wasn't at all unusual. Indeed, on a planetary scale it was normal. Folks who grow-up in closed, heterogeneous societies (perhaps 80 percent of the world's population) are all short on information and long on traditional values. My growing-up experience in North Dakota gave me a tremendous edge over my colleagues who had been raised in cities and suburbs because I knew the minds of my rural African and Latin counterparts as well as those of my neighbors in rural North Dakota.

My family's nine month stint in California provided my first abrupt contact with the outside world, and more than my parents and siblings I was able to adapt and come to terms with it. Perhaps it was easiest for me because I had been so unsuccessful in Alexander, so was more open to new ways, or perhaps it was because of an inborn curiosity about other cultures and people. At any rate, by the time my parents elected to depart California I was already acclimated and enjoying myself. I felt some sense of loss, returning home.

A year after returning, I made my first meaningful contact with an outsider. K. W. Simons came to Zap to teach English. He had grown-up in Bismarck, the son of the editor of the Bismarck Tribune; the closest thing to a "blue blood" in the state. Upon graduating from college he had gone off to Washington, D.C. to work on the staff of Senator "Wild Bill" Langer. After a few years doing that, he elected to return to the state to work in Non-Partisan League politics and make a living at whatever he might.

Mr. Simons was the most unusual person in Zap. He was very tall, talked incessantly about politics and current events, and seemed to be interested in anything and everything. In our high school he taught English, literature, civics, and related subjects, leaving science and athletics to Mr. Tillman and math and history to my father, our superintendent.

Because Mr. Simons was different, my young friends and I targeted him for teasing, trickery, and whatever good natured fun we could concoct. He was a wonderfully good sport about everything from tacks on his chair to cutting up in class. In the end, however, from time to time he cut through all the superficial banter and really connected with me.

I recall one day in literature class, as we discussed a romantic poem, he asked the class to show hands: "Who would choose a mate only for love? Who would consider money important?" Most of us were shocked at the mere suggestion that money should be a consideration in marriage. How could Mr. Simons be so crude? I don't know about the other kids, but he started me thinking about life's important decisions in a more serious way.

Another day Mr. Simons was trying to get us to think about careers, something none of us gave any thought to. Careers? You finish school and then farm, or work at whatever else your family does. K.W. commented to us that an acquaintance of his was a dentist, and said: "I wouldn't mind looking down bloody mouths all day for \$40,000 a year." Gasp! We were appalled to hear a teacher talk so crassly about money. Another time he commented: "I know that making a living doesn't seem important to you kids right now, but when you are forty and your wife needs a new coat, you're going to wish you had the money to buy it for her."

Mr. Simons didn't just talk about the world outside Zap; he also lived in it, at least part of the time. Occasionally I and my young friends in Zap were given a glimpse of it.

One of Mr. Simon's favorite subjects was his personal mission to save North Dakota's 3rd political party, the Non-Partisan League (NPL), from extinction through merger with the Democratic Party. Since the 1920s the NPL had been able to control many of North Dakota's state-wide elections by endorsing whichever major party candidate it found most appealing. This was nice for voters with an independent streak, but was hard on discipline in the major parties. Mr. Simons was treasurer of the state NPL, and an active member of the loyalist faction that was content with the NPL's independent status. A significant portion of the NPL's membership, however, favored merging with the Democratic Party.

In 1959, my junior year at Zap High School, matters came to a head at the NPL state convention. Because our civics teacher, Mr. Simons, was an active player in the convention, and it was being televised statewide, my father, our superintendent, felt it would provide a great civics lesson for the high school students to watch the proceedings.

We kids all gathered together in a holiday spirit, not believing our good fortune to escape classes, and received one of the more unusual civics lessons in the history of our school. The convention proceedings were loud and confused, with Mr. Simon's loyalists in control of the microphone and thus the floor. As we sat glued to the tube, we saw a large man bend over in front of the camera, attempting to unplug the public address system; a plot, no doubt, to increase the chaos

even further. Then, to our amazement and immense pride, we saw a size 14 shoe appear in the screen, connecting to the backside of the man reaching for the electrical outlet. The man pitched forward, and behind the shoe came the gangly 6'6" body of our civics teacher, K. W. Simons, in person. Our cheers were ecstatic.

The next morning we received an additional bonus (civics lesson) as the Bismarck Tribune was delivered to subscribers in Zap. The front page photo was a close-up of a large, bearded state legislator from Steel, North Dakota, collapsed in a bar booth with blood on his face. The banner headline read: "K. W. Simons arrested for fighting without a license.", and beneath it followed a several column story about the day's events. The convention proceedings, it seemed, had adjourned to the bar at Bismarck's Patterson Hotel, and our civics teacher had once again distinguished himself. The following day the banner headline in the Business Tribune once again featured our teacher, heralding: "K. W. Simons Retroactively Issued A License To Fight In Public." This, we were all proud to learn, meant that our teacher was once again a free man.

Later that year, as I and my co-editor, Janis Bauer, labored over producing a Zap High School Yearbook, we made a joke of Mr. Simon's civics lesson, recalling the event under a picture of our teacher wearing a prison uniform.

We kids always laughed at Mr. Simons, I perhaps the loudest of all, but he connected with me. He reminded me that our little world was not THE WORLD. We were living in a secure little cocoon, and would all break out one day, like butterflies, with options we could not even imagine. Mr. Simons, for me, was like the proverbial prophet from out of town. He touched my life briefly, said some true things, even as I and my colleagues scoffed, showed us by his actions that one man can make a difference in the wider world outside our community, and then went on his way.

12. Choosing To Be Unpopular

I spent my seventeenth summer working as an engineer's aid on a road crew. We were constructing a piece of Interstate 94 at a site about fifty miles southeast of Zap. Once again the job was within easy hitchhiking distance, so I was able to come home Saturday afternoon after work, and stay until Sunday afternoon.

By that summer I knew that life was going to lead me away to college at eighteen, so I was anxious to save as much money as possible. My dream was to impress my father, and prove to myself that I was a man, by paying my own way. I wanted that more than anything, and the specific school or location meant nothing to me. I wanted independence, and financial self sufficiency seemed to be the key to achieving that. So I became "Mr. Frugal."

I rented a bedroom from an elderly woman who lived in New Salem, the town at which our survey crew mobilized each morning at 7:00 a.m. That cost me \$5 per week. I purchased groceries once a week, and made all of my meals while sitting on my bed, and spreading my bounty on a small bed table. In a week I would consume several bags of sliced bread, a package of liver-wurst, a bottle of cheese whizz, a half-jar of peanut butter, and a half-pound of butter. I discov-

ered that with these four basic foods, topped-off with a large can of peaches and a gallon of milk, I could eat like a king.

The only thing I missed was hot coffee. My colleagues would gather in a restaurant at 6:30 each morning to drink coffee, but at ten cents a cup it was too pricey for me. My remedy was to boil coffee each Sunday, while at home, pour it into a masonry jar, and drink it cold all week, about one cup a day. By managing in this way, I was able to eat for \$5 per week. Earning \$1.35 per hour for a 60-hour week, with time and one half for hours over forty, I was earning a cool \$94.50 per week, before taxes, and saving \$84.50.

The price of this life style, unfortunately, was isolation. For the first time I had no friends from home with whom to talk at the end of the day, and because I was too frugal to pay for beer or coffee, I had no social life with my work mates either. My crew was composed of five other young men between nineteen and twenty-four, all of them tough young farm kids with several years experience working on highway construction, and all of them more sophisticated than I in the important realms of sexual experience, drinking and the art of being young men.

I listened to their stories each day, as they bantered among themselves about girls, cars, drinking, etc. and I ached to belong, but sensed that if I were to let loose and join in their life, it would be at the price of my own dreams. Eventually the other fellows stopped even talking to me, so I spent my entire day working in silence, pretending not to care. One day one of the fellows challenged me in some silly way, and we ended up on the ground with me straddling him and jamming his face into the dirt below. I was frantic not to be humiliated by this, my first physical test as a young man, and felt a rush at my easy victory. Then, because I was so unpopular, our boss, a man of twenty-four whom I knew could “put me over his knee” at will, intervened and pushed me. Once again, I got lucky, managed to get some leverage, and he ended up lying on his back in a very muddy creek bed about ten feet from where it all started.

I had no idea how I had thrown him into the creek; knowing only that I wanted the fight to end without me being physically broken, humiliated, or losing my job. I was saved by my boss’s boss who, driving by, saw the commotion, stopped his car on the roadside about 20 feet above us, taunted my boss, who was still extricating himself from the creek, mud-smearred from head to foot, and ordered us back to work.

After that incident life was easier for me because my work mates mistakenly believed that I was a tough dude, and I continued to keep my mouth shut, not wanting to say or do anything to dissuade them. The young man who started it later hired me to work with him evenings on his father’s farm loading bales of hay, for which I was paid five cents a bale plus a **HOT MEAL**.

I puzzled a lot that summer, since no one was talking to me anyway, about life, and about my choice to be unpopular because I believed it would serve a higher purpose. It proved to be a pivotal event for me, this early training in “swimming upstream,” and no doubt helped me to develop the “backbone” to take unpopular positions in the years to come. Willingness to act as I deemed appropriate despite fear of the consequences, and the courage to accept unpopularity, were fundamental life skills that shaped my adult life profoundly, in the final analysis not making it easier, perhaps, but certainly making it richer.

13. My Fifteen Minutes Of Fame

It sounds funny, recounting these stories now as a grown man, but in the world in which I lived in 1960 Zap, one's self-esteem was thoroughly intertwined with one's physical attributes. If you were a successful athlete, you had instant recognition as a man among men. Absent athletic ability, your next best ticket was to be perceived as a tough guy. By my senior year in high school I had long since given up on winning recognition as an athlete, and I was finding it very stressful to present myself as a tough guy. For starters, I was still physically timid, and except for my lucky, unexpected attack against a playmate when I lived in California, and a subsequent five minute tussle with my co-workers in New Salem, I had no experience or credentials as a tough guy. I'll admit, I got some mileage from having worked along side grown men at various construction jobs during summers when my colleagues were still doing odd jobs for their parents, but I secretly knew that I had always been at the bottom of the pecking order on those construction jobs, and that my survival was less because of my strength and ability than for my willingness to suffer indignation.

Then, out of the blue, fate presented me with my opportunity to earn true tough guy credentials.

It was a Saturday night, and my turn to use Dad's car. My brother and I each were allowed to use it one night a week, and he had taken his girl friend to Beulah several nights before, and had gotten into a little scrape with some local toughs. My brother was fairly athletic, and the story is that he and another fellow threw a few punches at one another with no dramatic result, just a little "dust up" between kids from rival towns.

I hadn't even heard about the incident, and didn't care anyway. I was dating Anita Bitterman, who was a great kisser, and she and I were sitting in my father's station wagon in a secluded spot behind Zap's grain elevator listening to Top Forty music and "making out." A car pulled-up in front of us, headlights beaming into our eyes, and belligerent voices shouted: "Hey Solem!"

My heart began to pound because I knew that my carefully woven façade as a tough guy was about to be destroyed before my girl friend's eyes, but I could see no way to avoid it. I exited the car, asking Anita to lock the door, and walked the half-dozen steps to confront my tormenters. Inside the car sat six young men, the largest of whom, Hook Fisher, I recognized as the sneering, long-haired, leather-jacketed dude who had challenged me with his eyes at several public dances recently, while we both stood on the sidelines, too shy to ask anyone to dance. I learned later that these guys were in search of my brother, seeking vengeance for the previous encounter.

My tormenters were at first startled (seeing me, rather than my brother), but then recovered and began to talk tough. Knowing that Anita was watching from ten feet away, I stood my ground, acted firm, and asked them to move along. Much to my amazement, they did. I returned to the car feeling as if my life had been restored, pretended as though the incident was no big deal for me, and went back to petting.

A half-hour later the young men returned, this time drunker than formerly, and ever more belligerent. We repeated the drill (and emotions), with the same result. It was a commentary to my optimism that I never took the second opportunity God handed me to say: "Hey, Anita, I'm tired of this place. Let's drive somewhere else."

Fifteen minutes after the second visit, my tormenters returned for a third time. Once again I asked Anita to lock the car, I exited to confront them, and we talked, me standing outside their car on the passenger side, facing Hook, and all of them inside. They wouldn't go, and I didn't dare to back away because I'd lose face with Anita, so I made one last desperate bluff. I said: "OK, guys, if you won't leave, then get out and fight." Unfortunately for him, Hook was nearest to me and the first to exit. Because he was so tall, he had to duck low while exiting, and somehow I had the presence of mind to pop him twice in the chest with my knees as he stepped forward in a crouch, and then as he fell back from those blows I put my shoe into his groin twice. By the time his partners, who had all prudently exited from the far side, had rounded the car, Hook was on the ground writhing and coughing, and I was standing over him looking down in amazement.

Hook's five friends stopped in their tracks, shocked to see their leader indisposed. Here was my second chance to end the matter with some honor, but all I could think was that Anita was sitting in the front seat of Dad's car just ten feet away, watching through the windshield, so I had to look good. I asked them to leave, to no avail. I then challenged each of them, individually, to fight. All looked away. My heart was beginning to return to a normal cadence. I could see, for the first time, a way to emerge from this fracas without humiliation. Then I made the mistake of challenging them again.

The third guy in the line I faced, stocky built and quiet, said OK, he'd fight me. We boxed for a minute, and I knew I had an advantage of reach, but now I was feeling confident, and I remembered how I'd been able to overpower my work mate in New Salem, so I moved in close. My plan was to get him around the neck and strangle him. From the moment I moved in close everything went awry. Every move I made had the opposite result. I felt my face bouncing off the front fender of their car, then it was bouncing off the dirt and I felt many kicks raining into my body from all sides (a little unnecessary help from his friends), and then I was on my back, exhausted, with my adversary straddling my chest and looking jubilant but worried. He said: "We'd better let him go. He looks pretty beat-up." Hook, who by then was on his feet again, snarled: "No! Kill him!" My adversary looked down at me and asked: "Had enough?" I looked up, thinking: "If I say I've had enough Anita, who is watching, will think I'm a chicken, and she'll tell everyone." So I did the only thing I could think of, given that my arms and legs were pinned. I spit in his face.

Hook then made another contribution to the fracas, shouting once more: "Kill him!" My adversary threw two, maybe three more punches straight down into my face, got up, saying: "He's had enough.", and walked away, his friends following him. As they drove out of sight, and I dusted myself off, feeling bruised from head to foot, I felt elated. I had stood up to them, took a pretty good thumping in front of my girl friend, but had neither cried nor backed-down.

That evening was the proudest moment of my adolescence, and coming just as I was turning eighteen, capped my long battle to overcome timidity and learn that the consequences of facing fear are generally worse than the threat itself. I also learned, a few days later, that the fellow who bounced me around with such ease, was a high school wrestler, and I realized that with a little training I could probably put the whole business of physical timidity behind me.

14. Roller Skates For Sale

As high school graduation ceremonies approached in the spring of 1961, I began to feel nostalgic. I knew that I would soon leave Zap, and from looking at all the unfamiliar faces in portraits of previous senior classes, hung at the entry to Zap High School, I suspected that I would be forgotten, like the others who went away. Zap had nurtured me through some difficult years, and only by staying there, raising a family of my own, and participating in local activities, could I leave any lasting impression, or make a meaningful contribution to its culture. I began to ponder whether there might be some really grand gesture of farewell that I could make – something I would be remembered for.

One spring afternoon, just a few days before the traditional senior picnic, my best friend Tommy Dallman and I were hiding out in the typing room, smoking a cigarette and discussing what final mischief we might make in honor of my departure. I picked up the county newspaper, the Beulah Independent, and at first glance the perfect caper presented itself to me. The headline read: “Sixty-six Pairs of Roller Skates Stolen from Beulah Pavilion.”

“That’s it!” I exclaimed to Tommy. “We’ll advertise in the next issue of the Beulah Independent; ‘Roller Skates For Sale. Call Tom Dallman or Ray Solem in Zap.’”

After marveling for a few moments about our genius, we began to think through the details. We would have to possess roller skates to sell or we might be charged with false advertising, we reasoned. We would also need to warn our parents in advance, to minimize the negative consequences; AFTER the paper had gone to press, so that the ad couldn’t be stopped, but before the paper hit the streets. It seemed like the perfect plan, so we composed the ad on the spot.

The Beulah Independent, in those days, was a weekly, coming out on Fridays. Our annual senior picnic was set for the Friday our ad was to run, so when we returned to the school about 5:00 that afternoon, giddy from the day off with our friends, we were not surprised to see the beige police cruiser belonging to County Sheriff Harold Keese parked in front of the school. My heart beat nervously as we approached him, but we attempted to feign nonchalance.

Unbeknownst to us at the moment, the county sheriff had already been into the school where he questioned my father, the superintendent, and K.W. Simons, our English teacher. My father had responded diplomatically, without giving up our little joke, “You never know about that kid of mine.” Mr. Simons, however, was fearful for us and tried to end the investigation on the spot with the remark: “Aw hell, Harold. They figure that you’re a hick cop in a hick county, and if brains were dynamite you couldn’t even blow your nose. They’re just making a fool of you Harold!” The impact of Mr. Simon’s interview sent the sheriff out front to await us in a very uncharitable mood.

Sheriff Keese peppered us with questions about alibi, shoe sizes and types, where the skates were stored, etc., and we were deliberately vague about everything, watching him grow ever more furious with each reply. Finally he hit me with a threat I had not expected. "Solem", he said, "you are eighteen so I can treat you as an adult, arrest you on suspicion and hold you for three days." That scared me because I was planning to hitchhike to Pierre, South Dakota that week-end to line up construction work for the summer. I retorted, trying to sound fearless: "Harold, you can do that, but if you do you won't get any votes in Zap the next time you run for re-election." Lame, it seems in retrospect, but perhaps he was also bluffing, because the moment passed without me being placed in handcuffs.

The next several weeks were a "stitch" for Tommy and me. The first thing that happened was an immediate enhancement of our reputations among our friends, and likewise among the toughs I always worried about when attending movies in Beulah. Everyone saw me through new eyes. No longer was I just another one of the kids. Now I was a big time thief. As I walked down the street in Beulah kids would see me coming, whisper nervously among themselves, then would fall absolutely silent as I passed. I loved it!

Then there were the phone calls. Adult males, nervously questioning about where they might buy some skates, one of them actually coming to my home to meet me and make the buy. I knew he was a cop, enjoyed how nervous he was around me, and had fun showing him the pair of ancient size 2 skates my neighbor had authorized me to sell, and then sending him to Tommy's ranch where he had an equally ancient pair of size 7 skates that had once been used by him.

The investigation went on for six months, with me missing most of it because I had moved on to a construction job at Oahe Dam, and then later on to college in Jamestown, North Dakota. Tommy informed me a half-year later that he had recently run into an investigator from the state attorney general's office while his family was shopping in Bismarck, asked him how the case was going, and was told: "Kid, we have concluded that you guys were just playing a stupid trick on us. Don't ever do that again!"

The last time I visited Zap for a school reunion, 35 years later, a half dozen of my friends and the older folks who are still alive asked me about the skates. Where had they been hidden, and had I come home to sell them?

PART III: EARLY MANHOOD

1. Learning To Play With The Cards You Are Dealt

From a fairly early age I had a notion that manhood should come at a certain time, at which there should be a deliberate setting-aside of childish ways. My first memory of the concept was from Sunday school classes at around age ten when we discussed the story of Jesus getting separated from his parents on the road home from his family's pilgrimage to Jerusalem. I saw Jesus' willingness to break away without permission as evidence that he felt ready to make his own decisions, and I interpreted his parents acceptance of this act as their acknowledgement that the time for them to respect his individuality had arrived.

In my own case, I determined that manhood should be associated with graduation from high school at age eighteen, and I began to plan around that event. The plethora of problems I brought into adolescence was baggage that I had to learn to deal with as a precondition to manhood. I looked at my father as a model of manly behavior, and could discern no evidence of my own shortcomings in him. I didn't know how he had managed to reach his state of manliness because he never talked of his childhood. Lacking such a model, I improvised. A lot of the socially unacceptable (to adults) behaviors I engaged in along the way (drinking, stealing, pretending to be tough) were, for me, a means to an end. I felt that I had to win the respect of my peers just to survive psychologically from day to day. At the same time I had to overcome my physical and emotional timidity so that I could live up to the ethical standards instilled by my father through occasional talks and his constant example. If developing a reputation among adults as an underachieving mischief-maker helped me toward these goals it was ok with me. I knew where my tactics were leading me, but I also knew that I would have to put them behind me at age eighteen.

As a man, I must be ready to play with the cards I had been dealt by nature. I must learn to accept that I had no more chance to be successful at athletics, singing or dancing than a short person has of becoming tall, and find socially acceptable ways to distinguish myself. I must also be ready to face fear because the alternative, life as a coward, always seeking to avoid difficult or scary situations, seemed unmanly.

My sense, as high school graduation and my eighteenth birthday approached, was that I had invested my adolescence wisely; that what might have looked, on the surface, like a wasted youth, had been a time well spent. I was ready to leave the nest and face life. In fact, I couldn't wait!

2. Finding My Inner Strength

On the week-end after facing Sheriff Harold Keese over the roller skates caper, I walked out to the highway passing Zap and put out my thumb. I had read in the local paper that there was a huge construction project in Pierre, South Dakota, about 300 miles distant; a dam over the Missouri called Oahe. It was to be the largest dam in the world. I figured that an eighteen year old willing to work hard could find employment there, and I wanted to make application before the flood of high school and college kids on summer holidays joined the job market. No one wanted to hire school kids. They were seen as having poor work habits, needing close supervision, and likely to return to school just about the time they are starting to earn their keep. It was important for me to arrive at the employment office before the school kids, and pose as a seasoned, itinerate construction worker.

The following Monday morning I was on-the-job at Oahe Dam, employed as a laborer with a 65 hour work-week, earning the highest wages paid anywhere in the region. I feigned sick the next Friday to answer my father's plea that I return for high school graduation and give my salutatory address. While there I recruited several other Zappers to return to Pierre with me. Soon I was joined by my brother Bob, class mates Glenn Pluidt and Don Walsh, and my future brother-in-law Roy Dschaak along with his brother Wes (both about five years older than us) and their father Jake. We rented the basement of a private home in Pierre. Roy, Wes and Fred, who were

older and had some experience, were given relatively better assignments, and Glenn, Don and Bob were sent to join me in the “tunnel from hell.”

I'll never forget my first day at Oahe Dam, before my Zap colleagues joined me. I went straight from the employment office on Monday morning to a warehouse where I was issued heavy rubber boots, pants, jacket, hardhat and a shovel. I was then ordered to join a group of similarly equipped men who were veterans. After some milling about, we were marched single file down through a maze of newly built concrete walls and construction equipment into an ever darker, colder environment. Suddenly we were standing on a ledge looking straight down about 60 feet into a pitch black abyss. I was the fifth man in the column, and I heard the foreman, a large man they called Brownie, order the first person in the column to “get down there.” I couldn't see where the poor fellow was being sent; only that he reached down with his right hand, grabbed something to steady himself, and seemed to jump over the edge, all the while holding his shovel in the other hand. My heart started to pound, and my legs went wobbly.

Each person ahead of me repeated the motion, until suddenly I was standing on the precipice myself. Looking straight down I saw my colleagues below me, about two steps apart, descending a vertical ladder of iron steps anchored to a concrete wall. My testicles began to tingle, and I felt like I might pass out, but I needed the job so followed suit, reaching down for the top rung of the 60 foot ladder. Somehow I managed to slide over the edge of the wall in my clumsy rubber suit, got my boots planted on a step, shovel over my shoulder, and began to descend, step by step. The technique was to remain fairly vertical so that when you let go with your climbing hand you could grab the next step below before you fell backward into the abyss. About five steps down I felt myself passing out, and sensed that my long struggle to make it in a man's world was going to end in this dark tunnel, among crude strangers who had no concern for me. I hugged the wall, waiting for it to pass, wondering how my mother would learn of my demise, and if my friends in Zap would think I had been brave or just stupid.

The moment passed, I made it to the bottom, and with the help of a faint light at either end of the tunnel surveyed my new work site. The tunnel was 300 feet long, eight feet wide, and filled with black mud and construction debris. The mud was so soft that I sunk into it sometimes to the ankles, and other times to the hips. The boss called it “muck”. Our job was to clean it out of there by shoveling it into five gallon buckets and carrying them to either end of the tunnel to pour it into a massive dumpster which would, when filled, be rolled around a corner to an open area. From there it could be secured by a crane several hundred feet overhead and hauled away to I knew not where. I learned, as we dug, that it was eight feet from the top of the “muck” to the bottom of the tunnel.

It was so dark in the middle of the tunnel that I could just barely see my fellow workers, several feet away. Because water was leaking into the tunnel, there were a half-dozen air pumps running at all times, creating such a din that we could only communicate with one another by cupping our hands over our partner's ear and shouting. The work day started at 6:00 a.m. and ended at 6:00 p.m. We were given 30 minutes for lunch, but the trip to and from the lunch site took five minutes, so our eating and resting time was actually more like 20 minutes.

After several days on this job my body was covered, from the waist down, with brown rings about one inch in diameter, my feet felt as though the arches had been broken, and upon awakening in the morning I couldn't move my fingers at all until they had been soaked in cold water. Even then, they didn't flex normally until after I had returned to work in the tunnel and the 40 degree muck. It looked like I was going to *earn* my money that summer, and the relatively soft life of a high school student seemed remote.

After returning from high school graduation accompanied by a number of chums from Zap, the tunnel work was easier to take. For several days four of us were together, in the dark and the din. It felt much more comfortable than when I was alone. I missed my girlfriend Carole terribly, so all day long I sang songs that reminded me of her, belting them out at the top of my lungs secure in the knowledge that no one could hear a note due to the din of the air pumps. Some days, after being in the pitch dark and din for so long, I wondered if the bright outdoors was real at all, or just something that I had imagined.

On the third day Glenn, who was a bit more mature than the rest of us, was given an opportunity to work outside the tunnel, which he seized gleefully. Several days later he was sent back, worked till mid-morning, then broke down, saying he couldn't take it any more, and walked off the job. I was amazed. No one in Zap had a bigger "rep" than Glenn. That left just Bob, Don and me in the tunnel, and we were glad to have one another for moral support.

Several weeks later we got our own opportunity to work outside in the sunshine, and remained there for the rest of the summer. As I reflected during the long work days that followed, the tunnel time had been important for me. I realized that despite the inadequacies that had bedeviled me during childhood, I had better ability to deal with physical and emotional stress than many people. I had discovered an inner strength not previously recognized that seemed to be of some use. I wondered if those many years of being chosen last on the playing field might have helped me to develop a toughness that was going to serve me well as an adult.

3. Choosing A College And Getting There

As long as I can remember thinking about such things I had assumed that one day I would go to college after completing high school. I had briefly flirted with the idea of taking a several year hiatus from formal education upon turning eighteen. I thought, for a time, that I'd sign on to a tramp steamer and travel the world, seeing the places and people I'd only read about. Later, I considered testing my manhood by joining Fidel Castro's freedom fighters in their struggle to overthrow Cuba's 30-year dictatorship under Fulgencio Batista. My ultimate goal, however, was always a college education.

I'm not certain that my mom fully appreciated this. Some of my socially unacceptable behavior along the way gave her cause for concern.

Traditionally Zap High School didn't send many of its graduates on to college; perhaps one in ten. My father meant to change that when he moved there to take over as superintendent, and he was successful. I recall that in my class of seventeen, the largest class in the history of Zap High School, there were three of us who planned to continue our formal education. In those days the

Princeton Exams were just coming into acceptance as vehicles for admission screening, and my father reasoned that it might be possible to give his students an edge through intensive special tutoring geared toward passing the exam. As far as I know this was a new concept at the time, so when we three began our three weeks of special, after school classes in exam techniques, we believed that we were pioneers.

The results exceeded expectations. All of us received good scores, and I somehow answered enough questions correctly to become a runner-up for a National Merit Scholarship. That translated to admission anywhere I might choose to enroll, and scholarship assistance as well.

At the time achieving financial independence was a primary goal, so I only considered schools that would either offer me a scholarship or were low cost. I rejected my father's alma mater, Concordia, because they didn't offer me a scholarship, probably disappointing him, though he said nothing.. After considering a half-dozen schools, I settled on a tiny (600 students) Presbyterian-affiliated liberal arts college in Jamestown, North Dakota. It offered the strong intellectual environment I yearned for and needed if I was to develop my mind to its potential.

My departure for summer construction work in Pierre, South Dakota even before school ended must have worried my mom. Though she had been able to "read me like a book" when I was a small boy, as I grew older and began to express my individuality in unorthodox ways she was less certain about her son. I shall never forget the day we began my new life as a college man.

I returned home from Oahe Dam with just one day to spare, packed my possessions in a few hours, and then Mom, a Jamestown-bound classmate named Mike Ryner and I set out on the 200 mile trip. I drove, Mom sat in the front passenger seat, and Mike sat in the back with some of our bags. The whole way Mom was quiet. I talked to her about my plans for the future, at least those plans that I felt she could deal with, and I did my best to explain myself to her. I loved her, wanted her approval, and hadn't yet learned that there are things an eighteen year old man can't expect his mother to understand or endorse.

We entered Jamestown around noon, ascended the hill to the college campus, and as we circled the "quad" to park in front of my designated dormitory, I heard a long, slow sigh emanate from my mother's chest. It sounded like she had been holding her breath for eighteen years. Then she spoke, for the first time in a half-hour, saying, "Son, I thought that you'd never get here."

4. Freshman Hazing

What a shock! Here I was, an eighteen year old adult, having worked three summers alongside grown men on demanding construction jobs while saving every penny I could just to make it to college, and now I was being told to submit to some childlike "rite of passage" to earn my place. I felt that I had already paid my dues. For me this ritual of hazing newcomers in what I had believed would be a "font of learning" was insulting and incomprehensible.

What could I do? I wanted to fit in, but I had come to college to learn to be a better man, not to play children's games. I felt that to start my career as a responsible, soon to be educated adult by

submitting to freshman hazing would be dishonorable. So I resisted. It was my “maiden run” as an adult swimming upstream against convention, and it was a turbulent journey.

Being branded a non-cooperator was not the worst of it. I also feared humiliation through physical confrontation. The enforcers of tradition were the athletes, or course, and the ones who confronted me were the most fearsome. My first face-off was in the lunch line with one of the linemen from the football team. Later I had another with the center on the basketball team. Both individuals were substantially larger than I, and could make short work of me in a physical confrontation, but my construction experience must have given me more of an attitude than I knew. When I met their threats with defiance, both backed down.

In those days the hazing process at Jamestown lasted six weeks. By the fourth week I had become a minor celebrity in the freshman dormitory -- the only non-cooperator on campus. Then our tormenters organized a special event. All freshmen were ordered to report to a ceremony in the quad at which we would be submitted to various indignities including being tied by the legs and dragged through long, deep mud puddles. Even the women were expected to submit to this.

I announced my intention to refuse participation and for the first time some of my classmates began to consider joining me in resistance. The freshmen athletes were quick to say they thought I was a “dick” but about two-thirds of the class decided to rebel. Then the athletes also joined up, not wanting to go against the majority.

When the upper-class jocks arrived to collect us, making their threatening noises, the freshmen athletes immediately gave in, then others followed until, finally, I was alone in an empty dorm. I confronted a half-dozen football players outside my room, pretended to be unafraid, and much to my relief they walked away.

A month later I was drafted by a group of my fellow students, including perhaps half the women on the campus plus the male English majors, poets, and the like, to represent them as their candidate for student body president. I was dumbfounded, since I didn’t even know most of these kids, but realized that it was a long overdue effort to alter the power balance at Jamestown at the expense of the athletes. I cooperated, for a few days, but when I realized that student government would interfere with my studies I thought better of it and withdrew my candidacy. I had seen, for the first time in my young life, how leadership works, and that I could actually make a difference in people’s lives if I chose to. For the moment, however, my priority was to get a good education, and over the next few years I would not let anything get in the way of that.

Curiously, my opponent for the mainstream leadership group, Dick Arney, continued in politics later in life, eventually representing Texas in the U.S. Congress and serving, at this writing, as House Majority Leader.

5. Discovering The World Of Book Learning

With so many personal problems to attend to, I had managed to pass through four years of high school without “cracking a book” that wasn’t required reading. My conceptual skills were strong, probably due to so much soul searching as I studied the world around me, but as to a classical

education, my new college chums were miles ahead of me. I also found myself in the “back of the pack” as far as familiarity with current popular culture. My father had not allowed television in our home; the local newspaper, a weekly, only covered community events; and there was a real limit to what one could learn on the streets of Zap.

As a result of all this, I hit Jamestown College’s academic challenges like a starving man, virtually pillaging the place for book knowledge. Nothing could stop me; not freshman hazing, not part-time work, not girls, not even the temptation to develop friendships in my dormitory. I didn’t know how long I would be in such a wonderful learning environment, so I became an ascetic, pushing myself to my physical and intellectual limits each day.

A critical initial decision was to deliberately set-aside any pretensions of a social life at the outset. I vowed not to date until I was comfortable with my intellectual development, and having abandoned the temptations to have girl friends, it was easy to put aside popularity with my male colleagues in the dormitory. My life, therefore, revolved solely around making a living (part-time work), eating, studying and sleeping. I started each day with a 7:00 a.m. breakfast, attended classes and studied until 4:00 p.m., ran across town to my job cleaning cars and toilets at a Buick dealership, then ran back to campus to eat at 6:30 p.m., and retired to my room to study from 7:00 p.m. until 3:00 or 4:00 a.m.. I had rented a single room, so had no interruptions from visitors. I brewed and drank two pots of coffee (18 cups) each night, and when I was ready for bed I opened my secret liquor cabinet and drank a small glass of whiskey. Occasionally I would seek out another late studying colleague to join me for the nightcap.

Sunday was my only easy day. I didn’t have work downtown then, and I allowed myself to watch TV in the Freshman lounge from 8:00 until 11:00 p.m. before commencing the night’s study marathon. During my sophomore year at Jamestown the schedule was the same except I substituted wrestling practice for the downtown job. I had decided to work on my timidity by offering myself as a sparing partner for Jamestown’s heavyweight wrestler, Moose Johnson. I realized that it was a mistake on the first day, but vowed to stay with it until I could pin the guy just once. The whole year passed without that happening. All I got out of the experiment was unbelievable conditioning, the daily humiliation of a good beating, and an end to my physical timidity. By the time Moose was through bouncing me around, nothing looked scary.

So many wonderful things happened to me while at Jamestown. I discovered, for a time, that Karl Marx was a genius, and then I discovered equally compelling genius in the John Birch Society. Soon afterward I found myself reading earlier philosophers, including Hegel, and my mind got so crammed with information that I had to start sorting and ordering it against my own experience with life. That, I realized, was the beginning of intellectual maturity. I had pushed myself for years to understand who I was in an emotional context, and now I was beginning to find myself intellectually, in the world of thought and opinion.

6. Finding A Of Balance

By the time spring arrived in 1962, I was physically and emotionally drained from the pace I had set for myself during my freshman year. I needed a break from studies and late nights. A summer of earning money at another construction site was appealing. I didn’t have far to go because

the U.S. Government was building a Minuteman missile base outside Minot, North Dakota, just 100 miles north of Zap.

As in high school, I was able to persuade my college teachers to excuse me several weeks early to find work. After a one day break at home in Zap, I hitched up to Minot and signed on. At 8:00 a.m. on a Monday I was issued rubber boots, pants and jacket, and a steel hardhat, and driven to a rural site outside Drake, North Dakota. At 10:00 a.m. I was led to a vertical shaft fifteen feet in diameter, and told to catch a ride on a steel basket attached to a crane for a 30 foot descent to the bottom, where three men were struggling valiantly to prevent a cave-in. The story now needs explanation to make sense.

The Minuteman missile silos, when completed, were 90 feet deep and fifteen feet in diameter, with a poured concrete base (blast pad) 8 feet deep. People like me, we were called miners, were charged with digging the holes. This was a challenge in North Dakota because much of the area in which we were digging was an underground lake bed. That meant that we went through very wet ground which was constantly shifting. We attempted to overcome that by bolting a steel ring (can) around us as we descended, 18" at a time. When the ground threatened to collapse the ring, we would drill 4" holes at 6' intervals, attach a fire hose to them, and pump very "hot" cement behind the steel lining. The cement was called hot because it was treated with calcium chloride to make it harden fast. Calcium chloride acts like acid when it comes into contact with human skin. Thus the rubber boots, pants and coats.

I descended into the hole without any briefing as to the dangers of working around calcium chloride. I saw three men struggling to hold back the collapsing can, so I pitched in, getting on my hands and knees in the water and mud to increase my leverage. I was strong and fresh, and by working with abandon, unconcerned about my boots and pants filling with calcium chloride, I was able to make a difference.

At noon we were given a very short break to eat lunch and regain our energy. My feet felt like they were burning, so I removed my boots and saw, to my horror, blood around both calves, ankles, and between my toes. I didn't want to be a complainer, but thought I should call it to the foreman's attention in case it resulted in serious injury, so I said, "My feet are sore." and pointing to the damage. He replied, "You'll get used to it." I didn't know. Maybe I would. I needed work, and this job, working seven days a week, paid lots of overtime. Still no one mentioned the calcium chloride. So I went back into the hole with my partners and continued the struggle.

At the end of the day, as we climbed out of the hole to make room for the swing shift, I felt serious discomfort, and was uncertain that I could make it home unassisted. I removed both boots painfully, and discovered that my legs were slowly bleeding from the calves down. I seemed to have lost my epidermis everywhere, and damaged much of the lower level of skin as well. I looked around for assistance to get to the nearest town, Drake, North Dakota, and everyone had gone. I was alone on foot in a field, about 100 yards from the nearest gravel road, and 20 miles from town. For a moment I felt anger at having been abandoned, but that passed. Holding my heavy boots in one hand, and a walking stick in the other, I set out for town barefoot.

The days are long in North Dakota in early June, which was lucky. I got to town before dark, found my brother, who was working on the same project at another site and had a hotel room, and proceeded to take the most painful bath of my lifetime. I knew that I needed to get hot water and soap on those wounds or it would be goodbye to both legs. Later my brother and I located a local doctor who looked me over, applied salve and an ace bandage from toes to knee on both

legs, and announced that he would be out of town for the weekend, but wanted to see me again Monday.

My plan was to get some sleep and go back to work. I knew that if I failed to show for my second day on the job I'd be fired, and I needed the work. Unfortunately, when I arose on Saturday morning I could not get those boots on over the bandage. It might have been too painful for me. It might simply have been too much bulk. I don't remember.

I began to feel sorry for myself, then thought, "No, Ray. Use the time constructively. Stay in Drake and you'll just get depressed." I hadn't seen my friends in Alexander in over a year, and that was only 135 miles east, so I limped to the edge of town and put out my thumb.

I coped with the pain that weekend by smoking and drinking. A day and one-half in Alexander satisfied my needs to catch up with friends, and I still couldn't get my boots on, so I hitched home to Zap with no real plan. My parents welcomed me, and didn't ask lots of questions. That night, as I grimaced against the pain while trying to sleep, I resolved to see a doctor. My legs didn't seem to be healing themselves.

A local friend, Leroy Walsh, drove me to the doctor's office in Beulah and watched as my ace bandages were removed. The stench of rotting flesh exploded into the room, the doctor jumped back reflexively, then steadied. After looking at my legs, now covered with green and black mucus as well as dried blood, he said: "Son. You have gangrene. I may have to take both of your legs." The doctor cleaned and redressed my legs, applying new ace bandages, we discussed logistics, and then Leroy helped me out the door and into his car for the drive to the hospital.

On the short drive from Beulah to Hazen I considered my situation, focussing on the upside, as was always my habit. For starters, I was going to get a rest, and because the accident happened on the job I would collect workman's compensation. I calculated that this would pay all of my hospital expenses, meals, and another \$600 per month. This was more money, net, than I would have earned working full time. The worst case would be amputation of both legs, and because I had had the foresight to purchase an injury insurance policy while working at Oahe Dam the previous summer I knew that I would be compensated \$75,000 per limb. Hell, I could go to Harvard for \$150,000.

With these positive thoughts in my mind, I got off on the wrong foot with the nurses at Hazen hospital. I informed everyone that I was earning workmen's compensation, would be there for a while, and thus wanted a single room with a view. They responded by grudgingly taking me to a bed in a windowless room, and leaving me unattended. Within a half hour the cumulative stress of the past five days hit me. I had gone from my college dormitory to home to a new construction job to a terrible injury to a lonely hotel in a strange town to a long hitch to Alexander, to another long hitch home and then to the doctor's office and an announcement that I might spend the rest of my life in a chair in just five days, yet it seemed like a lifetime. I spiked a fever, and wanted my mother.

Mom arrived several hours later, having been informed by Leroy that he had left me in the hospital, she assessed the situation, got me blankets and aspirin, and let the nurses know that this

young man had a mother who cared about him. It was the last time that my mom rode to my rescue, and it sure felt good. It is no wonder that, to this day, when I'm in a jam, Mom is the first person I think of.

The summer of 1962 was important for me because it gave me a valuable lesson in finding balance. I responded to treatment for my burns, and in six weeks was back on the job in Minot. Another near accident led me to give up on the mining work, and I turned to safer and cleaner survey work on the same project. I reflected at length during that summer, and concluded that my rush to get an education was important, as was my determination to earn enough income to pay my own way in life, but I needed to also set some limits on how hard to push myself. I needed to find a balance of ambition and energy that would be sustainable. It would take me many years to learn to put this realization into practice.

7. Holding On To God (Part III)

At nineteen I was still in turmoil over my spiritual life. It seemed that the more I learned about the formal religious instruction of my childhood the less it made sense to me. I knew that God was real because I continued to talk to him at least daily; much more when in times of stress. But all of the religious formalities, from doctrine to hymns to the church's interface with society in general were problematic for me.

Jamestown was a Presbyterian affiliated institution, and classes in religion were encouraged, so at the beginning of my sophomore year I decided to treat myself to some really adult-level religious instruction. No more evading the hard questions, I figured. Another disappointment! It seemed that so long as the focus of religious instruction was on church doctrine, whether it was Lutheranism, Presbyterianism, or Catholicism, I was going to run into nonsensical mumbo jumbo. I felt worried. I couldn't separate God from Christianity. Everyone knew that if you weren't a Christian you couldn't go to heaven and be with God.

Philosophy class started me thinking that maybe I needed to open up to some wider possibilities. Maybe God wasn't really a Lutheran, or even a Christian. Maybe he was above all that institutional dogma and actually able to relate to human beings of all cultures and faiths. It was a distressing idea for me to deal with on a personal level because it meant that everyone I had grown up with was confused, and the professional preachers and teachers in my life were either extraordinarily closed minded, or they were liars, promoting a set of bogus teachings.

I decided to try to let go of the struggle to reconcile my culture with my intuition about God until a later time. It was a cold-blooded decision, but I just had more going on than I could deal with. I was comfortable with my own spiritual life, and I would try to leave all the confusion about where my parents, siblings, teachers and friends stood unresolved. Not easy to do, especially at such a tender age, but I was so greedy for all kinds of other knowledge that I was willing to put aside reconciliation of these important issues until a later time. One night during that period of self examination I awoke from a dream in which I faced execution while wrestling with the question of whether God was real. I kept insisting on tangible evidence of God's existence until, at the moment just before dying, I awoke. I'm not sure what the dream was telling me.

8. Professor Neifer's Advanced Writing Seminar

Another sophomore year class that impacted my life permanently was an advanced writing seminar with Professor Paul Neifer. I was the only underclassman among a small group of seniors. The professor was an ex-Marine, lean and agile, with a very sharp wit and temperament. I sensed, as a kid who had bounced around the unforgiving world of construction for a few years, that this was a person who should not be trifled with.

I worked harder in Neifer's class than I did in any other I had ever taken. Each week there was another writing assignment, and I found myself investing perhaps eight hours per 200 word page. Every word, phrase, sentence and paragraph was an agonizing struggle. Some of the assignments were book reviews, which forced me to deal with the writing style of others. I was challenged like I had never been, was rising to the challenge like never before, and every one of my papers earned the same grade, a D.

I couldn't understand it. In my other classes I was earning A's with far less work. I felt that my writing was good, and getting better each day, but I couldn't get a decent grade. Finally, about half-way through the semester, fearing that I might lose my scholarship because of a low grade, I stayed after class and confronted the professor.

The meeting was very scary for me. Perhaps because of my years working around construction I came on more forcefully than I should have. Perhaps because he had been a Marine he was less tolerant of dissent than he might have been. Whatever it was, we had a "blow-up" that I feared might get me thrown out of school. Neifer shouted at me, and I at him, both of us raging like cornered animals. When I left the room nothing had been resolved. I worried about the consequences, but went back to working as hard as ever to write well. When my next paper was returned to me Neifer had scribbled an A in the upper right hand corner. The same grade was applied to every paper I wrote for him the remainder of the semester, and my grade for the course was also an A.

I still don't understand what happened there. All that I am sure of is that Neifer took a raw kid who couldn't write a sentence and taught him to communicate in writing in just one semester. I'm also sure that he was a dedicated professional who knew what he was doing. That class room blow-up that worried me so, I think, was somehow part of the teaching process. Whatever he did to get his result, I shall be forever grateful to him for it.

9. On Becoming A Carpenter

From the time I started out in construction at age fifteen I had yearned to learn a trade and thus graduate to higher pay levels and more interesting work. The path up from laborer tended to be either toward handling steel or handling wood. The steel workers on heavy construction jobs were the "lords" of the projects, earning the highest wages while doing the heaviest and most dangerous work. They were mostly young men with magnificent bodies who prided themselves in being drinkers and fighters. The carpenters, on the other hand, tended to be older men with families who came to work, did their jobs, taking care not to get in the way of the steel workers,

and went home to their families on week-ends. I wanted to be a steel worker in the worst way, but any trade was better than none.

In the spring of 1963, following my sophomore year at Jamestown, I purchased my first automobile for \$150 (a ten year old Dodge), and drove to Cheyenne, Wyoming to seek employment on the Minuteman missile project starting up there. Arriving ahead of the school kids, I was immediately hired as a laborer/stripper (that means I carried a hammer and crow bar and spent my day prying steel and wooden forms from recently dried concrete). About a month into the summer I got a break. A rumor circulated that the carpenter's union in Rawlins, Wyoming, just 200 miles west of Cheyenne, had a call for 150 carpenters to work on a new power plant project, and due to the demand for carpenters in nearby Cheyenne, they had no possibility of filling the order.

a. Apprenticeship

I was nervous about leaving a good job, but decided to seize the opportunity. On Sunday afternoon I headed west, arriving about 8:00 that evening. After a bit of reconnaissance, I found the union hall, parked my car in front of it, and went to sleep in the back seat. When the union's doors opened at 7:00 a.m., I was twenty feet from the action.

I knew that I would not be hired if there were any real carpenters available, so I waited while about twenty men entered, presumably to pick up work assignments, and then exited to drive away. When the traffic stopped, I went in myself. The union's business agent, a man about fifty, asked for my card. I told him that I came from a non-union state (North Dakota) but had worked as a carpenter for two years, mostly building barns. He asked me if I had \$100, I produced it, and he wrote out a card that said that I was an 80 percent apprentice. To my reckoning that put me within one year of a journeyman, and would pay me nearly the journeyman's rate, so I left with my work assignment feeling rather smug. Unfortunately, I had left Cheyenne with just \$150, and I now needed to purchase all the accouterments of a carpenter.

I drove to a hardware store and bought a hammer, saw, tape measure, level, chisels, plane, square, chalk line, tool box, tool belt, etc. as well as a pair of bib overalls. After paying for everything, I was left with a nickel and two pennies. Hmmm! No problem. I had gas in the car, and I figured that at day's end I could call my father collect and ask him to wire me a loan of \$100.

I drove out of town toward the job site feeling nervous, though excited about my career opportunity, when I realized that my strategy to "bust into" the carpenter's union needed refinement. All of my tools and my bib overalls were new. If I walked onto the job looking like I had just stepped out of a hardware store I would be recognized as a fraud and run off. I spotted a mud puddle, pulled my car over, dumped all of my new tools and my overalls into the puddle, and walked on them. Then I sat down beside the puddle and carefully cleaned everything. Now I was ready.

As I pulled my car up to the job site I appraised the situation. There were about fifty carpenters working in an area about 100 feet on a side, building wooden forms for concrete pours. I had been stripping such forms in Cheyenne, so I knew more or less how they were constructed. A very hard looking, agile man about thirty-five approached me, said he was the carpenter steward,

gave me what I took to be a suspicious look, and told me to “suit up” and join a group of about a dozen men working on one of the large forms. As I nervously filled my belt with nails, not knowing for sure which size to select, I prayed I wouldn’t have to fight the steward. He looked like a very “tough cookie.”

Five minutes after arriving at the site, I was standing in front of a wooden form wondering what to do next. My new colleagues looked at me suspiciously, probably uncomfortable with my youth, and my beard, which branded me as a leftist or a hippie. I reached into my belt, pulled out a 16 penny nail, set it in front of me in what I thought would be a good place to pound a nail, picked-up my 24 ounce hammer with my right hand, and swung my arm with enough force to shake the ground. I missed the nail. Everyone stopped working and watched me. I gave another mighty blow and missed again. I knew that I was about one minute from getting run off the job, and maybe slapped around a bit in the process. It was do or die.

I stood erect, gripping my 24 ounce hammer like a weapon, and glared over and down at the carpenter beside me. He averted his eyes. I then worked myself around the circle, taking a full half minute, giving each man a hard look until he looked away. Then I said a silent prayer, swung the hammer a third time, and buried the nail to the hilt. I was in!

b. A Journeyman

I only lasted three days on that job. A number of men were laid off and I was among them. I didn’t mind because life in Rawlins had been difficult. After work my first full day I had hoped to celebrate by spending my 7 cents on a Dairy Queen but found that the price of a small cone had recently increased to 10 cents, so I dined instead on a banana and several cans of warm beer that I had brought along in the trunk of my car. It was high school graduation night in Rawlins, and as I struggled to fall asleep in the back seat of my car I felt lonesome for home and friends.

My several remaining nights in Rawlins were better because I had a bed and food (thanks to a timely funds wire from my father), but the lodging was not ideal. At \$2 a day the price was right, but because my room was on the third floor of a whore house, I had to stand outside and knock every time I wanted to gain entry. When the madam, Ruby, opened the door for me everyone knew I had arrived because there was a string tied to the door handle that led up two flights of stairs, and tied to the string, at two foot intervals, were little bells. As I walked the length of the second floor hallway, en route to the steps up to my room, I felt appraising eyes on me from every open door I passed.

I left for Cheyenne the morning after being laid off, spent the evening with the other kids from Zap who had followed me to Wyoming, and the next morning I presented myself to the local carpenter union business agent. I told him I had been working for more than a year as an 80 percent apprentice, and was ready to go on the job as a journeyman carpenter. He replied that he could only send me to the job as a journeyman if I passed the carpenter exam, and invited me to join the weekly union meeting that evening, at which time I would be given the exam and, if successful, sworn in.

I had no idea how to study for the exam, but did not want to miss this opportunity for career advancement, so showed up that evening hoping for the best. My first thoughts, as I entered the union hall, were about where the windows and doors were in case I had to make a hasty exit. We all pledged allegiance to the flag, sang the “Star Spangled Banner” and cited some other carpenter oath I can’t remember. All of this patriotic stuff made me very nervous. I wondered how the 100 or so men in the room would feel about swearing in a kid with a beard. Then my name was called.

Three big honest-looking guys came for me, and led me down a corridor to a room at the back of the building. I marked the doors and windows in my mind as we walked along, and felt very uneasy. The three men sat on folding chairs, there was a table between us, and I stood. There were three similarly phrased questions to the exam, only two of which I remember:

(1) “Do you know how many pounds you can hang on a 16 penny nail?”, asked on of the men. My heart raced as I saw a glimmer of hope and I replied forcefully, “Yup!”

(2) “Do you know how to build a box form?”, the second man asked. Once again I dazzled them with my knowledge of the profession as I replied, “Yup!”

(3) I don’t remember the third question, but the answer to it was also, “Yup!”

When I had successfully answered the questions, my inquisitors looked at one another and the leader said: “He seems to know how to do the job.” As they led me back to the main meeting to be sworn in, I felt a rush of relief, and wondered how I would ever explain my voyage from laborer to carpenter to my father.

10. Crossing The Border

I had yearned to take a year off from school to travel the world since around age fifteen, and my twentieth year seemed the time to do that. It was 1963, I was working as a carpenter on the Minuteman missile project in Cheyenne, and the cold weather was making working outdoors ever less pleasant. John Kennedy was shot that November, shortly after two young colleagues of mine were killed in a construction accident, and the twin circumstances gave me a sense of mortality – of the need to make my time count. The notion of going to Cuba to help Fidel Castro with his liberation struggle had been spoiled by then, as his revolution deteriorated into a dictatorship of his own making. Travelling to Mississippi to register voters had appeal, but I didn’t know how to hook up with such an undertaking. And of course there was always Brazil; my father had talked often of this magnificent, huge frontier on the other side of the equator.

The cold weather of that December cinched it for me. I would travel home for Christmas, say farewell to my mom and dad, and head South to see new people and places and, I hoped, in the process become a world citizen.

I spent a week visiting family and friends in North Dakota over Christmas, then drove west to touch base with the families of Mom’s sister Ruth in Wyoming, her brother Wes in Washington, and her brother Wilmer in Oregon. Thereafter, I pointed my old Dodge south, making stops in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and finally San Diego and the border. The driving itself was thrilling for me as I was learning to get around cities with stop-and-go lights and one-way streets, to

read maps, to parallel park, and to deal with buildings with elevators, escalators, automatic doors and the like. It was a lot for a small town kid to take in all at once.

a. Mugged In Tijuana

I crossed the border into Tijuana, Mexico with a feeling of excitement. I was finally doing it – traveling abroad, becoming a citizen of the world. Two shirtless boys with flags waved me into an unfinished dirt lot where I parked my car. Following the crowds with a sense of excitement, I walked down the dirty streets lined with craft shops, restaurants and bars, and entered a place that seemed promising. There was a chubby lady on a stage behind the bar dancing in her underpants and T-shirt. She periodically lifted her shirt to give the patrons a glimpse of the wonders beneath. I ordered a beer and felt manly, like a cowboy in a western saloon.

After a time I exited and strolled on down the street. About a block from the bar a man about my age spoke from a doorway: “Psst. Come here, Senor, I need your help.” I stepped into the doorway, not knowing what to expect, and saw two other men step out of the shadows behind me. My heart raced. The gentleman who issued the original invitation said: “Give us \$14.” I thought: “Shit! That is exactly what is in my wallet. How did they learn that?” I felt scared, realizing that they had marked me in the bar when I bought the drink. I answered, “You’ll have to take it.” and I pushed the fellow in front of me.

The rest is unclear to me. I remember that the fight lasted less than a minute, that one of the men held a knife, but only watched. Another had a six inch blackjack, and he hit me repeatedly from behind, always on my shoulders, until my arms felt dead.. The guy in front of me traded punches, neither of us hurting the other. As my arms lost power, I realized that resistance was futile, so I stopped struggling and said, “Ok! You can have the money.” The fellows accepted my wallet, took the cash, returned the wallet, and as I turned away in humiliation, trying to “save face” by making some silly threat, one of them kicked me in the backside so hard that I went up on my toes and nearly lost my balance. His parting words were something like, “Go home to your mama, gringo!”

I was devastated. As I returned to my car all I could think about was getting revenge, but I knew that I couldn’t. I had been totally overmatched. I had to get back across the border and try to figure this out. My humiliation was absolute.

b. It’s Now Or Never

The next three days were a time of shame, loneliness and soul-searching for me. I drove east from San Diego, skirting the Mexican border on the American side as I traveled through California, Arizona, New Mexico and into Texas. I wanted to head south toward Brazil, but my Tijuana experience both scared me and made me wonder why. If that is what I could expect from Mexicans, why did I think it would be any better in whatever countries lay below Mexico, or even in Brazil, for that matter? Maybe I should just turn north, head back to my safe little environment in Jamestown, and forget about all this world citizen stuff. I hadn’t ever actually met a world citizen. Why should I want to be one myself?

On my third night after the fateful experience in Tijuana I was in El Paso, Texas, walking the streets and struggling with my dilemma. El Paso was on highway 85, the same road that travels through Cheyenne, and Alexander. All I had to do was point myself north. It was cold, and I didn't want to spend money on coffee, so I entered a public library and sat at a table, looking at maps, pondering, and praying. Finally the "light came on."

I would park my car in El Paso, and hitchhike south. The only thing I owned that I feared losing was my \$150 car. If I met more bad guys, the likelihood was that they would only want my money, so I could always turn back north. I realized that I had already suffered as much as I ever would, and having survived the humiliation of Tijuana I had nothing new to fear. I remembered the old story about falling off the horse; that the best thing is to get back on immediately, because the longer one delays the harder it is to get the courage to try again. I knew that it would be now or never.

11. Finding My Future

The next morning, as I crossed the border into Juarez on foot, I began an experience that would change my life permanently. My instinct about the appeal of world citizenship had been correct. It *was* my destiny to travel and live among people from different cultures. Indeed, for me it was as natural as breathing, and ever so exhilarating. But as I moved into this new life, day by day, circumstance by circumstance, relationship by relationship, I never knew what the next moment would bring, and almost everything I did was for the first time. I found myself gorging on these adventures just as I had gorged on book learning during my two years at Jamestown. Each day was a feast, and every night I collapsed in my bed satiated.

The key to getting along with folks you couldn't talk to, I learned, was simply to like them, and let them see that. Humans just wanted to be respected, and if you would give them that they would give it back.

I also learned, as I worked my way across Mexico and into Central America, that country folk were the easiest for me to understand and deal with. The urban sophisticates who were drawn to me because I was American, a blue-eyed blond, and young, often spoke some English, and were eager to practice it on me, and even to show me off to their friends. But it was the shy, rural Indians whom I stopped to talk with along the way who intrigued me, and with whom I connected best. They were generally barefoot and had little formal education, but they were more like me than were their urban counterparts. They knew what it was to work hard all day in the hot sun, to depend upon the weather for their livelihood, as do farmers everywhere, to be looked right at and not seen by city folk traveling through. I felt rapport with these folks, and they with me.

Day by day my notion of how I wished to invest my life clarified. I had known since about age 12 that I wanted to leave North Dakota and make my life in a place with people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. I was bored with looking like all of my friends. By age sixteen I knew that I wanted to work with poor people, and try to make their lives easier. When I departed on my voyage to Brazil, I thought my strategy would be to get a law degree and become a labor organizer. I had seen the unions do good things for the men who worked with me on the Oahe

Dam and Minuteman missile projects, and I had come to respect the hard-working men who labored beside me under such difficult circumstances.

By the time I reached Guatemala I knew that my real life's work would be with the more profoundly disadvantaged people of the third world; folks like the Indians I was dealing with every day along the road. Here were people who had truly been dealt a poor hand of cards; people with equal talent and energy to my own who had to fight just to get their next meal. These folks had virtually no chance to realize their God-given potential absent outside intervention. I thought I could make a difference with these people.

My daydreams about reshaping my life in such a different way began to take on an aspect of reality, finally, with an event that cut short my trip to Brazil. Fate showed me how I might realize my new career development plan.

I had fallen sick several times along the way. In Acapulco, unfamiliar with the tropical sun, I had burned myself seriously, spiked a high fever, and spent a few days in bed recovering. Later, in San Salvador I had fallen to heat exhaustion and lost a few days. Finally, as a consequence of eating and drinking without care during my entire trip, I fell sick in Nicaragua with amoebic dysentery. I tried to ride it out for several days, spending two entire days and nights on the toilet in my hotel, shedding 20 pounds in the process. Finally, fearing that I might become too weak to travel, and down to about \$50, most of it owed to the hotel for nights not yet paid, I pulled up my pants and raced across town to the American Embassy. I arrived just in time to avoid soiling myself, visited their toilet, and then went in to talk with a vice counsel. I told him that I was sick, needed to wire my father to request enough money to purchase a plane ticket to Miami, and asked for his help. He looked disapprovingly at my beard, scolded me for the situation I was in, and informed me that it would cost me \$15 and take 21 days for him to send a cable and receive a response. I reminded him that cables travel at 186,200 miles per second, expressed disappointment at his response, and ran back to my hotel, stopping at his toilet en route.

Later that day I visited the Nicaraguan airline, Lanica, told them my plight, and they sent the cable free of charge, promising a response in the morning.

As I spent my last mostly sleepless night on the toilet in Managua, I reflected. If that is the best the American government can do in selecting foreign service officers, I could have a wonderful career in that business. I began to see how I might find professional employment and work with poor people in Latin America.

12. Goodbye To North Dakota

I departed Managua the next day, thanks to a wire of \$100 from my father, arriving in Miami on the night that Cassius Clay defeated Sonny Liston for the heavyweight championship. The Beatles, a new music group from England, had appeared on the scene in my absence, and seemingly overnight had swept the nation. I put out my thumb at Miami International Airport with a \$20 bill and change in my pocket, en route to my car in El Paso. My plan was to recover it and return home to North Dakota to recover from my dysentery.

I hitched four days and nights without stopping, sleeping fitfully while riding. There was a scare north of Miami as I rode with two drunk young men from Detroit who waved guns at me and made threatening noises. There was another scare in Louisiana as I was discharged around 2:00 a.m. at the site of a stone throwing incident involving union workers on strike, and another in central Texas with a rich, drunk, gun-toting oilman who feared that I meant to hurt him. Along the way I spent most of my \$20, recovered from the dysentery, and made a deal with a truck driver transporting me into El Paso to pay my \$15 parking fee in return for one day's use of my car to smuggle booze into the U.S. A week after arriving in Miami I was home again in Zap, already well and eager to go to work.

The newspapers reported that North Dakota was about to become host to its second Minuteman missile complex, this one near Grand Forks. I knew that the work in Cheyenne would be slowing, as the base was more than half completed, so I decided to start fresh in Grand Forks. After several days of eating Mom's cooking, and sleeping on a familiar bed, I set out on the 350 mile drive northeast. It was mid-winter and the temperature was below zero Fahrenheit.

Because the job was at absolute start-up, the only workers being hired were miners, needed to dig the 90 foot deep shafts. I knew this work because I had done it in Minot several years earlier, so was hired the moment I presented myself. Thus began what was perhaps the most challenging job of my lifetime, and the beginning of my recognition that I, too, could be broken if tested sufficiently.

I leased a room in the basement of a single family home, next to the furnace where warmth was assured. My work day started at 5:00 a.m. as I arose, dressed in five layers of clothing, and ventured outside in the pre-dawn darkness, where the wind chill was between minus 25 and minus 75 degrees Fahrenheit for the first four weeks, to put a heating element on my engine block so that the car would start. Then it was back into the basement to eat a breakfast of peanut butter, liverwurst and cheese sandwiches, and prepare a lunch of more of the same.

The individual job sites were spread in a ring at a 25 mile radius from Grand Forks Air Base. That meant that they were anywhere from 20 to 60 miles drive from town. I would pick up several of my work mates, and set out for the job site about sun-up at 7:00 a.m., taking care to arrive at least ten minutes before start of our shift at 8:00 a.m. The first thing that impacted me each morning was noting the appearance of the men from graveyard shift as they came up out of the hole. Covered in ice, they moved mechanically, and had eyes that were empty of expression. There were five miners on a crew, and each day the shift that preceded us had a new person. These were tough North Dakota farm people who had lived their entire lives in cold winters, but the challenges of working an eight hour shift under these conditions was too much for them.

I couldn't wait to get my hands on a jackhammer, because it was the only way to get warm. No matter how cold the temperature, and how viciously the wind howled in from Canada, within fifteen minutes of squeezing the trigger on the jackhammer I would begin to sweat beneath my five layers of clothing, and my body would loosen. During that first month we never put down the jackhammers because every inch of icy ground we chipped through would expose another inch to freezing. The freeze line literally moved down with us. There was no problem with loose, water infested soil because we were digging through solid ice.

By 10:00 a.m., when we were allowed to stop for a drink of hot coffee and a cigarette, our hands were numb, fingers locked around the jackhammer trigger. Our beards, which were critical to breaking the force of the wind, were caked with ice caused by mucous draining constantly from our eyes and noses. The foreman would have a fire roaring in a barrel, so we would thaw out our hands, still in the gloves, trying to loosen them enough to open our coffee thermoses. The sweat that had been dripping down our backs froze the moment we let go of the jackhammers, so long icicles formed under our clothing.

The days seemed very long, and though I never gave quitting a thought, I developed a new appreciation for the harshness of North Dakota's winters. I had always prided myself in being the kid who never zipped up his parka, no matter how cold, and in being able to get on my skis and hike across country to check my trap line, or shoot rabbits. I thought I could handle the weather. Now I knew better. I knew that handling the weather in North Dakota simply meant staying inside, where it can't hurt you, and sampling it in small, manageable doses. I realized that I feared cold weather, and could never again put myself in a position to have to deal with it. I mentally moved out of North Dakota that winter. I would make my life in warm places, I thought, and reserve my physical and emotional toughness for challenges that had more meaning. Why, I wondered, would a rational person subject himself to such a harsh environment?

PART IV: COURTSHIP, MARRIAGE AND GRADUATE SCHOOL

1. Meeting Sanna

As soon as I got myself settled into life on the Grand Forks Minuteman missile project, I looked up a kid I had known during my freshman year in high school at Haynes. Wes Christenson had been one year ahead of me, his mom taught third and fourth grades at our school, and he was even then developing as a student leader. I had heard that he went on to college at the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks, so checked for his number in the campus telephone book while grabbing a meal in the student union cafeteria.

As it turned out, Wes, in his senior year, was the biggest man on campus. Editor of the school newspaper, editor of the school yearbook, president of his fraternity and president of the student body, he was a whirling dervish of activity and influence and, I was pleased to learn, happy to hear from me. Wes asked me to spend a night in his fraternity, giving me his bed while he slept on the floor, and also invited me to my first ever fraternity/sorority party, an annual drinking and dancing event called the "Singapore Sling." I didn't know what to make of the warm reception into his world, so different from what I had known as an ascetic at Jamestown, and also a world apart from my life as an itinerate construction worker. I gathered that I was a curiosity in my own right, being a bearded construction guy who had recently traveled abroad, so I kept my mouth shut and "went with the flow."

During my evening at the frat house, Wes gathered several of his "brothers" around the prior year's yearbook and, with Wes simultaneously writing a term paper for one of them and directing activities, we searched for a suitable date I might take to the "Singapore Sling." The photo decided upon by everyone, with strong direction from Wes, was of a pretty, blue-eyed blond girl who had been a homecoming queen runner-up. Her name was Sanna Lee Rimstad.

Sanna, it seemed, was the daughter of a foreign service officer, had grown up in Germany, and was generally regarded as sophisticated among the local, mostly home-grown kids. Wes had been “sweet on her” for some time, but had been unsuccessful as a suitor. So they were good friends, and I was her designated date.

I felt confused about everything that was going on around me. From 5:00 a.m. awakening until returning home about 6:00 p.m. I struggled just to survive the cold while developing a relationship with four other very tough young men, none of whom had ever seen the inside of a fraternity house, nor dated a college girl, and never would. Then I would shower, thaw out, eat my evening meal of liverwurst, cheese and peanut-butter sandwiches, and venture out to the campus to see Wes and his colleagues, whose main topics of conversation were classes, basketball games and girls.

And now I had to deal with a date. I hadn’t been with a girl for nearly two years. At Jamestown my gender isolation had been deliberate, as I wanted to avoid distraction from my studies. Later, while working construction in Cheyenne, I simply couldn’t meet girls my age. The region was overwhelmed with construction workers and the crime and social problems that come with hordes of single, male itinerate workmen, and the local families responded by keeping their daughters off the streets. The closest I ever got to female companionship was an occasional fleeting conversation with a random construction worker’s wife while doing laundry. During my Latin American jaunt there had been dates, but always chaperoned, as was the custom with Latin women of the time, so displays of affection never got past holding hands. Frankly, I wasn’t ready for this, but I couldn’t see an easy way to ask out.

The night of the date I learned that college girls can be expensive. I was expected to purchase a party favor, a glass mug labeled “Singapore Sling,” and bring a bottle of booze. After spending \$5 for the mug and \$6 for a bottle of rum, I was “flat-ass broke” until my first payday on the new job. Thank goodness my car was full of gas!

Sanna met me at the door of her sorority house, and I wondered if such a pretty girl was going to be comfortable with a raw construction worker. She appeared not to mind how I presented myself, and talked effusively all evening, seeming to know everyone, so it wasn’t necessary for me to say much. What could I have said? I knew lots about construction, a bit about traveling in Latin America, and loved to discuss philosophy, religion, history and politics. None of my interests would have drawn a crowd at this gathering. About half way through the evening, as Sanna and I danced, I ventured a kiss, and she responded by biting me. Startled, I thought: “Go slow, Ray. You’ve never dated a college girl, and you have no idea what you are doing.” The evening ended with no further mishaps, and I retreated to my basement room, next to the warm furnace, to reflect. I was broke until payday, still seven days off, so I thought I would have lots of time to mull things over.

The next night, a Saturday, as I was polishing off my evening meal of liverwurst, cheese and peanut butter sandwiches, reflecting on another gruesome day working outdoors in the sub-zero weather, I received my first ever visitor to my new basement digs. It was Wes, and he was inviting me to join him and Sanna for drinks at a college bar. I told him I was broke, but he insisted

that he'd like to pay so I tagged along. Sunday evening the same thing happened, except that Wes insisted that it was at Sanna's instigation. Hmmn. Could this good looking, popular coed really be interested in me? It didn't make much sense. The following night, having been invited the previous date, I joined Sanna at her grandparents home near the campus, where we were alone for the first time. We talked quietly, still no kissing or even holding hands. Then seemingly "out of the blue," as I lay on the couch with my date curled up on the carpet beside me; Sanna said, "I think that I'm falling in love with you."

"Holy smokes! Where did that come from? Four days I've known this girl. Why didn't I see it coming?" Just when I thought I was getting the hang of dating a college girl, I became more confused than ever.

2. Courtship

Sanna and I dated steadily all winter and spring until graduation day and the arrival of her parents. Plans were to load her possessions into the family car, drive her home to Washington, D.C., and then she would decide whether to remain there and work or accompany them to Paris to her father's next assignment.

Dates with Sanna were different from what I was accustomed to in high school. In Zap the girls had been short on conversation and long on kissing, so on dates we had mostly listened to the Top Forty music station and kissed. It suited me just fine, and I got to be pretty good at it. There were times when I was sorely tempted to cross the line from kissing to more serious forms of intimacy, but I always resisted taking that step, partly out of respect for my young partners and partly out of fear of the consequences. Sanna was more of a talker than a kisser. She loved to discuss history and politics, so we did that, and then there was always a flurry of social activity around her to keep things interesting.

The morning after what I thought would be our last evening together, I showed up at Sanna's sorority house, per her request, to help her parents load their automobile. I had not yet met them, so was expecting a formal presentation and wondered how she would characterize our relationship. I was disappointed. She merely referred to me offhandedly as the guy she had been dating, I picked up some trunks and loaded them, and they were off. I don't remember even shaking her father's hand.

I felt a "let down," with Sanna departing my life after occupying every evening of it since we had met five months earlier, but also a sense of relief. I knew that she was ready for marriage and I, with two years of undergraduate studies ahead of me, and then perhaps law school, was nowhere near ready.

Three days later I was awakened from a hard sleep by a 3:00 a.m. telephone call. It was Sanna, calling from her home in Washington, D.C. She said that she had been crying since leaving me, and wanted to return. My brain reeled with this news, I stammered something about not wanting to get married, and her needing to find work and her own place to live, but not objecting to her return. So it was done.

Sanna returned by airplane a few days later, and we began phase two of our courtship. It worked like this. I'd come home from work, get cleaned up, pick her up from the home she shared with three of her sorority sisters, we'd make love, then go to a movie, bar, whatever, make love again, then I'd leave her at her home and I'd rush home to sleep enough to get through another work day. Our lovemaking was generally done in the car or somewhere in a park or field as we had no private accommodations to share and we were not ready to go public with this aspect of our relationship.

It was a schedule I could only keep because I was so young and tough. Working seven days a week, rotating from day to swing to graveyard shifts, is hard on a man in any event. With me running like this, subsisting on four or five hours of sleep, and then holding on to a sixty-pound jackhammer all day long, I was tested to my limits. On one occasion that I recall clearly I was standing on a small platform suspended from a crane thirty feet in the air, holding a cable by one hand to keep from falling, and a jackhammer in the other, when I fell asleep. Only the feel of my hands parting from the cable awoke me, and the balance of the other hand on the jackhammer gave me the split second I needed to grab a new hold to avoid falling to an early demise.

Thus we passed our first summer together, all the while with me making plans to return to academic life as a transfer student at the University of the Americas in Mexico City. My earlier trip to Latin America had piqued my interest in the region, and I felt that studies in Mexico would help to clarify my thoughts on the matter as well as give me a better feel for where to pursue graduate studies and later work. Sanna was noncommittal about my study and career plans, seeming to live day to day herself. That final week together we spent making plans for Sanna to launch her teaching career in nearby Fisher, Minnesota while I went away to Mexico.

3. Life In Mexico City

I had not yet learned to cry in the way men are allowed to, over something romantic, so the scene at the Minneapolis airport, saying goodbye to Sanna, was unexpected. She cried easily in those days, and I found myself so overwhelmed by her emotion on saying goodbye that I joined in. I was still wiping away tears as we winged over Nebraska en route south to my new home. I wondered, "Does this mean that I'm falling in love?" It didn't feel like love to me, but then what did I know about love?

Mexico City was everything I had yearned for as a small town boy watching out-of-state cars race through Alexander while my friends and I played in the park bordering Highway 85. At the time it had a population of 8 million, making it larger than New York City. Paseo de la Reforma, the main street in the Pink Zone, where I spent most of my time while downtown, was 12 lanes wide, the Latin American Tower was 44 stories high, one could hear a variety of languages spoken on the street, and prices were so low that I could afford to eat and drink most places. For me this life was a dream come true.

College itself was less interesting. The student body was comprised mostly of American kids on "Junior Year Abroad" programs from eastern U.S. universities, few of them very interested in their studies or the Mexican culture. The teaching faculty was also of haphazard quality. As a font of learning, Jamestown College had been far more challenging in every way; but then at

Jamestown I wasn't surrounded by a new language, culture, and ever so many interesting people on the streets and in the shops, pubs and markets.

Intellectually I knew that I should date while in Mexico, and try to broaden my social horizons, but after my near scrape with marriage, and that tearful farewell in Minneapolis, I didn't feel free to. So, instead of taking on the normal social life of a twenty-year-old student, I resumed my isolation, studying long hours, but interspersing studies with time on the streets where I could develop my Spanish-speaking ability and get to know this fascinating new culture.

When Christmas break rolled around, I found myself choosing between joining a friend hitching to the Yucatan Peninsula to go skin diving or staying in Mexico to host a visit from Sanna. I had been writing to her daily, and growing ever closer as we corresponded, and I felt fairly certain that if she flew to Mexico to spend a week with me over the holidays it could mean marriage at the end of the school year.

Sanna did come, and we had a wonderful time exploring Mexico City together. I don't remember much about what we did, but I recall that she traveled well, and seemed unafraid as we met the challenges of my new, sometimes ominous environment. I liked that, because I was certain that my future would bring lots of travel and adventure and I wanted a "game" partner to share it. Sanna didn't seem to have plans of her own, but rather was interested in sharing mine. She made it clear to me that married or not, she intended to "throw-in" with me and see where life would take us. I didn't understand how I could deal with living together absent marriage. It seemed to me to be dishonorable and thus not an option.

4. Wedding Plans

Only a couple of kids in their very early twenties could conceive of such an arrangement. Sanna would drive my old Dodge to Zap as soon as the school year ended in Fisher. There she and my father would load it, and an old homemade wooden trailer with all of our possessions, and she'd set out on the 1,500 mile drive to the Mexican border to meet me. I would catch a bus in Mexico City when my school year ended, and make the 1,000 mile trip north. We'd meet in San Antonio, spend a night in a hotel there, then drive to Austin, where I planned to enroll at the University of Texas, and while there we'd find a preacher and "tie the knot." So that is what we did.

I'll never forget our first sighting of one another in San Antonio. We must have agreed on an intersection, or a hotel, because I was standing on the street watching for Sanna when she appeared behind the wheel of the old Dodge. She had cut her hair short and looked so blond and pretty. When she spotted me her smile was radiant. It was a very nice reunion.

The paperwork at the University of Texas was simple. We then drove around the neighborhood surrounding the campus looking for housing for the next fall, and a nearby Lutheran Church where we might get married. In less than an hour's search we found a church with an open door, went in to look around, and encountered a preacher. He was taken aback at our desire to marry on such short notice, asked if there was a baby on the way, and informed us that the soonest he could do the ceremony was the next morning. Meantime, he wanted us to sit with him for some counseling immediately, so that we would have the evening to think things over.

The next morning Sanna dressed in a lovely off-white suit she had purchased for the occasion; I wore my only sport coat, a cheap little number with sleeves that didn't quite reach my hands, and trousers that didn't reach my shoes. Thus attired, we took our vows. I was pleased with how we did it: no ceremony, no pressure from outsiders, just two young people entering into a contract for which they alone were responsible. I wasn't ready for marriage, I knew, but was certain that once committed it was a thing I would live with and grow into.

We went out for steak that evening at a "high-end" diner on the edge of campus (the Thunderbird), and we had our first little tiff. It turns out that Sanna was not particularly fond of steak, and had no plans to finish it. I, on the other hand, had just paid for the most expensive dinner of my life, and couldn't imagine anyone not eating every morsel. When I saw that it was Sanna's intention to leave half her food uneaten I chastised her, saying that she should "clean her plate." She did, and it was probably the last time that Sanna allowed me to bully her in that way.

5. Honeymoon In Newark

From the time that Sanna and I became serious about one another she had frequently suggested that it would be good for me to spend some time on the East Coast. I took that to mean that such exposure would help to complete my education by acquainting me with the rest of our country, and I agreed. For Sanna the term East Coast meant Washington, D.C., where she had spent much of her youth. For me it meant New York City, because I perceived that as the epicenter of East Coast financial and cultural life. New York turned out to be close enough for Sanna.

The day after our wedding, with our preparations for school and housing in Austin completed, we set out for the "big apple." There was a several day delay in a small town in Oklahoma, where our beloved old Dodge received a new transmission, and another several hour stopover at a roadside restaurant in rural Pennsylvania, where I studied my maps and calculated our arrival time in the big city so that it would be late evening, after rush hour. I tried to appear cool, so as not to worry Sanna, but I knew that my rudimentary driving and map-reading skills would be tested.

At twenty-one, I still had only limited experience driving in cities with stop-and-go lights and one-way streets, and I was sure that New York City would have lots of both. To complicate things further, the Dodge had a leaky brake cylinder, which I kept "tuned up" by pouring fluid into it several times a day and pumping the brakes. Even with these precautions, stops required planning, with down shifting to slow the car, sometimes followed by erratic twisting of the wheel to further slow the car, and finally, if I needed to stop really fast at a light, or behind another car, I would open the driver's side door and plant my feet on the highway while pushing backward against the door with my shoulders. Better to face these challenges when traffic was not too competitive.

The massiveness of the metropolitan area was beyond my expectations. Mexico City had a greater population, but it was relatively compact, and, of course, I had not driven a car in Mexico City. We drove and drove and drove, and finally, in downtown Newark, near midnight and still several miles short of Manhattan, we decided to find a hotel. It would also be cheaper, we rea-

soned. We found a “flea bag” in a rough part of town, parked our car and trailer, and proceeded to unload everything we owned, hauling it over the sidewalk, through the lobby, onto the elevator, and eventually into our room. I remember stopping for a breather about half-way through the exercise and, as I stood beside the desk clerk while Sanna passed with a trunk on her back he asked, “Is that one of them there pioneer women I’ve heard about?” I felt pretty proud of her at that moment.

In the next few days we concluded that Newark was as close to the “big apple” as we would get that summer, mainly due to the cost of living across the Hudson, so we took an apartment on North Broadway. The neighborhood was all Italian on our side of the street, and all black on the other side. The building was run down, and the walls between apartments poorly insulated so we could hear our neighbors quarrel, make love, or whatever else they were doing. The streets were crowded with tough talking folks sitting around in their undershirts, but that was more a curiosity to us than a fear. Our car, left unlocked, was unmolested due to its pathetic physical condition. All in all, we fit into our new culture with relative ease.

The job situation was not ideal. Sanna was introduced to the management at the Consolidated Freightways depot down in Newark’s infamous “neck” through my mom’s brother Wilmer in Portland (he was the company’s vice president) and accepted a day job as a clerk. I wanted to do physical work, so reported for swing shift at the “shape line” for Consolidated each evening at 5:00 p.m. When I didn’t pass muster there, I ran as fast as I could across a massive junk yard to another trucking company which had its “shape line” at 5:30. Between the two companies I managed to work four nights a week.

Sanna would often drive down to have lunch with me at 10:00 p.m., and then I’d head home at 2:30 a.m., walking to the center of Newark and catching a bus from there. The downtown Newark bus station unnerved me because it was populated by a large number of black homosexuals with orange, red and green hair, jewelry, and an attitude. I tried to look tough and unconcerned, as I stood among them waiting for my bus, but I certainly didn’t feel that way.

Our summer routine in Newark became one of Sanna working days and me evenings, with us seeing one another during Sanna’s breakfast (7:00 a.m.), her lunch (noon), my lunch (10:00 p.m.), when I got home from work (3:00 a.m.), and then all week-end as we explored Manhattan. I was bearded, we both wore Mexican ponchos and sandals when we went out, and generally we felt “hip” and comfortable in the new places we were getting to know.

One Saturday morning, shortly after settling in Newark, I had an unsettling experience that helped me to understand the cultural differences between the western men I had grown up with and my new counterparts from the East. I was cruising for a parking place downtown, saw an opportunity to my right, and wrenched my wheel and shot straight into it, braking the car by hitting the curb. As I exited the car, feeling smug about finding a place in such a crowded commercial area, I noticed that a man had exited a car about one and one-half lengths ahead. Apparently he had been planning to back into the spot and I had stolen it from him. I felt a rush of guilt, then decided it was too late to undo the misdeed and stepped toward the curb. At that moment the man ahead of me proceeded to shout profanities at me, taking steps in my direction. I looked at him, noted that he was middle aged, smaller than me, and seemed consumed with rage. Com-

ing as I did from a culture where one would only challenge another man if he intended to fight, I thought: “Oh no. This is where I meet my demise. The man certainly has a gun or he wouldn’t challenge me.” I felt trapped. The “code of the West” didn’t allow me to retreat now. As I advanced toward him, my heart pounded, and I wondered how Sanna would get word of my fate since none of my identity papers carried our Newark address. Suddenly the man stopped shouting, turned in his tracks, jumped back into his car and drove away. His demeanor had changed completely in the blink of an eye.

I trembled for twenty minutes after that, and pondered for days. I had thought I was going to die because of the dispute my small indiscretion had engendered, and that man hadn’t even been serious. He was just scolding me. It was his way of saying, “Hey, pal, I was planning to park there!” It would take me another half-dozen years to learn the many differences in the way that eastern and western men communicated with one another, and to be comfortable with either style, but that experience got me off to a fast start.

Another poignant experience gave me an appreciation of the extent to which Sanna was pushing herself, joining me in a rough and tumble life so unfamiliar to her but for which my construction background had prepared me. I was traveling home by bus one evening, having just finished a new job on a housepainting crew, and Sanna expected me for dinner at 5:30. Tired, I slept through my bus stop, awakening at the end of the line a half-hour later. Unconcerned, I got on a return bus, and arrived home at 6:30. Sanna was waiting, looking very shaken, her face streaked with tears. When I didn’t arrive on time, she concluded something terrible had happened, immediately called the police, and then paced around helplessly. My first reaction, when I walked through the door and found her in this condition, was to be amused. Then I saw that it was not funny to her. Newark was manageable for Sanna if we were a team, but she did not want to face its challenges on her own.

6. The University Of Texas

The University of Texas in 1965 was like nothing I had even imagined. With 25,000 students, an 18 story building at its center, and a “drag” with cinemas, restaurants, clothing stores, etc. running alongside, it represented a real contrast from my previous experiences in higher education. Jamestown College, with its 600 students and half-dozen buildings, could easily fit inside UT’s football stadium, or on any one of a dozen parking lots. UT was a city within a city. I found it intimidating, but accepted the challenge.

a. Registration

My first test was to develop a curriculum that would enable me to graduate on a traditional four year schedule. As a senior transfer, I faced a host of unexpected requirements that were statutory at any Texas state university; Freshman English, Freshman Math and Texas history, to name a few. My undergraduate advisor, a wonderful, patient man of about fifty named Carl Leiden, totaled up the semester hours I needed to complete my bachelor’s degree and they came to sixty-six. Since a full year’s course load was 30 hours, it initially seemed unlikely that I could graduate on schedule.

Timely graduation was essential because the Selective Service Board in Beulah, North Dakota was monitoring my life style, had taken exception to my one year break following my sophomore year, and made it clear that there would be no graduate school exemptions for me unless I was timely in completing my undergraduate degree. With the Viet Nam War raging, and I the only member of my class at Zap High School who hadn't served in the military, I was on their "radar screen." I also noted that the father of Hook Fischer, the big guy I disabled with some well placed kicks during that fight my senior year in high school, was chairman of the board. Hook had enlisted upon high school graduation, as was the local custom. I couldn't help but wonder if Mr. Fischer knew my history with his son.

After several hours of scheming, Dr. Leiden and I agreed upon a strategy which, he said, could work in theory, though he had never known it to be done. I would have to meet the department chairpersons for math, history and English and negotiate exemptions or substitutions. At Jamestown that would have been conceivable, because all the professors and administrators knew one another, but at Texas it seemed impossible. Nevertheless, I set out on my mission feeling that it was "do or die."

I quickly learned that department chairpersons were not interested in meeting with individual undergraduate students, so I had to catch them unawares. That translated, for me, to finding their offices and then "staking them out" at the beginning or end of each day. I reasoned that they had to come in to work through the front door, and they had to leave the same way. So I put myself between them and the door. My persistence, and the unusual nature of my request, won the day. After three days of stake-out work, I had negotiated my requirements down from 66 to 36 hours. It meant I was taking some very strange classes, Modern Math and Physics, for example, some of which did not interest me, but if I could survive the battle and get high grades, I'd be poised to enter UT's distinguished graduate school of Latin American Studies in the fall of 1966. The alternative was "grunt work" in Viet Nam.

Dr. Leiden was impressed, and we made a friendship that has survived the 30 years since. Sanna and I, greatly relieved, settled into a strenuous but pleasant daily routine.

b. Math 301.17(f)

This was one of those dreaded substitutions I negotiated to be able to legally graduate on schedule. I had no idea what I was in for, but was eager to do well because anything looked better than Viet Nam. On the first day of class, Monday morning at 8:45, I showed-up early, took a seat, watched the seats around me fill, and then the professor entered and proceeded to give a lecture on English literature. I felt embarrassed, and worried that I had made a mistake, but knew it was too late to find the right class so sat through the lecture and resolved to do better on Wednesday. I was still ok. At Texas one was allowed three "cuts" and I had only missed one session.

On the second day of class, Wednesday morning at 8:45, I once again arrived early, double checked on the location, sat down, and awaited the show. This time it was a science class. Feeling more "battle hardened" by now, I got up and excused myself as soon as I realized my mistake. Now I had two strikes against me.

Making it to Friday's session was a must, so I went to the department chairman's office to confirm the location, and I set out a half-hour early to scout the building, the various floors in the building, and even read things on the walls in the classroom and the corridors nearby. I was certain I had nailed it, there were five minutes remaining before class time, and still no one there. An ideal time to visit the men's room.

When I emerged, five minutes later, the class room was full, with even the teacher in his place. I looked quickly through the glass window in the door, then pushed it open with my right hand, putting my left hand in the pocket of my trousers. As I stepped through, I observed that the first three rows were occupied by coeds, cute and carefully made-up, as was the fashion of the time, most wearing bright colored mini-skirts and tank tops. Behind them were another six rows of guys; mostly trim-looking ROTC types. The cute girls made me feel self conscious, so I articulated carefully: "Is this Math 301.17, Section F? The professor, a young, blond man, looked at me quizzically, with a slight smile on his face, and said: "Yes it is." As I crossed the front of the classroom, I heard a muffled giggle coming from the pretty coeds and I thought to myself, "Hmnm. I am obviously making an impression here." On the far side of the classroom I turned left, went back to the sixth row where there was an open seat, and sat down beside one of the few "long hairs" in the room. I looked around me, feeling happy to finally be among the students with whom I would share the rest of the semester, when my partner in the next seat leaned over and whispered: "Psst! Your fly is open."

7. Student Life

For me the most interesting thing about being a student at UT was the political environment. Austin was a liberal bastion in the heart of the Texas "Bible Belt" and it drew young people from across the American South who sought to escape the stifling conservative and racist views of the time. Meantime, the social life of the campus was dominated by Texas' own brand of conservatism; epitomized by oil money, a cowboy culture, expensively dressed and made-up girls, and above all sports. The student leaders came from the fraternity and sorority ranks, ROTC seemed to be ubiquitous, and order was imposed by a special fraternal elite, called the Cowboys, all of them seemingly very large and handsome, who strolled the campus like lords of the manor, talking only with one another.

In the midst of this 25,000 strong melange of clean-cut looking Southern kids was a tiny, unkempt, gaggle of about 200 so-called hippies who sought to do their own thing while showing total disrespect for all established tradition. Some of these kids experimented with drugs, LSD and marijuana being the popular choices of the time, and sort of hung out; some were self-styled Marxist intellectuals who devoted their spare moments to arguing political theory; some were attracted to the civil rights movement and seemed to always have a black outsider among them, perhaps a leader from the streets; some made opposition to the Viet Nam War their "*cause célèbre*". What all these kids had in common, myself included, since I chose them as my associates, was an abiding wariness of the majority of the student body, and especially the fearsome elite fraternity of Cowboys.

For a kid from Zap, the presence of this disparate group of malcontents was irresistible. Finally I had found the diversity I yearned for. Each little group was insular in its own way, of course, but because they were so few among the mass of the student body, and felt so under siege, the groups tended to socialize among themselves. So I could join a Marxist discussion in the cafeteria, and one of the kids at the table would want to talk about integrating the local movie theatres, another would be sitting there stoned on pot, and still another would be fixated on opposition to the Viet Nam War. My own politics was Libertarian, which conveniently enabled me to agree philosophically with the anti-draft and civil rights views, and also to believe that the drug users should be left to experiment as they pleased. Philosophical discussions with Marxists were a wonderful diversion for me.

As a married man, accompanied generally by my very traditional wife who fit in better with UT's sports and party culture, I was not a natural fit. Also, I was far too dedicated to my studies to invest much time and energy in these relationships. But they made for a wonderful diversion, and because I was larger and more fearsome than most of my fellow students, I was useful to the hippie kids as a sort of buffer against harassment by members of the student body who found them objectionable.

Sanna and I were sitting in the UT cafeteria chatting with some of these kids on the day Charles Whitman went into the Tower and began his infamous shooting spree that resulted in 16 dead and 32 wounded. As we chatted quietly about politics, one of the "druggies" stopped by our table to say: "There's someone out there who is shooting people." As he sat down at a nearby table and lit a cigarette, we got up to investigate. As we exited the rear door, facing the "drag" we saw a coed just across the street, about 40 feet distant, step out from a construction barricade, cry out and fall as a bullet seemed to pass through her neck. A muscular arm reached out from behind the barricade and pulled her back through the doorway from which she had emerged. Moments later, 50 feet down the street, a young man was shot through the forehead as he stood in front of the news stand, falling behind a car out of sight. We watched in wonder for the next 45 minutes as the shooting continued. Eventually we figured out that it was coming from the Tower, though no one knew how many shooters were up there. We also noted in fascination that there were gunmen (students, we figured) lying on top of buildings, and leaning out of windows, shooting back at the Tower. The incident ended when a salesman from the University Coop, carrying a personally owned handgun, joined an off-duty cop and they rode the elevator to the top of the 18 story Tower and shot Whitman in the back. The randomness of the whole shooting and dying scenario intrigued me, as did people's reactions to it.

My senior year at UT ended just as it began, with me staking out the office of a departmental chairman. It seemed that my Graduate Record Exam (GRE) scores were good, but not quite good enough to justify admission into UT's Graduate School for Latin American Studies. Getting into that program was my whole reason for transferring to Texas, and I also saw it as the key to realizing my career ambitions. So I asked to meet the chairman. He refused to see me. I asked again and was refused again. Desperate, I took my copy of Kalil Gibran's *The Prophet* to comfort me and sat down by the front door of his office most of one day and part of a second. At lunch time the second day his secretary, who apparently felt compassion for me, revealed that the Chairman had been entering and exiting through a rear door so to avoid me. She got up, informed me that she was going out to lunch, and whispered: "He's in there right now."

When she was out of sight I strode to his door, opened it, and saw a large man sitting behind a desk. I had not met him before, but he recognized me and spoke first, saying that I didn't have the grades or ability to do graduate work in his department, and should look elsewhere. I explained politely that my grades and GRE scores had suffered from poor high school preparation, and my grades were made worse by having attended three schools in four years. He was unimpressed, and perhaps annoyed by the beard. One never knew in those days. So we faced one another across his desk, the conversation getting louder and more insistent by the minute, until suddenly he folded. "OK, Goddammit!", he shouted while banging his fist against his desk. "But you make two "A's" for every "B" or you're out of here on your ass, and don't even stop to say goodbye." I was in! Not as smooth as my admission to the carpenter's union several years earlier, but just as effective.

It was to be my destiny, always to strive for achievements that others felt should be beyond me, and only to get them over someone's objections. The perpetual outsider, I grew to be comfortable in that role.

8. From San Francisco To Viet Nam (Almost)

The summer of 1967, after completing my first year of graduate work at UT, Sanna and I decided to break away for a period of adventure. I had been interested in the longshoreman philosopher, Eric Hoffer, for several years, and thought it would be fun to meet him; maybe even work alongside him and have long conversations. Because he made his life in San Francisco, it was all the more interesting to me. The previous year Mario Savio and fellow students at California Berkely had kicked off the free speech movement, which fed into the anti-Viet Nam War movement. Just across the bay the students and hangers-on at San Francisco State University and the Haight-Ashbury District, had started a movement of their own; a sort of peace and love "happening" often referred to as "flower power" and the kids as "flower children." It was too much for a kid from Zap to resist, so we loaded up our old Dodge and headed West.

a. In Search Of Eric Hoffer

The first part of my summer plan, hooking up with Eric Hoffer, didn't go well. I was too naive in the way of urban life to think of looking him up in the phone book. Rather, I went to the union hall serving the dock where I knew, from reading his books, that he worked, and signed on for employment. The day I arrived the dock workers went out on strike. I waited around two days, then abandoned that plan to search for employment anywhere I could find it.

Thanks to my lucky break in Cheyenne, I could call myself a carpenter, so I drove around the Bay Area calling on carpenter union hiring halls. In the suburb of Vallejo, about 30 miles east of San Francisco, I scored. Sanna was with me as I drove up to the union hall, so I parked the car in a temporary spot right in front, asked her to wait, and went in to try my luck. The business agent was brusque and not encouraging, but as we talked I learned that he had been born in North Dakota himself. That meant that he would be a "soft touch" so I laid one on him, telling him that I was a drifter, out of work, and with a pregnant wife sitting down there in the car. The business agent looked out of his second story window, saw a pretty little blond in an unbelievably beat-up

automobile, and said: “OK, kid. I can send you out on the water treatment plant in Napa, but don’t tell anyone that you are new in town.”

With employment secure, we arranged a rental home and proceeded to enjoy San Francisco every spare moment, spending lots of time at Berkely and in the Haight-Ashbury, but never connecting with Eric Hoffer. The construction job was very good for me professionally because I was taken under the wing of the “saw man” and actually taught some carpentry skills. Then, six weeks into our pleasant summer escape, I received a telegram from the draft board at Beulah North Dakota ordering me to report for military service.

Historical Footnote

It should probably be explained here that the Viet Nam War was not popular with many Americans, particularly students and intellectuals. I felt, like many others, that the U.S. was intervening in a civil conflict, and that given the intensity and duration of the struggle by the North Vietnamese to throw out the Japanese and French previously, we were probably fighting revolutionaries much like our own forefathers. I, like most boys who grew up in the West and Midwest, had always dreamed of military service, and an opportunity to prove my manhood in combat, but this war was not one I wanted to be involved in. I felt, to the contrary, that it was my patriotic duty to oppose the war.

The stakes were very high for both sides. Many of the kids who accepted conscription had unpleasant experiences in Viet Nam. Many who resisted conscription faced difficult choices including emigration, fabricating medical deferments and jail. Every decision young men of draft age made between 1963 and 1976 revolved around accepting or avoiding conscription into military service.

b. Beating The Draft

I went to work the next morning, gave notice at noon, and set out for North Dakota that evening. Driving straight through without a break, Sanna and I were in Zap two days later, and on the third day after receiving my orders to report for duty I was sitting before the Mercer County draft board. I had no idea how to handle this matter. Every one of my classmates had served in the army, and I had no information about any of the members of the draft board. So I was “flying by the seat of my pants” with my life (should I be drafted and sent into battle), or perhaps my citizenship (should I elect to emigrate), at stake.

The board members were polite, simple looking fellows who appeared to be farmers; probably former enlisted men who had served in World War II, I thought. Mr. Fischer, the chairman, was the only one who seemed hostile. He had a half-inch thick file in his hands which he said was all about me, and he said several times, as he rifled through it, “I’m just trying to find out why you keep telling us that you can’t go.” I searched my mind for an angle, opened my mouth, and said, “I understand that it is time for me to go, and I accept that. Will you give me a few weeks to drive to Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio where I can volunteer for the Medical Service Corps? As a medic I’m sure to go to Viet Nam and get lots of action. I want to get some action.”

Mr. Fischer was startled and didn’t know what to say. Several of his henchmen nodded soberly and approvingly, and one of them said, “He wants action, we should give him a few weeks to volunteer.” Mr. Fisher acquiesced, and I walked out of there with some breathing space. I knew, from all the nervous chatter among draft dodgers of the time, that the medics were the most endangered men in the army, and that many of them were pacifists who didn’t want to carry a gun. I figured that these guys would be impressed by my willingness to put myself at risk in this way.

I also knew that because there were so many pacifists volunteering for the Medical Service Corps, that it was hard to gain acceptance.

I drove home that evening knowing that I had bought three or four weeks, and also that I didn't want to waste the balance of the summer out of work. The next day I persuaded the folks at North American Coal Company to hire me as an engineer to supervise construction of a very large steel equipment repair building at the Zap mine. They asked if I could read blueprints, and I answered "Yup!" That turned out to be the correct answer, and I was summarily hired as a building engineer.

The job was fun for two reasons. First, it provided a reunion with many of the kids I had gone to high school with. Most were back from the army by now, and just starting careers at the mine. They welcomed me home, not sure if it was a permanent thing or not, and we all fell into the old, familiar relationship patterns we had known formerly. It was a bit of a come down for me, since I had not enjoyed as much status in Zap as I had become accustomed to since leaving, but I didn't mind. It was all so comfortable. I also enjoyed the job because somehow the building went up as it was supposed to. I sweated big time as we set the foundation bolts in the concrete slab, this being the only part of my engineering task requiring precision, but somehow we got it right. Several weeks later, with the building up and looking good, I was off to meet my fate in Texas.

As a confirmed draft dodger without any friends in the service, I had never been on a military base before driving into Fort Sam Houston. Nervously I found my way to headquarters, parked, and went in to ask for the man in charge. A very polite, mild man came out after a few minutes, introduced himself as Col. William Dickenson, and invited me into his small office to talk. I laid it on him, telling him that I was a graduate student with ambitions to join the State Department or Agency for International Development after completing my master's degree, but since my draft board was not going to let me finish school, I wanted an assignment where I could avoid combat and just get through the war in one piece.

Col. Dickenson thanked me for my "honest" statement, informed me that everyone he accepted into the Medical Service Corps was being sent straight to Viet Nam and going into combat, that I didn't fit the profile he was looking for, and by the way he had an eight month waiting list. I tried not to grin. The Col. then said to me: "You know. The army has a place for everyone, and I'm sure that we can give you a job you'd enjoy." He then spent the better part of an hour with me looking through manuals for jobs in Latin America where I could apply my education and language skills. All the interesting jobs, mostly in intelligence, required a preceding tour in Viet Nam. At the end of his search the Col. said: "I'll take your application, and inform your draft board that you have applied, but I don't think that you'll be accepted given your lack of interest in combat." I thanked him, filled out the forms, and walked away with at least eight months of breathing room (until my application would be rejected), and only nine months until completion of my degree.

9. Learning How To Win Respect

I learned an important lesson during my last year in graduate school. In the spring of 1968 I worked as a carpenter-stripper constructing a two-story clothing store on the UT drag. Because the work was across the street from my classes, I could fit it in easily, and I was enjoying it because I knew that, with graduation approaching, it would probably be my last stint as a working man.

On the first two days of work I took advantage of my captive audience during lunch break and preached my antiwar message. No one listened, figuring that I was just another naïve bearded, hippie with a big mouth. The third day, on reporting for work, the boss asked me and the two other students, strong young Texans on athletic scholarships, to strip away some large wood forms that were imbedded in recently cured concrete. My two colleagues started on one end of the three-sided pour and I on the other.

I loved stripping, and was good at it, so dove into the job with relish, banging, ripping and smashing with all the power in my hard, young body. My two athlete friends also attacked their job intently, particularly after seeing how effective I was working alone, but there were periods of silence from their side of the pour as they rested from their labors. I began to feel competitive, and didn't look up from my work until the boss put his hand on my shoulder at lunch time and asked me to stop. We three had done about 75 percent of the day's work, with my colleagues stripping three forms between them and me stripping fifty-three on my own. The boss, the other carpenters, and my very embarrassed competitors, were in awe.

While a dozen of us sat in a loose circle eating our lunches, I launched again into my antiwar spiel. Suddenly everyone was interested, listening to what I said, a few even expressing agreement.

I puzzled about my colleagues' changed reactions for several days. All I could figure was that my show of competence in something that the men understood caused them to conclude that I must therefore be competent in other things. It wouldn't have mattered what I was offering opinions about that afternoon, the men would have agreed. People, I concluded, judge others by criteria they themselves understand, so if you want to influence others you need to prove your competence in some arena in which they feel competent to judge you. Do that and they will give you the benefit of the doubt with respect to matters about which they have little knowledge or interest.

10. Exit Mom

My mother started having serious heart sickness while in her early fifties. I was away at college, and later graduate school in Texas, and the health and welfare of my parents seemed very remote to me. I simply thought of them as being as they were when I left home at age eighteen. In her fashion, Mom kept her concerns about dying at such an early age to herself. With me and my siblings she preferred to play the role of interested and supportive parent.

Because she kept her concerns private, I thought nothing of it when, during Christmas of 1967, she gave me and each of my siblings a hand knit sweater with her name sewn into the label. “Thanks, Mom! When did you start knitting?” was the extent of my reaction. It wasn’t until we put her in her grave seven months later that I realized the sweater was a farewell gift – her way of saying she loved us, and perhaps a shy request that we remember her from time to time.

On July 28, 1968, I received a call from home. “Your mother is in the hospital!”, my father said. “Her heart is failing. They have her on oxygen. If you hurry you might get here before she dies.”

I caught the next plane home, landing in Bismarck and catching a taxi directly to the hospital. I remember entering Mom’s room not knowing what to expect, and finding Dad my sister Rita, and perhaps my Aunt Gloria standing at one end of a bed which was encased in a plastic bubble. They were talking quietly with one another, looking awkward and uncertain. Dad had a look of helpless despair on his face, as though he was pleading: “What can I do?” And Mom struggled alone under that plastic bubble, her eyes squeezed shut, gasping for air as her body heaved like a fallen marathoner.

I acknowledged my family, and went fearfully to the bubble, reaching under it to take Mom’s cold hand. Mine felt so warm and large against hers. She opened her eyes, recognized me, smiled through her pain and exhaustion, and gave my hand a frail squeeze. I wanted to tell her I loved her. I don’t think I ever did that in my whole life. The only person in our family who talked that way was Mom. But I was too shy. I just stood there, holding her hand as she closed her eyes and returned to her fight for just one more breath. She died later that day.

For whatever it is worth, I never let go of my mother, nor she of me. Not a day goes by I don’t think of her in some context, and I feel that we are communing silently. I still make the same teasing jokes about her that comprised much of our conversation during my last, adolescent years at home, and when I have a decision to make about the things she valued most – children, home and religious life – I never fail to consult with her mentally, as often or not remarking to whom-ever is in my presence: “My mom did this, liked that, or would have thought ...”

PART V: RAISING A FAMILY

1. Enter Sanna Lee

Sanna Lee joined this world on November 21, 1968. I had taken employment with USAID in August of that year, so her mother and I were living at Riverside Towers Apartments, just across the street from the Department of State and one block distant from Sanna’s parents’ residence in Columbia Plaza Apartments. Sanna had experienced an early flirtation with miscarriage, during the first trimester, so the final months of the pregnancy were worrisome for us both.

On delivery day we proceeded to Washington Hospital Center, settled into a pre-delivery room as best we could, Sanna ordered a spinal sedative, and we waited together. Her doctor and staff were very professional, so aside from Sanna’s discomfort the whole process seemed about as routine as a first birth could be. At the moment of delivery, however, it all became very special.

I remember it like it happened yesterday. Standing at the head of the bed, holding Sanna's hand, I watched the action through a mirror over the doctor's shoulders. First appeared a bright red head of hair, which set my heart pounding, then two little pink shoulders appeared. The right shoulder tugged twice, trying to free itself, and out popped a little right arm, followed by the rest of her. The kid was in full wail as she emerged, and as tall and beautiful as any baby who ever lived. We had just witnessed our first miracle.

There was never a time when Sanna Lee wasn't beautiful, bright and confident. She suffered from colic during her first three months, which caused discomfort and crying, but one always sensed that this baby was as on top of things as a baby could be.

Because Sanna had worn herself out physically with the final months of pregnancy, and Sanna Lee's colic made her a poor sleeper, I was lucky enough to spend a lot of time holding, changing and feeding her during the first two months of her life. I recall many nights sitting at my desk between midnight and 5:00 a.m. reading my Portuguese language textbook while cradling her in my arm, or on my shoulder. We bonded then, the two of us, and I've felt bonded to her since, even these many years and experiences later.

2. Enter Karen Ann

Karen Ann's birth was as disorganized and chaotic as her sister's was orderly. We were living in Rio de Janeiro, the pregnancy had been relatively effortless, and when Sanna woke me at 5:00 a.m. to say she thought she was going into labor I looked at my watch, considered the situation and the hour, and suggested that we wait and see. At 5:30 Sanna again offered that her time was coming, but remembering the seven hour wait in the hospital for Sanna Lee's birth, I once again confidently urged that we wait at least until daylight. When Sanna expressed a feeling of urgency at 6:00 a.m., I agreed to pack the bags, and at 6:15 a.m. we were on our way across Rio de Janeiro, driving through the Tijuca tunnel to the German Hospital, just ahead of rush hour traffic. We had no idea how lucky we were.

One of the conditions we placed on our Brazilian doctor was that he allow me to accompany Sanna through the delivery process, as I had in the U.S. It was an unusual request in Brazil, but the doctor acceded, so when I assisted Sanna through the front door to the hospital we expected arrangements had already been made to accommodate us.

The nuns who ran the hospital saw that Sanna was very near delivering, so rushed her onto a rolling bed, then told me to scam. I disregarded the order, Sanna urged that she was ready to deliver, and so the head nurse and I argued quietly as we rushed down the hallway pushing the bed. As we entered the delivery room the nurse looked at me fiercely and shouted: "No further!" Sanna cried: "Its coming!" Someone shouted: "Get the gas!"

I grabbed what looked like a gas mask, put it over Sanna's face upside down, she cried out once more, and Karen shot out of her womb like a very slippery, slow motion rocket. No one in that room had a chance to help, least of all me, as I fumbled with the gas mask trying to decide which side was up, wondering if it was still helpful.

Karen Ann's personality, which couldn't have been more different than her sister's, was apparent from the outset. Despite her quick emergence on delivery day, she had a very tentative, cautious way about her. In unguarded moments you could catch an amiable expression, but most of the time she seemed to be trying to figure out what was going on.

I was a long time getting close to Karen Ann because she was the proverbial easy pregnancy and easy baby. She never wore her mother out, so I wasn't needed. I felt jealous and left out, but accepted the situation because I could see that Sanna was enjoying her role as mother more than ever before. I had my USAID career, after all, and also lacked an appreciation of how long it would take me to grow close to my child if I didn't accomplish it in the first months of life. It would be many years before I felt bonded with Karen Ann, as I had early on with her sister.

3. Adjusting To A World Of Women

Being the sole male in a household of women was the last thing I had ever imagined for myself. Growing up, I had assumed that I would have sons, and I had the notion that only through sons could one self realize as a father. I recall telling my coworkers in Rio de Janeiro that my second child would be a son, and the stunned and sad reaction of my friend George when I announced the birth of another daughter. I felt angry with him for not sharing my joy, and confused about my own feelings.

The fact is, within moments of learning that I was to be the father of two daughters, my attitude toward girl children shifted. I didn't see them as girls any longer, but rather as people. Their mother might be a woman, and the three of them might dress like girls and have certain girl things in common, but to me my daughters were my progeny, and I had zero interest in whether they were male or female. My expectations of them, and my relationship with them, was no different from what it would be were they sons.

Even so, I took a certain pleasure in being the only male in the household. It made me feel special when we went out, and watching my daughters grow up pretty, like their mom, was a wonderful feeling. I enjoyed the idea that they looked like little girls, but inside, unbeknownst to others, they were as tough and self-reliant as any little soldier being prepared to do battle.

4. Sanna Lee -- The Warrior Goddess

Sanna Lee was a natural at everything she tried. At ten months she took her first step, and at one year she and I were visiting the playground near our apartment building in Rio, she with bright orange-red hair shining in the sunlight, climbing the slide by herself, and squealing joyously as I pushed her in the swing. I recall her first time swimming. She was thirteen months of age, and we were visiting with my boss and his family beside their backyard pool. I had heard that babies, like dogs, instinctively know how to swim, so I tested the theory, and my nerve, by dropping Sanna Lee over the side. She sunk below the surface, her eyes open wide in amazement at the feeling of the cold water, then I saw her little feet kicking and her hands paddling, and she bobbed to the surface. At that point I lost my nerve and pulled her out. She was as unfazed by the experience as her mother and I were breathless and amazed.

At age two and one half, while we lived in Recife, Brazil, Sanna and I decided that Sanna Lee was ready for the stimulation of more children. There was a pre-school just down the street from our home, with all the kids Brazilians. We figured that Sanna Lee's Portuguese, learned from the maid, was as good as her English, so she'd do fine. On the day she enrolled we walked with her, feeling very torn about putting our little baby out into the cruel world at such a tender age, and praying that the goodbye scene wouldn't be too desperate. We met the school master at the door and introduced her new client. As we discussed ground rules, Sanna Lee rushed forward to join her new friends and the next stage of her life. Her mother and I were shocked. We walked home feeling abandoned; at once proud of our child for her independence but at the same time heartbroken that the process of leaving us was so easy for her.

5. Karen Ann -- The Careful

By the time Karen Ann joined our family her mother and I, reflecting on all of Sanna Lee's early successes, thought that we must be the world's best parents. It was an eye opener, therefore, to find that our second child was nothing like the first, and our efforts to shape the girls had little relevance to how they developed.

Just as her sister always knew what she wanted, and was quick to express herself, Karen Ann was ever cautious. She crawled backwards a long time before crawling forward, and didn't get up on two feet until her fifteenth month. She was also slow to learn to speak. Her favorite occupation was eating, being held, and watching. At the time it wasn't clear whether she was slow, or a careful evaluator looking to minimize risk.

When we took Karen Ann to pre-school at age four, she was far from ready to let go of her mom. She held on to Sanna's leg and howled on realizing that she was about to be left. Her fear of separation didn't end easily. Every morning, as Sanna attempted to drop her off at pre-school, Karen Ann repeated the performance, making Sanna feel like she was throwing her baby to the wolves. Sanna finally solved the conundrum by joining the faculty of the pre-school so that she could be nearby in case Karen Ann needed reassurance.

6. Musical Education

It seems, as I reflect on the child raising years, that my role must have been exceedingly small because my specific memories are so few. At the time I thought of myself as an active and good father, but when it comes to sharing the many critical breakthroughs in a child's life, I can't remember those of my children in the same way that I remember my own childhood. Teaching the girls to play the piano is one exception.

I had played the piano for several years as a boy, between ages nine and twelve, and took great satisfaction from it. It worried me that it might not be a masculine activity, but those hours sitting alone at the keyboard had given me much pleasure, and I wanted to share that joy with my daughters. So, with Sanna Lee approaching age four, I decided to purchase a piano and relearn so that I could teach my children.

a. Sanna Lee – The Technician

Because Sanna Lee was quick to learn everything, I reasoned that she might learn music early. One day, when she was just short of four years of age, I invited her to join me on the bench to play. I tried initially to get her to look at the notes in the grade one piano book purchased for the occasion, and play them. Within a half-minute she was bored. I could see the strategy wouldn't work, and if I didn't change my approach immediately, I would lose her.

Sanna Lee loved to draw, and was good at it, so I asked her: "How would you like to *write* your own song?" She instantly brightened and squealed, "Yes!" So we wrote songs. She drew little circles on paper, colored them in, drew little tails on them, and then I helped by drawing a musical score through her notes. When we had three notes on paper, with a score drawn through them, I announced: "Now, that's a song. Would you like to play it?"

The kid was on it like a bee after honey. She learned that song (three notes), then insisted on writing and learning another, then another, and so it went. By the end of the first week of lessons, Sanna Lee had learned the entire keyboard, could read music, and was playing from her grade-one book as well as writing her own music.

Sanna Lee would go on to play the piano for another eight years, always a superb music reader, only giving-up the instrument when, in her adolescent years, the guitar seemed more attractive and a better show case for her excellent singing voice.

b. Karen Ann – The Ear

As I sat with Sanna Lee at the keyboard, Karen Ann was always nearby, often pulling on my trousers and asking for lessons herself. I paid her no mind because at two and one-half she couldn't possibly read music. After all, slow at everything, she hadn't even learned yet to draw little stick people. How could she possibly deal with notes and musical scores?

One day, several months into her older sister's music lessons, Karen Ann was once again on the piano bench, fumbling away at the keyboard with little fat fingers that barely distinguished themselves one from the other, when I noticed something amazing. She was playing entire measures of her sister's songs, sometimes in the key her sister was learning, and sometimes in another key entirely. "Holy smokes!", I thought. "The kid is playing by ear."

I raced to the bench to sit with her, asked her if she'd like to learn to play, and she gave me an enthusiastic yes. I reached for the drawing paper and pencil, and set out to teach her as I had taught her older sister, writing music and then playing it. It didn't work. Though Karen Ann had much more patience than her older sister, in a matter of five minutes I could see that she wasn't getting it. She wasn't yet ready to draw and color circles and put tails on them. I don't think that her eyes were even distinguishing them. Then the light came on for me.

If the kid has already taught herself to play her sister's songs in whatever key her finger lands on, why waste time learning notes? We can deal with that later, if ever. So I had the fun of teaching Karen Ann piano simply by playing songs, a measure at a time, and letting her figure out where

to go from there. Whether the key was C, G, or F, she didn't care. Once she heard a tune, she could figure out how to play it. She had perfect pitch, and a sense of how music is constructed.

It wasn't long before I passed my two little prodigies on to a professional music teacher, and I became a spectator as they learned, soon passing me in ability. Sanna Lee, throughout, remained the music reading technician, and Karen Ann the natural ear musician.

At around age eleven, shortly after asserting her independence from her mom by going without permission to a beauty shop to get her long, blond hair cut short, Karen took another big step. She asked me if it would be ok to switch instruments – to learn the violin. I confidently answered that it is better to stay with the piano; that one cannot realistically hope to master more than one instrument. Several days later Karen Ann went to the family strong box, retrieved the savings bonds tucked away to help pay for college, cashed them, and purchased a child size, antique violin -- and lessons. Over the next several years she would also prove capable with this instrument, joining the Montgomery Youth Orchestra and playing with them, much to her parents delight, in several gigs at the Kennedy Center. The first and only thing that Karen Ann found easy, music, would continue to occupy her until, at age seventeen, she picked up an oar and joined her high school's sweep rowing team.

7. Teaching Work Habits

My own childhood had been much more like Karen Ann's than Sanna Lee's, except the thing I learned to do well was hard, gritty construction work. This outlet had helped me to develop a sense of self worth, and also prepared me for the challenges of adult life, so I was eager to share what I could of that experience and discipline with my daughters.

Soon after we moved back to the U.S. from Brazil, Sanna and I started the girls cleaning their rooms and earning an allowance for it. Thus began a tradition of working to earn money and parental approval. I too wanted to earn extra money so that we could buy a home in Bethesda's best neighborhood for public schools, so I channeled my construction skills into becoming a part-time home rehabilitator. That translated to purchasing a new home every year during the period that our kids were in elementary school, taking it apart and putting it back together with new kitchen, bathroom, etc., living in it until it could be sold at a favorable price, then moving on to the next challenge. During this period I purchased tools for my girls, and we made a game of helping Daddy fix the house.

In the early years of this exercise, when the girls were toddlers, they helped by bringing me one nail at a time, or cleaning up after me. Later we discovered that little girls could do a fine job removing and replacing electrical switch plates and electrical outlets, holding the other end of a door or piece of lumber, etc. One day, when Sanna Lee was twelve, I received a scolding from a neighbor who objected to her working from the roof of a house where I was installing gutters while I worked from a ladder just below.

It is still not entirely clear to me how my girls benefited from all this work experience, but I have noticed that Sanna Lee has a home full of furniture she built herself, and when Karen Ann moves

into a new place she often paints, puts down carpet, and does not hesitate to haul furniture and the like on the top of her automobile.

I used to enjoy telling folks, “My kids don’t have toys; they have tools. They think that construction work is fun.” Was that a con? Did my girls miss out not having Lego sets, and playing with dolls? I don’t think so, and I can say that some of the happiest moments of my life were working along side them rehabilitating homes, teaching them simple construction skills, and imagining that they would grow up to be confident, resourceful and self-reliant homemakers.

8. Passing Along The Culture

I raised Sanna Lee and Karen Ann on stories of my childhood; of signal experiences from my early life in Alexander, North Dakota. Because my own childhood had been difficult, I assumed that the girls had many fears of their own, and that each day on the playground or at school had challenged them in some way. I assumed that when they were quiet or withdrawn, it was a mask for some sort of trauma, and their mother and I would talk about it, try to understand what was going on, and discuss possible interventions.

Sanna’s way with the girls was simply to make it crystal clear that she loved them and was in their corner “come hell or high water.” When she saw one of the girls looking worried or depressed, she tried to inoculate them from pain by smothering them in love. Maybe I would have done the same were I the only parent, but I could never compete with Sanna in the love department, so I didn’t try. I told the girls regularly that I loved them, and we were a touching and kissing family, unlike either Sanna’s or mine, but my approach was to try to get inside the problem intellectually and relate to it. So I would probe, and when I felt I was close to understanding what was going on, I’d reach into my memory bank and come up with a story that might have relevance.

The strategy was simple. I knew that my girls looked up to me, and worried about meeting my expectations. I felt, therefore, that the most helpful thing, when they were feeling fearful or fragile, was to let them know that everyone feels that way sometimes; even their father. So I’d tell a story from my own childhood about when I had “blown it;” e.g. been chosen last to play a game, failed to come to the rescue of my girl friend, shot a BB through a neighbor’s window, whatever seemed to fit the moment. Every story showed their father’s weakness and vulnerability as a child, and every story had a moral. I figured that knowing their father had also suffered, and occasionally been bad, yet somehow survived and lived to adulthood could only be reassuring. The moral lesson was an extra teaching opportunity. By throwing my stories on top of all the love smothering their mother had for them it seemed our kids should get through the bad times.

We called it passing along the culture.

I had one other technique for dealing with the girls; for teaching them important lessons. It grew from my own fierce sense of independence as a child, and my resultant unwillingness to be preached to. Preaching had never been a problem in our household because neither my mom nor dad had been overbearing, but many of my childhood friends had suffered from nagging parents.

My technique involved first holding advice to a bare minimum on the theory that the more advice given the less it would be valued. Second, and perhaps more important, I took care to say something important only once, and then very concisely, again on the theory that a single, concise statement would be valued more than a barrage of advice.

Typically my intervention would be preceded by a quiet talk with Sanna, to ensure that I understood the circumstances about to be addressed, and to seek general agreement. Sanna and I held very different world views, including different opinions about many aspects of child raising, but despite that, by respecting one another and communicating constantly about our children, we were always able to reach a consensus on matters of importance and be mutually supportive. So we would talk first, and reach an agreement on my strategy and planned announcement.

Thereafter, I would steal a moment with each kid, or sometimes with both together, to say that I had something I wanted to discuss with them, that it was important, that I would do it over dinner that evening, and that I would limit my comments to a half minute, a minute, or some similar short period of time, depending upon whether any back and forth discussion was required. Because it didn't happen too often, this "heads-up" would put the girls on alert, and there would be a feeling of expectation at dinner time.

At what seemed an appropriate moment, I would ask the girls if they were ready for my announcement or discussion. If they concurred, I'd say something like: "OK. I'm only going to go over this once so please listen carefully. You can agree or disagree, as you will, but I want you to listen to my point of view. If I know that you've considered my thoughts, I will accept your decisions." Then I'd lay it on them in the prescribed time limit, and shut up.

Generally, I think that Sanna and I were successful in passing along our mostly shared culture to the girls. Each is a fierce non-conformist, so there was a real limit to the amount of influence we could hold with them, but for the most part I think that they listened, processed our teachings intelligently, and then accepted or rejected the message based upon the substance rather than emotional reaction to an overbearing presentation.

I'll never forget the first time that it was made crystal clear to me that my daughters might not be blank slates upon which I could write at will, provided I was careful and clever about presentation. It was after one of those carefully orchestrated dinner announcements on a topic I don't even remember. Sanna Lee was fifteen and Karen Ann thirteen. I had made my pitch, the conversation ended, and I was feeling content that I had waged another successful campaign to pass along the culture when Sanna Lee, looking thoughtful and speaking very softly, said: "Dad., I agree with *some* of what you said." At that moment I felt very humble.

9. Seeing The Girls Off To College

During the entire time of bringing up children, Sanna and I had always looked forward to their going off to college. It would represent a time when our jobs as parents were finished, we thought, and we would be proud to send our new adult children into the world and ready to get on with the next phase of our lives. Reality turned out to be quite different. Proud of our chil-

dren we were, but by no means were we ready to let them go so we could move on to the next phase. The extent of our unreadiness shocked us both.

When it came time for Sanna Lee to choose a school, we did all the usual things parents do, looking at reports about schools, engaging a professional counselor, weighing the trade-off between close to home and away, large universities and small liberal arts colleges, etc. Sanna Lee's grades were good enough to get her into any school but the Ivies, and they didn't interest her so it wasn't an issue. Basically, it was a matter of her choosing the environment she preferred.

I pushed for a small, liberal arts academic environment. My start at Jamestown College had been so salutary for my own development, and I reasoned that with her strong intellectual ability Sanna Lee would similarly blossom in such a school. Sanna Lee's main interest seemed to be to put some distance between home and school.

In the end we settled on a tiny, Quaker-affiliated college in Indiana called Earlham. It had a strong academic tradition, the relationship between students and teachers was reputed to be very close, and I was dazzled to learn that they practiced a sort of reverse freshman hazing. Rather than making the new students feel uncomfortable upon arrival, they showered them with kindness and welcome. So we made the ten-hour drive to Richmond, Indiana in the family car feeling quite good about everything; we had raised our oldest daughter successfully and she was about to start adult life in a wonderful, nurturing college environment. For my own part, I never had an inkling that I wasn't ready to let her go.

The sense of loss began to set in as we settled Sanna Lee into her dormitory. She seemed all too ready, and we were only in the way. I knew intellectually that this would be her attitude, and I welcomed it on a rational level because it meant that we had done our job as parents. On an emotional level, however, I felt abandoned and brutalized. Some major part of my persona had been ripped right out of my chest, and everyone was acting as if nothing had happened.

On the ten-hour drive home Sanna and I suffered as we never had in our lives as parents. We kept reminding one another that saying goodbye to Sanna Lee was a natural thing, and that leaving her at a wonderful place such as Earlham was a blessing, but all we could feel was the pain of her loss. Never again would we hear her singing to herself as she fiddled with projects in her room, or enjoy the chaos of neighborhood kids that seemed to follow everywhere she went. I remembered the quiet nights, feeding her from the bottle and then walking her to ease the colic, her little body in one hand and textbook in the other.

When Karen Ann's turn to select a college came around two years later, once again we were unprepared. She too wanted to make distance between us, and expressed a desire to attend a school where she could pursue rowing. I summarily overruled that idea, thinking that her one semester flirtation with rowing would pass, and besides, I resented the fact that her interest in sports seemed to be replacing her interest in music. The notion of giving up a craft at which she was already successful for something new and, it seemed to me, so much less suitable to take into adulthood, was alien to me and, I was confident, would surely pass.

So we settled on the University of Colorado in Boulder; a fine academic institution, but also a school famous for outdoor sports and good times. I was satisfied, and Karen Ann was willing, though tentative. We made a family trip of it, driving across the country in two long days, Sanna and the girls sharing the driving and me in the back of the station wagon writing a book about the failings of America's economic development program.

On arrival at the University of Colorado, Karen Ann was hesitant. Unlike her sister, who always welcomed challenges, Karen Ann seemed to be looking things over very carefully, studying her chances, and keeping quiet about what was in her mind. Her mom and I worried. Was she having second thoughts about Colorado? About college? There was no time to worry about our separation anxiety while we were on the campus because we were more worried that Karen Ann might choose not to stay at all.

We said goodbye tearfully, not knowing if our little bird was really ready to fly, and left her for the long drive to Earlham, then home. How could this stage of life be so cruel. First abject sadness at leaving Sanna Lee, partly because she was so ready to leave, and now equally overwhelming sadness at losing Karen Ann, partly because we wondered if she was ready to leave.

All of my life I had been certain that seeing my children off to college would be a proud and happy day of fulfillment, as I assumed it had been for my own parents. For me, letting go was much more complex. Sure, the proud and happy emotions were there, but layered so far below feelings of grief and loss that they were almost without significance. I wondered how my own parents had really felt. Had I hurt them with my cavalier attitude about taking on the challenges of adulthood?

10. Getting To Know And Accept The People Who Were Once My Children

As I write this I am fifty-five years of age, and my girls are thirty and twenty-nine. Sanna Lee came home for only a few months after completing studies in Indiana, then headed West to Seattle, Washington. Karen Ann stayed away for nearly five years, while she was a student at Colorado, then Texas, and finally Washington, and has since been only intermittently nearby as she pursues her interests as an elite rowing athlete wherever they take her.

Neither of my girls chose a path I would have selected for them, and this has been hard for me. I raised my girls to be nonconformists, as I am, thinking naively that this would give us a great deal in common – that we would pursue similar interests and enjoy talking about the same things. I enjoy business, politics, finance, history, anthropology, human events; how could I fail to raise a kid who didn't share some of that broad range of interests, much less two such kids?

Maybe, I say to myself, the apparent differences between my girls and me are superficial, and I only focus on the differences because I'm still feeling pain at loss of the parent-child relationship. Maybe my own emotional immaturity is the problem, and if I work on that the barriers to closeness will go away.

Or maybe it is much more serious. Maybe parents in present society can't expect to remain close with their children. Maybe the closeness one sees in traditional societies is unnatural; forced by

the circumstances of depending upon one's parents for livelihood; e.g. shelter under a common roof or access to the family farm or business. I'm very confused by my feelings, and by my daughters' reactions and behaviors. Intellectually I can deal with them, but emotionally I'm lost in a sea of confusion.

With Karen Ann things are working out fairly well for me. Her choice to pursue athletics in college, and then to carry on as an elite athlete until age thirty, making success as a rower her overriding priority and ambition, would have been unimaginable to me twelve years ago when she still lived at home. Little by little, however, as I have followed Karen Ann's athletic career, I have come to accept the choice, and in seeing the discipline and sacrifice required to be as successful as she is, I have come to respect her and her colleagues in the sport.

Acceptance has been made much easier because Karen Ann has both shared the sport, inviting me to signal events, and has introduced me to her colleagues and coaches. It has also been made easier because she has invited me into other aspects of her life, sharing how she earns a living, sometimes asking my advice or help on a small project (e.g. resume or letter), and entering into a partnership with me on a challenging publishing endeavor, creation of American Rower's Almanac. She has been reluctant to talk to me about personal things, particularly relationships with guys, but this is such a well known area of vulnerability among people in general that I can understand and easily accept this degree of separation.

Because of the high degree of communication between Karen Ann and me, I have come to terms with the person she has become. I find her an interesting and worthwhile individual, am optimistic that she will make positive contributions to society, and believe that we can be friends as her life blossoms while my own slowly fades. She even makes me feel loved most of the time.

With Sanna Lee things are more difficult. The kid is so fiercely independent that she leaves me feeling that she doesn't need me, and this is the cause of unending pain. Her involvement in a Lakota Sioux "family" shortly after arriving in Seattle six years ago, and the choice to center her life on "family" activities to the exclusion of steady employment and professional growth came as a surprise. Sanna Lee has always been very highly developed spiritually, so I could understand the attraction itself, but sacrifice of professional growth has been difficult for me to accept. And the matter is made worse by the lack of communication between us.

Like Sanna Lee, I was eager to leave home at eighteen, but unlike her I felt a need to maintain close contact through letter writing. Twice a week from departure for college in 1961 until my mother's death in 1968 I wrote to my parents, sharing my thoughts, worries and plans. On one hand I wanted to "bring my mother along" with my own emotional and intellectual growth, so that a gulf wouldn't develop between us. Somehow I was confident that my father understood me, and didn't need nurturing, but I was also sure that Mom didn't understand, and needed nurturing. Though I left, and stayed away, and did unexpected things, the lines of communication were always open. I guess, to be frank with myself, I don't know for sure how my parents felt about all that. They were ever careful not to be judgmental, so feedback from them was only a sharing of events in their own lives; never a commentary, or questions, about mine.

So it is in this context that I puzzle about the state of my relationship with Sanna Lee. Here is this beautiful kid with the thousand year old intellect, the kid who humbled me at age fifteen with her thoughtful comment “I agree with *some* of what you said, Dad.”, rather than showing disrespect by challenging me, and I can’t get close to her. I visit her, she gives me a glimpse of her life and her friends, and it becomes clear to me that she is a strong willed leader, which pleases me, but I am always made to feel distant; not a part of her life anymore.

On the one hand I still feel bonded with her from those early days when she was an infant, and I see much of myself in her. The fierce sense of independence, the intense spirituality, self esteem so high that she can make any life choice she wishes and take the heat – all of these qualities I admire and feel are shared. Yet here we are, three thousand miles apart, with our communication ever less frequent and ever more formal. It leaves a void in my chest, and a low-level sadness that never goes away.

Tracks

Professional Life

I have always been driven by an internal sense of purpose - a belief that service to mankind should take precedence over personal comfort, status or accumulation of assets. This belief, and the determination to live it, rendered me a poor fit in the government and corporate environment wherein I spent much of my professional life. Happily, it suited me well for my second career as an investment syndicator as well as my life-long interest in public service. The following recollections, therefore, are those of an individual who spent his professional years as an outsider; never willing to assimilate into the government bureaucracy in which I spent 28 years of my life, and at the same time always regarded somewhat suspiciously by my fellow investment syndicators. It is the sort of ambiguity that makes one tough, and centered; or is it the toughness and centeredness that comes first?

Dedication

I dedicate these remembrances of my professional life to you, Sanna Lee and Karen Ann, in hope that you can glean from it something of use. Because each of you has taken parts of my character and values as your own, as did I from my own father, it is likely that some of my experience can be of value. Perhaps a better understanding of me will help you to better understand yourselves.

OUTLINE

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2. A City Life
3. Service To Others
4. Business Versus Government Employment

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2. Discovering My Special Abilities
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Centering My Professional Life On Myself

1. USAID – Adjusting By Disassociating
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3. Public Service – How Best To Approach It
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 - Contractor Abuse
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2. Lafayette Federal Credit Union
3. Influencing Public Opinion

Living Life For A Higher Purpose

CHOOSING A CAREER

1. Farming

As a small boy I always assumed that I would grow up to be a farmer like my dad. I was aware that he dabbled at keeping an appliance store, that he had taught school as a young man, and that he spent a lot of time speculating in mineral rights for oil wells. I, however, saw him primarily as a farmer, and I think that he saw himself the same. I liked the idea that he worked the soil; growing crops to feed other people. I thought that I could learn to be good at that myself.

A summer job during my twelfth year disabused me of that plan. I was employed by Bill Lanz, who farmed southeast of Alexander, to clear the weeds from a row of trees (a windbreak) he was developing along the edge of one of his fields. It paid the astronomical sum of 25 cents per hour, plus lunch each day until we finished the job, which provided me with more than enough incentive to succeed. I had a co-worker, but I've forgotten who it was.

I had not been at the task two hours when my eyes and nose began to swell, and mucous built up in my head. By lunch time I was a mess, breathing with difficulty and with desperately itchy eyes from attempting to clear the mucous with my dirty, gloved hand. At lunchtime my employer took note of it, and I shrugged it off, saying that I was sure there would be no problem. I wanted very much to do well at this job, and make some money, and the discomfort was manageable for me. Mr. Lanz seemed worried, however, checked on me periodically, and at 3:00 p.m. he invited me to take my partial day's pay and go home. I felt terrible! My first real job, and I was being fired.

From that time forward I took a keen interest in my hay fever, testing myself whenever I could. I found that I had a similar inability to shovel wheat when it was being augured into the truck, or to work on a combine at all. By the end of my thirteenth summer it was clear to me that I could never make it in wheat farming; I couldn't even do it for summer work.

2. A City Life

About this time I had my first premonition that I was meant to take on a life very different from my family and friends in Alexander. My father had driven us (Mom, my siblings and me) to an event in a city. I don't remember if it was Williston, Bismarck or Minot. Cars were being parked for the drivers, that is the important point, and I recall a very confident young man instructing my father to get out of the car and he would drive it to an appropriate place. I had never imagined giving up something as personal and important as an automobile to a perfect stranger, and was dazzled by the young man's casual and confident way of getting behind the wheel and driving off. "Goodness!" I thought. "That guy can drive every car in this place. I'd like to be able to do something like that some day."

These thoughts germinated, until one day later that summer I hitchhiked up to Williston to shop. I purchased my first ever records for a portable phonograph purchased with money made selling beer and soft drink bottles gathered from the road ditches north of Alexander. The titles were "Blueberry Hill" by Fats Domino and "Mockingbird Hill" by Patti Page. While in the record

store I was teased by three local high school guys. They asked me where I was from, and I replied defiantly: “Alexander!” One of them then asked, “Hey kid, what kind of dances do you do in Alexander, the waltz?” I felt a rush of humiliation for having been spotted as a “rube” but replied with all the boldness I could muster: “Heck no! We do every kind of dance in Alexander. Even the jitterbug.” I had no idea how to jitterbug, and I prayed that there would be no follow-up inquiry into the matter.

I felt troubled after that encounter, and was pondering it when I turned the corner onto Williston’s main street where I saw a bus exiting the Greyhound terminal. There was a sign at its top which read “Minneapolis.” Then it hit me. I want to make a living somewhere grand and mysterious.” I thought, “a place where there are all kinds of people around me and all manner of experiences to be had. I don’t want to be a ‘rube’ and I don’t want to be made to feel like one.” I remembered the guy who parked my dad’s car awhile back, and I thought, “Now there’s a guy no one would ever call a rube, and if someone did, he’d have a ready answer.”

3. Service To Others

The third major step toward choosing a career path evolved much more slowly. My very early thoughts of entering the ministry might be construed as showing an interest in service, but that would be a mistake. I thought lots about the ministry only because the sole relationship, outside of those with my parents, that seemed to work for me was my relationship with God. For me the ministry would have been a retreat from the hard cold world as I knew it. There is no service in that.

During the next several years, as I worked on various construction projects in the Dakotas, Nebraska and Wyoming, I came into contact with a class of working men I hadn’t formerly known. These were people who worked at hard, sometimes dangerous jobs, often far from home, at best living in “flop houses” with groups of similarly employed men or, at worst, living in their automobiles, in any case making just enough money during the short mid-western construction season to feed their families during the winter.

Lots of these guys had problems. Most drank too much, the men over forty suffered from physical ailments, many were divorced, and few seemed to feel that life would ever get any better for them. These were guys with dreams and abilities that seemed very much like my own, but few had any idea of how to achieve them, or the confidence to try. I didn’t get it. Here I was, at the bottom of the pecking order in the construction industry, working with guys vastly more able than I at the jobs we were doing, yet feeling confident that I would someday rise above them in economic terms, realizing my ambitions even as their own would be soon forgotten.

The idea of it, the fundamental unfairness, bothered me. I didn’t understand, and still don’t I guess, but I felt that I should do something about it. I began to think about building a career plan based upon my ability to relate to these individuals, and my desire to help them self-realize even as I knew that I would myself. Because most of the large projects I worked on in those years (Minuteman missiles at Minot, Grand Forks and Cheyenne and Oahe Dam in Pierre) were union projects, I was able to see first hand what a good union contract can do to improve working conditions. I even found myself reading pertinent sections of the bargaining agreement, and assert-

ing my knowledge of it when I saw low level management people cut corners, or otherwise abuse any of my coworkers. I became a “union man” and began to think about putting myself through law school as preparation for a career as a labor organizer.

That notion began to germinate when I was nineteen, and shaped my educational plans until my fateful hitchhiking trip as far south as Managua, Nicaragua near the end of my twentieth year. Along the road, during that trip whose intended destination was Brazil, I met and empathized with many wonderful, hard working “campesinos”, most of them Indians, and my idea of how and where to serve crystallized. Here were people who had even poorer prospects for getting ahead than my construction colleagues, and there was little they could do about it. Bright, sober, employed year-round; none of that could fundamentally change the prospects for most of these *campesino* men and women. Absent money, land and education, they were screwed, and life didn’t seem any more promising for their children. Here a tough, hard to intimidate kid from rural North Dakota might make a difference, I thought. But how could I make it happen?

4. Business Versus Government Employment

With my mind set on finding a way to work with Latin American Indians, I shaped my education plans accordingly. Junior year in Mexico City was the first step, and a move to the University of Texas in Austin for my senior year, and a master’s degree program, was the second step. Along the way I shifted my study focus from political science to history and economics, and began to apply myself to learning Spanish and Portuguese. I had no idea who would hire me to work in Latin America, and how I could dedicate myself to service while living and working there, but I felt confident that these hurdles would be cleared when the time came.

In the spring of 1968 I began my job search, applying to any organization that might send me to Latin America. Gulf Oil, United Fruit, CitiBank, Peace Corps and USAID were among the primary interests. I recall the interview with United Fruit, which in those days was regarded as the great exploiter of the Central American *campesino*. I didn’t own a suit, so showed up for the conversation wearing a Pendleton jacket, and of course the beard. When, in the course of the interview, I was asked why I would want to work for United Fruit, I put my cards on the table face-up. I explained that I was tired of reading about United Fruit in a negative context, that the company needed to learn to deal more harmoniously with its *campesino* employees and growers, and that I wanted to help make that happen. Miraculously, I was not immediately dismissed. Indeed, there were several follow-up calls, and I got the impression that I was on their short list.

In the end, it was USAID that came through with the best job offer, and I found myself bound for government employment. My goal, I told myself, is to get inside what I perceived to be a terminally sick, dysfunctional government organization, and turn it into an effective weapon for curing world poverty. I would serve the Latin American *campesino* indirectly, not by spending my days with him, helping to solve problems on the ground, but rather leveraging myself by changing the U.S. foreign assistance program to serve its target *campesino* clients more effectively.

INTRODUCTION TO THE FOREIGN SERVICE

1. Choosing A Professional Focus

The door to USAID was opened via a high score on the Federal Service Entrance Examination, and some behind the scenes assistance from my new father-in-law, Idar Rimestad. Idar was Deputy Undersecretary for Management in the Department of State at the time, and he was on friendly terms with James Waldon, Chief of Management for the Latin America Bureau of State and USAID. I had met Idar only after Sanna and I were married, enduring a one-day visit during a backyard barbecue at the home of friends of Idar's in Washington, D.C. during the summer Sanna and I spent in Newark, and a subsequent one-day visit at the home of another friend of Idar's in Aspen, Colorado during my first year in graduate school. At that second meeting I made it known that I planned to explore work at USAID and State, among other options.

Idar had long since "taken my measure" and found problems, particularly with my beard, so made it clear that he viewed me as unfit for such work. I recall a long evening, after dinner, in which Idar and his friend Army, a former Foreign Service Officer, argued ruthlessly with me on the subject of U.S. foreign policy in Latin America. The discussion was like a "gang bang" with the two of them taking every opportunity to disparage my ill-formed, graduate school views, and along the way offering repeatedly that I should put aside any thought of foreign service work. It got rough enough that my mother-in-law, Ann, soon left the room in tears, followed a half hour later by my wife Sanna, also crying, and the host and hostess.

I left that discussion about 1:00 a.m. having concluded that my father-in-law was a profoundly insecure individual, and believing that if such an insecure jerk could succeed in the foreign service system, it would be "easy pickings" for me if I could just pry the door open. I did not expect help from Idar, and when it was given it was so well hidden that I only was able to piece it together twenty-eight years later, looking at old personnel files on the eve of my retirement.

In the final analysis, the subject is only relevant because this connection caused me to be among five international development interns employed by USAID in 1968, whereupon I was assigned to work in the administrative management career path.

I was soon to learn that in the Foreign Service, people called administrative officers are really housekeepers. They take care of the physical space in which folks work, look after the systems of travel and communication, and also handle personnel (hiring, promotion and dismissal of employees). None of these things interested me, and though it was an acceptable career path as far as reaching my goal to become assistant administrator for Latin America (the top policy-making job I aspired to) it was work involving minimal contact with the investment portfolio, and even less with the *campesino* families I hoped to impact through my work. Within two weeks of taking on my new job in Washington, D.C., where I was being prepared for a tour of duty in Brazil, I had dedicated myself to getting transferred into project development work.

In the USAID of 1968 the overall staff comprised about 5,000 people, half of them living and working abroad and half in Washington, D.C. I was lucky enough to be among the half destined for work abroad as Foreign Service Officers. Of the total work force, about 60 percent were in

management support roles, about 30 percent were technical specialists (e.g. agronomists, engineers, tax advisors), and the balance worked in the most desirable fields of policy, project development or evaluation. No more than 100 individuals worked in project development - the field that interested me. I wanted to be one of the guys who travels to the field, performs feasibility studies for new investments, and then conceptualizes and develops the projects. I saw this work as giving me the greatest opportunity to do good; the best way of reshaping my employer into an effective change agent.

After completing agency orientation and transferring to Rio de Janeiro in January of 1969, I soon discovered an abundance of opportunities to develop project development skills. Though I was assigned to the Office of Administrative Management, thanks to supportive bosses (Lester Gottlieb and Lee Odle) I was given work opportunities that involved feasibility analysis, conceptualization and writing. Lester himself, though one of the Agency's top administrative officers, felt constrained in his job, and was happy to help me take on non-traditional challenges he might have enjoyed himself earlier in his career, had the opportunities presented themselves. Later, as I performed brief rotations through various parts of the USAID Mission, I was given one assignment after another that involved analysis, conceptualization and writing. Then, as luck would have it, I was assigned to the program office for six weeks to fill in for an officer on home leave, and this fellow just happened to be eleven months behind on his project development work. He had a hundred-odd technical professionals (education, public service and labor advisors) he was expected to support who wanted to develop new investments and depended upon him to examine their feasibility, conceptualize them, and write them up for review by USAID's investment committee. For a kid looking to prove himself on project development and management this was the "mother lode."

During the next six weeks I worked feverishly, first calming the angry technical advisors whose work had been held up, then winning their confidence, and finally exploring their project ideas and turning them into investment-worthy proposals. Absent any training in project economics or feasibility work, I was "flying by the seat of my pants" the whole time, but somehow succeeded. At the end of the six-week assignment I had written and won approval of five new projects, along with a host of other contract implementation work, and established myself as a performer in the field of project development and program management.

Curiously, even as I accomplished all this work I made enemies all around me. It was a long time registering with me, but I was to learn that in a large, dysfunctional corporate environment such as USAID, getting the work out is only appreciated if it can be done without causing anyone discomfort. I, in fact, had made everyone in the program office where I worked uncomfortable. The director and his deputy, in particular, were tired of me stopping in their offices every day to ask if documents I had put on their desks had been read and cleared by them. I was challenging their prerogatives to control the flow of work. The coworkers of the man I was replacing were even more threatened. How was it that a new employee, fresh from graduate school, could do so much work so quickly? It was embarrassing for everyone.

In the end, my productivity won out over my personality and style shortcomings, and I was allowed to leave the administrative management career path to become a project development officer. I had found my professional niche, and must now learn to make the most of it.

2. Discovering My Special Abilities

Midway through my first tour of duty in Brazil I arranged to be transferred to Recife, in Northeast Brazil. Recife, at the time, was viewed as a hellish place to work. It was very hot, the city was primitive, and the Northeasterners were unfriendly to Americans and not very interesting. Why would anyone leave an apartment on Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro, one of the world's most beautiful and sophisticated cities, for Recife?

I wanted more professional challenge, and working in Rio was too much like Miami Beach. The problems we were charged to address seemed remote from Rio. The famously beautiful Carioca women, the great restaurants and hotels, and all the wonderful parties, were not what I was looking for. I felt that I could better live a life of service in a less hedonistic environment.

Recife did that for me in spades. Common folks in Recife were desperately poor, many of them malnourished and sick. There were men, women and children on every street corner begging for food, and we rarely had any garbage to dispose of because of the steady stream of people who came to the door looking to recycle it. Some wanted any paper products, some wanted any metal, glass or plastic, and some simply brought a dirty bucket and asked us to dump leftovers we might have into it. When I went to work mornings in Recife, I knew exactly why I was there, and the sense of urgency never departed.

I had two functions to perform in Recife. I was put in charge of USAID's fourth largest technical training program (there were larger programs in Rio, New Delhi and Saigon), replacing a man who had been in place for seven years. This was program management work, and I met the challenge by setting up badly needed systems to make it run more efficiently, and also set out to catalogue and follow up with all current and former trainees. The resultant directory was a veritable "who's who" in Northeast Brazil and presented a wonderful opportunity to create good will for the U.S. government as well as a useful networking tool.

It was during the course of my technical training work that I made a powerful discovery as to my suitability for economic development work. One of my colleagues, a senior Brazilian education advisor, invited me along one day to lunch at the Caixanga Club. I accepted, not appreciating how lucky I was. Caixanga, it seems, hosted occasional large luncheon gatherings, and the participants were the "creme de la creme" of Northeastern Brazil's power structure. It was unusual for a USAID employee to be invited.

The get-together seemed strange from the moment I entered the clubhouse. We entered a room full of men talking loudly, laughing and even slapping one another on the back. I noted that many were drinking. "Goodness!" I thought. "What is going on? *Nordestinos* don't talk loudly, and I've never seen one drink to excess. *Nordestinos* are excessively shy, careful and formal."

After a time we sat down to dinner. Tables were arranged in a square large enough to accommodate about 100 people. Conversation continued loud and raucous, and I was still confused. Suddenly, I realized that I was being singled out. People had been standing up and making toasts, or giving small talks, and someone was shouting, "Make the gringo give a speech!" Then someone

else shouted, “He’s a Russian!” I looked over at my colleague, my heart pounding and my head swelling in embarrassment, and he nodded, which I took to be advice to stand up and address the throng. So I did. I started with: “My name is Ray Solem, and I’m here as a guest of Miguel Melo, with whom I ...” Before I could go further the room erupted in laughter, and someone shouted: “Make him sit down!” I looked uncertainly at Miguel, wondering what I had gotten myself into, and he seemed to nod affirmatively. So I sat, embarrassed but relieved that the taunting had moved on to someone else, with my mind racing, trying to understand what was going on. Then, over the cacophony of sound filling the room, it came to me. I kept hearing the word: “*Matuto. Matuto.*” “Good heavens!” I thought. “Hillbilly! Now that’s a rude expression I haven’t heard since language school. These people are calling each other hillbilly. They must think of themselves as hillbillies, and they are comfortable with me because they recognize that I am also a person from the country.”

After that Northeast Brazil was an easy place for me to work because I knew that my counterparts in the Brazilian government weren’t rude; they just lacked confidence and the social skills that go with it. The silences weren’t meant to be impolite. They were just shy. All I needed to do to be a successful operator in Northeast Brazil, if this analysis was correct, is continue to be myself. On that basis I would be liked and trusted.

A few months later I had a second revelatory experience that confirmed my analysis of the situation.

Our agricultural development chief position had gone vacant, and USAID in Washington, D.C. sent a replacement on direct transfer from Jordan. The mission director, Donor Lyon, a Jewish kid from New York, with a Harvard PhD in Economics, was unhappy because the new guy, Bo Bowen, a former west Texas rancher and farm equipment dealer, spoke no Portuguese. I had little confidence in Donor’s judgement, so resolved to work with Bo and try to make him a success. He had received an award from the King of Jordan for his work in that country, so I reasoned that he must be competent.

After a few weeks in his new job, Bo and I agreed that it would be good for him to meet with his counterparts in the Agricultural Office of the Superintendency for the Development of the Northeast (SUDENE). By then I knew more of the SUDENE officials than most folks in USAID, even though I was among the newest employees, so I agreed to take him there. I warned him that the agricultural staff was the most hostile and anti-American of all SUDENE personnel. He was nervous, but determined to take the step.

We arrived on time, and true to custom at SUDENE we were asked to wait, and directed to tiny little chairs in the hallway. Bo was about 6’5” and sixty years of age, so he maneuvered himself into the chair with difficulty, and looked very funny sitting there with his knees up around his ears. After about 45 minutes, we were ushered into a conference room to find Bo’s counterpart sitting behind a conference table, arms folded and a stern look on his face, with about six staff members on either side. It wasn’t clear where we should sit, and no one got up to greet us or offer help, so I led Bo to the chair closest to his counterpart, and I sat beside him. Then I began the introductions, and a strange thing happened.

As I spoke, looking into the face of Bo's counterpart, he fixed his eyes on Bo, and Bo just sat there looking uncomfortable, probably not understanding anything being said because it was all in Portuguese. My introduction lasted about five minutes, and while I spoke I could feel some sort of energy passing between Bo and his counterpart. It was almost like electrical current. When I stopped talking, Bo's counterpart asked me a few questions, all the while fixing on Bo. When the meeting concluded Bo's counterpart came out from behind his table, walked up to Bo and gave him a hug, looking at me and saying: "I like him. I believe that he is sincere."

In Brazil's Northeast *sincero* is the ultimate compliment. Bo was home free, and he had accomplished it with nothing more than his spiritual presence and a shy "muchas gracias" spoken in a bad Spanish accent.

As we drove away, I told Bo about my earlier experience with the "matutos" at the Caixanga Luncheon Club, and I felt 100 percent comfortable that my notion that the natural affinity between people from rural societies was real, and would serve me well in the years to come.

3. Disillusionment With USAID

As my three year tour in Brazil drew to a close, I felt at a crossroads. If I was going to leave the government, now would be a good time. My career, however, seemed to be going extremely well. I was already an office director, something that might well have taken ten to fifteen years to accomplish, and I felt that I was proving effective, and doing good service. My boss in Recife, Bob Chamberlain, had been a hard taskmaster, running me ragged even as he plodded along at his slow but steady pace. He was, however, a terrific teacher. At the end of my evaluation period he gave me a strong recommendation for advancement, closing with a statement I did not understand. He said: "... and when he achieves bureaucratic maturity he shall rise to the highest ranks in the agency." I wondered: "What in the world is bureaucratic maturity?" When I asked, Bob explained something profoundly important and valid. Rather than accept it and understand that I could never be successful in USAID without a fundamental change in my value system, however, I simply added it to my list of reasons for wanting to change the system from within.

Bob said, paraphrasing: "Your immaturity, Ray, is that you put individual tasks ahead of getting along. If you are to be successful, over the long run, in an organization like USAID, you need to respect relationships more than any single thing that you do."

My notion that the agency's economic development mission should drive the organization, and personnel should put the mission ahead of comfort and convenience, was in direct opposition with Bob's analysis. As it turned out, Bob was right. An agency controlled by self-dealing bureaucrats who put their jobs and comfort ahead of performance cannot be reformed from within. An outside force willing to demand accountability (e.g. the President, Congress, a rigid performance test of some kind) is essential to reforming any bureaucracy.

In the end I decided to stay on for another assignment, and was offered a deputy assistant directorship in the Ecuador mission. I was excited because I would be working with Indians, in another language (Spanish), and at a substantially higher level position than what I enjoyed in Brazil. Unfortunately, after traveling to Ecuador to arrange housing, the job was cancelled, I was

transferred back to Washington, D.C. to work once again in administrative management with my former boss and friend Lester Gottlieb. Lester was kind and supportive, and urged me to give his field another chance, saying that he could get me some quick promotions. He was right, and it would have been a smart career move, but I did not want to spend my life doing administrative chores for a bureaucracy.

I felt confused, and considered returning to construction work which, by comparison, was all substance and no style. The personnel director for Latin America urged me to take a six week temporary assignment in Costa Rica and think things over, so I did. Those weeks alone, in a strange country, helped me to concentrate, and I arrived at a conclusion that would shape the rest of my life. I knew that I could have a brilliant career if I “played the game” in USAID, and I would have a very good chance of rising to the position of top policy maker for the Latin America region, but I wasn’t willing to pay the price. I was also fearful that if I “sold out” in this way, I would no longer have the independent spirit necessary to make changes. Yet I loved the idea of working in economic development, I knew that I was a very strong project designer, and I knew that I had an unusual gift for communicating with and understanding the poor farmers and merchants we were trying to help with our programs.

My decision was to remain in USAID, however to focus solely on project development, whether that choice hurt my career prospects or not. I would treat USAID as a labor of love, sort of a hobby, and do it to the best of my ability no matter what the obstacles. Meantime, I would look to a parallel career in business to test my professional skills in a more meaningful way, and I would also pursue public service wherever I found an opportunity.

Centering My Professional Life On Myself

1. USAID – Adjusting By Disassociating

The concept of putting myself at the center of all my professional career decisions was difficult for me to come to. It meant that I was effectively refusing to commit to any institution, and in the process, viewing myself as a part of a larger whole. No longer was I Ray Solem, foreign service officer. Rather, I was Ray Solem, who happened to be employed for the moment in the foreign service but also dabbled in business. I gave up the confidence gained from seeing myself as a part of something larger and stepped out into the world as Ray Solem, individual. I was now solely responsible for my own actions, successes and failures alike, with no one to lean on.

The way that played out in career decisions is that all training, work assignments and other work decisions were made on the basis of whether they would help me to “self-realize” - to achieve my personal mission to serve others by making USAID an effective vehicle for development assistance. It didn’t matter whether it helped my career in USAID. Indeed, from that day forward I made many decisions with the full knowledge that they would hurt my USAID career.

Along the way, therefore, though I did many worthwhile things in USAID, each year I was viewed by insiders as increasingly eccentric, and because USAID is an organization in which relationships are viewed as more important than output, each year from 1971 forward (I was twenty-eight years of age when I made the commitment), my opportunities in USAID dimin-

ished. I was working hard and effectively to achieve USAID's economic development mission, which matched my own goals, and in the process moving further and further down the pecking order because of the disconnect between career growth and mission enhancement. Because I had made a conscious decision to live my life in this way, disassociating myself from the values of the bureaucracy in which I worked, it was bearable, but nonetheless disconcerting.

2. Finding Order In Investment; A World Of Rules And Consequences

Growing up in Alexander under my father's tutelage, the world of business and investment was completely foreign to me. My father never talked about money, and I think that he had little interest in it. He was a very "laid back" farmer, and as near as I could see his little appliance business was not taken seriously. He seemed to get great joy from his efforts to buy and trade mineral rights around the region. I think, though, that it was more of a game to him, like poker. He had some understanding of the exploration process, studied the topographic maps intently, and made his moves. In the end he did manage to acquire partial ownership in several leases, a few of which produced oil, but these events happened near the very end of his thirty-year contracts when he had already lost his memory and general awareness.

During my years working construction and pursuing formal education, I was likewise without contact with the business world and its values and concepts. I lived in the world of hourly labor, building things, and ideas. It wasn't until I joined USAID in 1968, and met my fellow international development interns, that I got my first notion of how exciting business could be.

Two of my colleagues were new graduates of Harvard Business School, Joe King and Don Pearson. Don was a magnetic fellow with overwhelming self-confidence, charm, and a drive to achieve. He was open about his plan to use his USAID assignment as a way to smooth the way for a business career in Brazil, where he was determined to start his own hedge fund investment company. Meantime, while we were all doing our six-month orientation tour in Washington, D.C., he elected to start a small investment fund to participate in the U.S. stock market. I listened, uncomprehending, as Don talked about it, went to my credit union and borrowed \$1,000, and later another \$5,000, to join in the fun, and watched with interest as Don grew his little fund from \$5,000 (\$1,000 from each of us interns) to \$250,000. The growth was from new subscriptions. Don seemed to infect everyone in his evolving circle of relationships with his enthusiasm. On the investment front, Don's fund lost money every semester after the first, up to the point that I withdrew and lost contact with it.

Don also had a well-developed philosophy with respect to wealth accumulation. This was important to me because I had always associated wealth with unworthy and decadent behavior. Don said that wealth was important because it gave a person access to power and privacy. The privacy part I didn't relate well to because I enjoy all manner of human contact, but the word power "rang my bell." If I'm to be a successful "do-gooder", I thought, what could be more useful than power?

By the time I returned from Brazil I already was thinking like a businessman. My project development work at USAID had instructed me in the arts of feasibility analysis, conceptualization, structuring and presentation. My experience running the large technical training program had

shown me that my USAID project development skills could also be applied on behalf of state governments in competing for federal resources. I put these two experiences together and returned home with my first two business ideas: (1) I would trade upon my construction skills and enter the business of rehabilitating houses; and (2) I would trade on my USAID experience and put together an economic development commission for a poor, rural state in the U.S., and use it to increase that state's share of federal development assistance grants.

Within a year of returning to Washington, D.C. I had successfully engaged myself in both plans, and was well on my way to leading a dual life. Part of each day I was a hard-nosed, and not very popular USAID project development officer, insisting on rigorous design and honest feasibility analysis in the face of a bureaucratic system that simply wanted to place funds quickly and without risk of political embarrassment. The other part of my day I was using my own very dear funds, and borrowed money, to purchase and rehabilitate houses or to package and sell whatever other business or service concept I deemed worthy. My USAID friends didn't understand why I was so unyielding in my fervor for rigorous standards in project design, and my business friends wondered why I was wasting ten hours of each week day going into a government office to do they knew not what.

In the end, I felt really good about my work in the world of investing, no matter the struggles and set-backs. Here was a world that had structure; an objective test of the worth of a project, or an individual. You were financially viable or you weren't. You produced more than you consumed or you didn't. I liked the simplicity and fairness of it. My investment business provided a perfect counterpoint to my government career where style was everything; if you could talk others into doing something that made it OK. USAID might have provided me with the structure I needed had it operated according to some ethical code, its mission statement, for example, but it did not. USAID was, more than anything I can think of, like the Mafia after its early, highly mission-oriented years in the streets of New York. It no longer existed to serve the people; now it had become an attractive career vehicle for ambitious people who wanted to enjoy a special elite status while living a sheltered life within an organizational cocoon.

3. Public Service – How Best To Approach It

During this period I also began to focus on how I might engage systematically in public service over the long-run. I came to understand that the most suitable approach for me to such work would be to integrate it into my income earning tasks. In USAID that translated to being loyal to the agency's mission because its mission statement is pure service; to invest U.S. government resources in third world countries so to help them grow economically. In business that meant using my skills and power to promote worthy causes as they presented themselves. Only after I had acquired enough of a financial underpinning to care for the needs of my family, I calculated, should I even consider doing independent public service full-time.

It was very complicated. When I entered USAID I had thought of that career as public service. Very shortly after involving myself, however, I noted that the institution was, in fact, a very poor vehicle through which to serve any charitable purpose. On the one hand it was manipulated, like a toy, by the Department of State; used as a sort of "piggy bank" to help them with their diplomatic endeavors. What better way to get on good terms with a new prime minister than to trans-

fer \$10 million to him in the form of a school, road, or whatever he fancied and project development officers like myself could justify. Because pleasing the State Department, and sometimes individual Congressmen, Senators and Presidents was the way to have a good career, my colleagues in USAID also became part of the problem. If the President wanted to announce a \$10 million school construction project during a visit to the Philippines on July 1, then the USAID functionaries who managed those resources had better complete the study of that investment, conclude that it is worthwhile, and package the project before July 1. That, I came to believe, is not public service. Nor is it consistent with USAID's mission statement. Indeed, my best public service in USAID came from objecting to these misuses of scarce development assistance resources and making myself unpopular in the process.

I eventually learned that as an entrepreneur I would develop many useful skills that could be put to use in a public service context long before I had money to invest in such activities. I would not have to await wealth accumulation to serve society; indeed, it could be a continuing process with the manner of service evolving with my own capabilities.

4. Putting It All Together Intellectually

So it was that in the early 1970s a better understanding of my own life plan came together. To be an effective public servant, the key is power. But what kind of power?

Power over myself (e.g. willingness to sacrifice), I reasoned, would give me the ability to serve people with my personal time and skills. Should I limit my service to what I can do with my own mind and body, whatever good is done must be achieved one-on-one. The exception to this would be the power of ideas. A good thinker, with appropriate writing skills, can leverage himself dramatically. Power over resources, on the other hand, would give me the ability to leverage myself with whatever resources I could command. The greater the resources the greater the leverage.

I preferred the idea of leveraging myself. Serving as a thinker and writer seemed an unavailable option given my rather ordinary intellectual gifts. That left control over resources as my best shot. So how to do that?

- I could acquire control over resources through development of my bureaucratic skills, for example through a career in USAID.
- I could acquire control over resources by returning home to North Dakota and getting involved in politics.
- I could acquire control over resources by making lots of money.

The more I thought about it the more I was certain that the last approach suited me best. It would provide the most concrete power base, and it would allow me to focus my energies on substance, leaving aside the distractions of "going along to get along" in the bureaucracy, or the myriad demands of constituents in politics.

Bureaucratic power, I reasoned, is easy to acquire but rarely used. This is so because success as a bureaucrat is achieved by being a non-judgmental tool for whatever political force is felt at the given moment. Successful bureaucrats are like weather vanes; they shift quickly and easily with the wind. The moment a bureaucrat begins to resist the force of the wind he is no longer useful to the system and will be disposed of. You achieve power by standing for nothing, being a “team player,” and the moment you take a stand you are deemed to have “lost it” and are disposed of.

Political power, likewise, seemed entirely too ephemeral. I was probably influenced in this conclusion by my own father’s unsuccessful political career, but I had also followed politics in general closely since childhood and felt comfortable with my analysis. For starters, what if I were to return to North Dakota, work at one thing or another for ten years, and never achieve high office? Then where would I be? What if I did accomplish my desired power base, perhaps a seat in Congress? How long would it be before I could do very much with it? And what would time spent in public service, as opposed to serving my constituents, do to my political career over time? I could end up an unemployed, “do-gooder” politician still at the prime of my life. No, political power did not seem suited for me.

The only reliable, long-term power in 20th Century America, I reasoned, is economic power; the ability to accumulate resources through business initiatives and to exercise control over those resources. With the skills of a capitalist I would be most able to serve others intellectually. Hospitals, schools and causes needing support can be helped more by a person who knows how to raise money than by one more “candy striper” volunteer. If I were to succeed in accumulating wealth, I could leverage my skills even more by contributing cash as well as management skills to causes. If my reputation were sufficiently large, I could probably bring lots of other financially successful people into the venture behind me. The herd instinct is strong among humans, after all, and far more people will follow a successful businessman to an enterprise than will follow a teacher, preacher or plumber.

So it was resolved, somewhere around 1972. I would continue my work at USAID, but with the full realization that by establishing myself as a rigorous professional project designer, with limits on willingness to compromise on substantive issues and no interest in taking promotions to administrative positions, I would not enjoy the advancement that would normally accompany a person of my abilities and dedication. At the same time I would dive into learning business with wholehearted enthusiasm, accumulating skills and assets as best I could, knowing that both would make me ever more powerful and able to serve my higher interests. Finally, I would seize every opportunity for public service that presented itself along the way, so long as it was service that could be done with my personal skills. Significant investment of personal resources would await a later time.

In a sentence, I would center my professional career, and my long-term ambitions to make the world a better place, on myself.

Tales From My USAID Career

It is strange for me to write about my USAID career because I don’t know what sort of importance to give it. It occupied most of my time for twenty-nine years, provided me the basis for an

exciting international life style, and enabled many interesting and significant accomplishments. On the surface, that should make it the biggest factor in my professional life. Except for those very heady first three years in Brazil, however, it was never the anchor for me that it is for most participants in large corporate environments. I worked ever so hard to try to achieve the mission of the agency through my work, winning far more battles than I lost, and putting my job on the line frequently. Unhappily, at the end of each day I went home feeling a bit soiled by the system in which I served. I admired and identified with USAID's stated goals, but the institution, like the proverbial corrupt tent preacher, did not live up to its billing

1. Refusing To Play The Game

Perhaps a good way to explain my ambivalence about USAID is to illustrate with several specific examples how my determination to dedicate myself to honest and professional project development work created problems for me. I'll take one case from early in my career (1976) and another from the twilight years (1991).

a. Cape Verde Desalination And Water Project

The most career costly project I ever got involved in during the early years was a water desalination plant for Sal Island in the Republic of Cape Verde. I started out on the wrong foot by rejecting, during feasibility, a "half-baked" design that had been conceived by some United Nations official without ever visiting the site. After investing about \$30,000 and six months to assemble a feasibility team, taken them to Cape Verde, and concluded that the work we were sent to do made no economic sense, I was in a quandary. I did not want to take my team home after just two days in the field to tell folks the proposed technology for water desalination was not workable. Rather, I opted to listen to my Cape Verdean counterpart, who had warned us earlier that the U.N. project proposal was a loser, and we investigated his alternative solution to the problem of no fresh water. After two weeks analysis, it was clear to us that the technology suggested by our Cape Verdean counterpart would work very well, and would lower the price of water from \$8.00 per ton to \$0.50 per ton. We were thrilled and proud of our work.

The reaction at USAID in Washington to the change in approach was stunned disbelief. The regional director for the Horn of Africa got so upset with me during one animated discussion, at which I refused to back away from the proposal, that he snarled at me, "Get out of my office or I'll knock you through the wall!" On the way to the final project review meeting six months later, at which funding would be approved or not, my own boss, the head of project development for Africa, informed me that he felt he had to vote against the project. His reasoning, which he expressed in front of the senior staff of the Africa Bureau, was that cheap water for Cape Verde shouldn't be supported by USAID because Cape Verde allows South African Airways to refuel at Sal Island Airport, thus making SAA a co-beneficiary. I was stunned at such an ignorant remark from one of USAID's senior leaders. Luckily, the bureau chief, a no nonsense political appointee who had not yet joined the "get along by going along" club slapped him down with the comment: "John. Is this a South Africa project or a Cape Verde Project?" The objection went away, along with all other opposition, because career bureaucrats are like weather vanes. It was one of those rare occasions when USAID did the right thing because of the vagaries of politics.

b. Enterprise Funds

It was ironic, though perhaps inevitable, that my USAID career ended on a similar note. I was invited to return to full-time status in 1990, leaving a much higher paying consultancy at the International Finance Corporation, so that I could manage the agency's new half-billion dollar portfolio of venture capital companies in Eastern Europe.

USAID's portfolio of so-called enterprise funds had been established mindlessly, at White House direction, without a single professional venture capital advisor on staff to direct structuring efforts. The result was four separate funds, each with only one investor - USAID. Each was run by a chairman appointed by the White House with help from the State Department, with other members of the board of directors similarly appointed. The first three enterprise fund chairmen came from backgrounds selling securities on Wall Street; other board members were an eclectic collection of political friends from all walks of life, and staff members were third echelon types from Wall Street; whatever class of employees could be bought for a GS-14 salary and no benefits. Ability to communicate in the language of the host country, where the work was being carried out, was rare. Neither did many of the staffers have prior experience in venture capital or working abroad.

The Agency people who invited me to take over management of the portfolio were beginning to worry about embarrassment because they had no idea what the four Enterprise Funds were doing with a half billion dollars of USAID funds. Meantime, the agency's senior management, the George Bush appointees running the bureau and the agency, were happy to leave well enough alone. A senior agency professional had been reprimanded several years earlier for attempting to establish some controls over the funds, and everyone remembered that. And of course the State Department folks who really call the shots regarding agency activities wanted things left alone. For them the funds were nothing more than a piggy bank to be exploited by friends of the White House and senior Polish, Hungarian, Czech and Bulgarian officials. If they weren't complaining, why should USAID concern itself about use of funds?

I got an inkling of this divergence of interests when I was introduced to the leadership during my first week. The top State and USAID players, both White House appointments, expressed surprise to learn that I had been hired, and both said roughly the same thing: "You can look into things, but don't be intrusive."

I knew from those remarks that I was getting into something really hot, but I also knew that if I could get a handle on things quickly it wasn't too late to set up controls and support systems that might make these dysfunctional little piggybanks actually do some good. I had acquired substantial experience setting up and operating blind pool investment funds in my own business, so had unusually relevant experience for the task. I also felt committed because it was I who started the agency down the road toward establishing venture capital companies back in 1980 when I put together the International Small Business Investment Company.

So ... I dove into the task with enthusiasm, got to know all the various fund presidents and senior staffers, made arrangements with two of the "big six" accounting firms USAID had on retainer to

help the funds set up sorely needed management and control systems, and went on a tour of the European headquarters offices to get a look at their field operations.

What I learned about the Polish operation particularly worried me as they were on a course to financial insolvency within several years, and it looked suspiciously like staff members knew this was happening and were making plans to jump from the fund into the companies they were investing in, leaving USAID with a bankrupt shell. While in their New York office, and later in Warsaw, I suggested to the leadership that they establish a small business lending operation so to generate some cash flow with which to meet payroll. Later, upon stopping in at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) in London en-route home, I spoke with the president of its venture capital operation, and when he advised that he was thinking of setting up his own fund in Warsaw, I suggested that he invest in USAID's, structuring his investment so that it could be managed separately. That would help USAID's fund by spreading its operating costs over a larger portfolio, and would also (I hoped) bring some professional management to the task. It would help EBRD by lowering their up-front investment cost.

A week later, when I reported to my bosses in Washington, D.C., I recommended management changes to remedy the problems I'd seen. My report was buried, and I was ordered to work elsewhere in the Europe portfolio. Several weeks after that, the Polish Fund advised State that it planned to set up an affiliate company with an EBRD investment. State didn't want outsiders involved in their piggy bank, so when I argued forcefully that it was a good idea, I was asked to leave the Europe Bureau altogether.

At the end of the day the following happened:

- The changes I proposed for managing the funds were all installed, albeit so slowly that major financial losses and several devastating public disclosures of bad practices occurred in the interim.
- The EBRD investment in the Polish Fund (my idea) was made, and has proven the most significant positive development with respect to the Fund.
- The Polish Fund started a small business lending program (my idea) which generated the cash flow needed to meet payroll and proved its second best achievement.
- I was blackballed by the Europe Bureau, which ultimately caused me to be forced into early retirement from USAID.

2. The Range Of Experience

As frustrating as it was to work in such a dysfunctional organization, USAID provided me with a wide range of stimulating and challenging opportunities. In my early years I did almost exclusively project development work. Later, after I converted from foreign service to civil service employment, I got fewer opportunities to develop projects, so filled the creative gap with project evaluation work. Throughout, I was periodically drafted into program management tasks; work that justified higher grades, and was easy for me but it did not hold my interest.

In the following resume of that work I shall focus on the nature of the work in general rather than on specific activities.

a. Project Development

During the course of my USAID career I played the lead role in putting together some twenty-five new projects. A typical assignment would begin with a broad request to see if I could put together a project with a general emphasis; e.g. agricultural productivity or small farmer lending. I would then consult with USAID and/or host country officials with direct knowledge of the proposal for background. Subsequently I would perform research on the technology, the country and prior USAID experience with such projects. With this as background, I would discuss the proposal once again with the interested policy person and share my preliminary views. We would reach an understanding on general terms, and I would get the agency's blessing to select a team of contract experts to work with me on project feasibility. Team cost and composition were left to me to determine.

The typical field mission lasted two to four weeks, and involved intensive sixteen-hour work days often spent riding around in four-wheel drive vehicles, hiking through the bush, staying in primitive lodging, and then a final day or two interviewing and negotiating with high-level government officials in the capital city. It was exhilarating work while in the field, and usually by the time the job was completed the team members and the host country counterparts had developed friendships.

By the time I sent my contract team members home I usually had about fifty pages of barely legible scrawl (notes, charts, text, etc.) from each participant, and it was left to me to pull it all together into a project paper suitable for presentation to USAID's senior staff. This project paper was normally a document of fifty to 200 pages, including annexes. I did most of these writing jobs in the two weeks following the field work, generally in the George Washington University Cafeteria where I wouldn't be interrupted by phone calls.

The final stage in project development work was presentation to USAID's senior staff for the relevant regional bureau (Africa, Asia, etc.). These meetings were an exercise in childlike self-indulgence, without exception. Among the explanations for my unkind characterization are the following peculiarities:

- Every person around the table, regardless of background and expertise, felt free to chime in with whatever idea was fleeting through his head.
 - Few participants ever prepared by examining the proposal.
 - The USAID culture favored a relaxed ambiance. That meant that meetings rarely started on time, once underway they were characterized by frequent interruptions of one speaker by another with a louder voice or more assertive personality, there were always gigglers and side talkers, and the questioners were given to long prologues, sidebars and soliloquies.
 - All meetings lasted until lunchtime or quitting time, irrespective of when they started. This meant that a 10:00 a.m. meeting would last two hours whether it needed to or not,

and a 4:00 p.m. meeting lasted one hour, whether or not that allowed sufficient time for a thoughtful review.

- Dissenting opinions were welcome until it was time to close the meeting, but were never carried to the end. All decisions were by consensus. The rare dissenter at meeting's close was punished by not being invited back.

The meeting life cycle was predictable. The chairperson, usually the bureau administrator, would arrive not having had time to prepare. When he or she sat down the giggling would stop, the project team would make its formal presentation in twenty minutes, then the free-for-all would ensue. This would continue until about fifteen minutes before the target closing time, at which point everyone would turn to the bureau chief to see which way the wind would blow that day. The bureau chief, by then, had learned a bit about the project, knew what all the office directors thought, and was ready to hint at a decision. As soon as the hint was dropped, the office directors scrambled to agree, and when it was clear all would agree, the bureau chief would approve the decision. This careful consensus development process ensured that no single person could be held accountable for the decision made, and that no one could later claim that they tried to stop it from happening. Coincidentally, this is roughly the way decisions are made in traditional tribal cultures.

During my early years in USAID this last step in the project development cycle frustrated me very much because I insisted on treating it as a rational, objective process. It was also problematic because my early projects were mostly in the agricultural discipline, and the agricultural technicians I'd bring along to speak on technical issues were never effective in this environment. It was a cultural matter. Every USAID agronomist I knew had grown-up either on a farm or in a small town. The speaking habit in such environments is to wait about a half-second after your co-conversationalist has stopped speaking to start your answer. It is a habit that is deeply ingrained in the culture of rural societies. To interrupt would be rude. So my Agricultural technical advisors would come to the meeting after months of preparation, "loaded for bear" and expecting to advance their views. Unhappily for them, virtually all policy types in USAID, from which the population of office directors emerges, are city kids accustomed to fast, loud talk and changing speakers by interrupting or over-talking. As one of my agriculture colleagues said to me when I scolded him for failing to speak during a just concluded two-hour project presentation: "I wanted to, Ray, but I just didn't get a chance."

After a few close calls (nearly seeing a good project turned down) I changed my approach to these meetings. Instead of trying to get this "gaggle" to seriously discuss the substantive issues of the projects, I decided to focus on each individual and find a way to make him feel good. I did this by applying sales techniques I had recently learned from some real estate sales training tapes - common sense approaches that can be very disarming when used on people who don't know they are being "worked." I knew all of the directors so knew their individual quirks. For example, if a director who fancied himself an expert in technical training asked how training would be handled under the project, instead of providing a direct answer, which he would feel the need to dispute so that his colleagues could be reminded of his expertise, I would say something like: "I'm glad you asked about that, Denny. You are clearly the most knowledgeable person in the room on technical training issues, and we very much look forward to your inputs to

our training program." Denny would then grin, give the project his approval, and I'd never have to deal with him again because he wasn't looking for more work. He just wanted to remind everyone of how smart he was.

Am I cynical about how project development decisions are made in USAID? You bet! The process as it works in practice is little more than a paperwork sham to develop a plausible justification for placing money in one country or another. Project development taken seriously could result in economic development impact. Project development done the USAID way does little more than increase the front-end cost of transferring the funds we planned to transfer anyway. I knew that the system was a sham when I worked in it, but hoped that by hard work and willingness to do battle on the issues, I could change it. To the best of my knowledge I had no lasting impact on the process.

b. Evaluation

In 1979 the union representing State and USAID foreign service employees persuaded Congressman David Obey to introduce a bill in the House creating a union shop in USAID for about 1,000 of the roughly 1,200 jobs in Washington, D.C. that related to project development, evaluation and management. Until that point they had been competed for equally by foreign service (FS) and civil service (CS) employees, and were shared about equally. This meant that 90 percent of the CS employees in these jobs would have to change their professions or, in the alternative, remain "grandfathered" in whatever grade and position they occupied in 1979 for the remainder of their careers. I had been re-employed as a civil servant in 1976, after resigning the foreign service to start an investment company.

As a result, job opportunities were extremely rare within the project design field, and I found myself "making do" by (1) cutting back to part-time employment and (2) taking on a number of very large-scale and challenging project and portfolio evaluation assignments. I was a natural for the evaluation work because it was so similar in methodology to project development. I would accept the task, hire a team to help, travel to the field to interview project and host government personnel, then return home to write. I missed developing new projects that would result in jobs and economic activity, but had the hope that my work as an evaluator would result in better project design by others.

I was very good at evaluation, and enjoyed writing papers that were published and sent to libraries and made available to scholars and the economic development community around the world. On the negative side, I soon learned that no amount of experience sharing was going to influence USAID's modus operandi. When USAID's policy people, the State Department or the President wanted to place funds in a country the project development staff were far more interested in getting the transaction "papered" on time than they were in structuring a project that benefited from past experience. The only project development people likely to read my evaluations were contractors on design teams, but if they wanted steady work they too had to emphasize "moving the money."

Somewhere along the way I was allowed to actually write a treatise on USAID's evaluation system, and after looking at it carefully I concluded that no matter how much money or talent was

invested in it, it could not possibly be effective because of the way it was structured. Evaluation had no independent budget, and evaluation officers worked for and received their annual personnel evaluations from the people charged with moving the money in timely fashion. I laid out these flaws, along with some others, in a well-written report, then presented it in several agency-wide forums at the same time that I submitted it to my boss, the agency's director of evaluation.

It was like I'd handed her a hot potato. She couldn't dispute it, and was clearly troubled by how well the report was received in the agency-wide forum, but she didn't dare go to her boss, one of the people who was in charge of moving money, to ask that her operation be removed from his and placed directly under the administrator. So it died.

On another occasion I spent several months reviewing the agency's 20plus years of experience with agricultural credit projects in Paraguay. This was viewed as a significant study because USAID had put roughly \$10 billion into small farmer credit at that point and had only a handful of still living institutions to show for it. Paraguay was selected for the case study because it had enjoyed USAID small farmer credit assistance going back 25 years, and the money had gone into three programs that covered the full range of models; a government bank, a parastatal bank, and a credit union system. The credit union program was viewed as one of the best USAID had been involved with anywhere in the world.

As I did my field work in Paraguay, I concluded that the only one of the three programs that had any financial viability was the credit union program, and even it continued to struggle and to depend upon grant assistance from USAID. Still, I was impressed by the hard-working people involved in it, and could see that much had been accomplished at the level of the business itself.

Then the other shoe dropped. I stumbled upon a study done by a Paraguay graduate student who had interviewed a sample of farmers asking them (1) do you use credit and (2) have you borrowed from any of the Paraguayan government supported programs? The results were devastating. Whereas 100 percent of the farmers used credit, only 1.6 percent had ever borrowed from the government programs. In business terms, after 25 years offering highly subsidized credit through very expensive to manage credit programs USAID had only achieved 1.6 percent market penetration.

I wrote my report knowing that I now had a very significant condemnation of USAID's usual modus operandi on my hands, and thinking I could use it to engender some simple changes in the Agency's way of structuring such projects. The changes needed were readily apparent to me after surveying the wreckage of USAID's misguided programs, and had been promoted by the team of agricultural credit experts from Ohio State University (retained by USAID) for nearly a decade. Like all government organizations, however, USAID found change difficult. Because of agency protocol, I used very gentle language to deliver the harsh message, and also took care to note every positive aspect of the project I could think of.

For a few weeks after submitting the report I heard nothing from anyone. Obviously, no one was reading the publication. Then one morning I attended a meeting with the new USAID administrator who came with the Reagan presidency, and during a discussion period I stood up and talked about the need for changes in our approach to agricultural credit, and I cited the 1.6 per-

cent market penetration figure. The administrator was startled, spoke to his assistant administrator (AA) for policy, and several hours after the meeting I received a phone call from the AA asking for the report. The next day he sent me a memo asking me to (1) draft a cable to all field missions calling attention to the need for changes in the way the agency administered agricultural credit programs and (2) draft specific methodology changes for his review and signature.

I was elated. Finally, concrete results from an evaluation. I went to my boss, who served one step below the AA in question, to tell him of the exchange and get his blessing. He reacted angrily, saying that the new Reagan people didn't know what they were doing, and I should ignore the request in hopes that it would die. I was stunned, but knew that I could not "end run" such a clear and direct command, so complied thinking: "No harm! The AA will follow up with me, and then I'll explain the failure to comply and he can clear the log jam if he chooses to." I never heard from him again, and USAID continues to this day to design its small farmer credit projects in the same way that has given it all the failures of past years.

3. Program and Project Management

In USAID there are two kinds of management: administrative management, such as I was originally slated for when hired, and management of programs and projects. This latter form of management is substantive, and even fun, though less creative than the design and evaluation work which I preferred. Along the way I was from time to time drawn into taking such management jobs, I always did them well, and I always escaped them as quickly as I could for more creative pursuits. Even a quick gloss of my USAID career requires addressing this activity if I am to give a full picture.

a. Technical Training

My first flirtation with program management in USAID was my tour as director of the technical training office in Recife in 1970-71. We moved lots of money there (about \$1 million per year) in very small increments; training programs costing about \$25,000 each, on average. That translated to some forty separate activities per year, each involving an organization (e.g. a Ministry of Agriculture), a person (e.g. an office director), that person's spouse and children, and a training institution, generally in the U.S. For the trainees these were life-defining opportunities. For USAID they were major investments in the long-term prospects for program success because the trainees were typically associated with some project activity we had underway. We sent lots of folks to the U.S. for graduate degrees in agronomy so that they could return home and work as managers of farm extension programs, for example.

Of all the work USAID does, it does technical training best. This is so because the hand of USAID is so light. We choose the participants, prepare them for their training program (typically giving a crash course in English), and then we are out of it until they are ready to return home. A U.S. university experience is almost always rewarding – something they remember for the rest of their lives. It makes them better professionals, and it teaches them to love America and things American. Both are goals of the program, although the latter goals are unstated.

With USAID having operated a technical training program for ten years in northeast Brazil, where people were initially suspicious of America and American ways, it had made life-long friends of several hundred social, professional and political leaders throughout the region. Every state education, agricultural and public works department had people in it, often including the director, who remembered fondly their years at Oklahoma State or Georgetown, subscribed to an American magazine or two, and welcomed any opportunity to practice English.

Realizing this, and wanting to systematize what had been a “seat of the pants” operation run by a single, hard working “old pro” since its inception, I immediately set out to harvest from our files this crop of contacts throughout the region. It was a monumental task that dovetailed nicely with the equally monumental task of systematizing operations so that the work of the office could be done efficiently and didn’t depend entirely upon the memory of one person. At the close of my tenure in Recife the technical training operation was working better than ever before, my directory of trainees was completed and in use by many Americans and Brazilians, and I had made some of the closest friends of my professional life among my Brazilian counterparts.

I’ll never forget the unexpected airport send-off by Jairo, the Director of SUDENE’s technical training office. He brought with him key staffers, and a wonderful several page citation of my contributions to the program and to U.S./Brazilian relations. I cried, he and his deputy cried, and I felt like all the hard work was worthwhile.

USAID was also appreciative, and for a time my name was bantered about as a candidate for director of technical training for the entire agency. I was flattered, and it would have been a big promotion for a twenty-eight-year-old, taking a job which reported directly to the administrator, but I never did anything to encourage it. I wanted to make my mark in project development, and as worthy as I felt technical training was I couldn’t envision myself spending year after year dealing with the monumental administrative trivia involved with running such a program.

b. Office of the Auditor General

The next time I landed in a management job was upon my return to USAID in Washington, D.C. in late 1971. I was unassigned because the intended job in Quito, Ecuador had been deleted. My former boss and old friend Lester Gottlieb, however, was back in the U.S. and prepared to look after me. He put me into a management analyst position for a time, opening many doors and giving me the most interesting work he could offer. I wasn’t happy with it. Lester was about to retire, so he offered to sell the agency on putting me into his job. As he was a super-grade, it would have been an enormous promotion for me and a great career builder. I felt humbled by the expression of confidence, but declined. The auditor general himself subsequently offered me the position of Director of Internal Audit (70 auditors to supervise) and liaison between the auditor general, the inspector general and the General Accounting Office. These too were very senior positions, and I felt humbled once again, but I again declined. The Auditor General, Ed Tenant, liked me, and knew that my decision would not bode well for my career, but was graceful about cutting me loose to my fate.

c. Office Of Program And Policy Coordination

In early 1973 I negotiated for myself a policy management job; the closest I could get to project development while remaining in Washington, D.C. I wished to remain in the U.S. for a time because I was investing evenings and weekends getting started in my real estate investment business as well as negotiating with several Congressmen to start up state economic development commissions on the model I had developed while in Recife. In keeping with my decision to center my professional life on myself, versus any particular employer, this seemed the best use of my time at the moment.

In this new policy management job I spent three grueling years attempting to develop a new project development system for the agency, and then to compel compliance by the various regional bureaus that were used to going their own way. The conceptualization and development side of this work was enormously fun for me, and at the end of the day we conceived systems that were to survive largely intact for more than twenty years. In an agency that thrives on reorganization, as USAID does, that is a very long time. I believe, to this day, that our systems lasted so long because they were sound and resulted in a better portfolio.

Aside from giving me an agency-wide platform for developing and demonstrating my conceptualization and writing skills, this job also taught me to deal with stress. As a child I had been painfully shy, unable up to age eighteen (when I took the Dale Carnegie Course) to even speak my name in public. It continued to be a major problem for me in USAID, and every meeting was traumatic. I could speak out, and did, but I never knew if my voice would quiver and I'd get shortness of breath or even cry, until I was talking. It caused me to take great care about standing to speak.

In my new job, however, I was paid to go to bureau project review meetings (I was responsible for all agriculture projects.) and speak for the Central Policy Bureau, primarily to ensure that the proposals met the standards of our new system. The regional bureaus were not used to seeing an outsider in their meetings, did not respect the policy bureau, and did not respect the new systems. Since they, and my boss, all reported as co-equals to the administrator, we had no clear line of authority to compel compliance. What that meant, in practice, is that if I wanted to get a place at the table I had to arrive early and just take it, and if I wanted to speak I'd better be prepared for a very hostile reception. This sort of assertiveness was not natural to a shy kid from North Dakota.

My job put me into roughly 150 senior level project review meetings a year, most of them hostile. I made it my habit to take a chair close to the AA in charge of the bureau, to read every project carefully, and to enforce policy bureau standards precisely. I would always try to be polite and modest, and sometimes it was appreciated, but often I was met with sniggers, even shouted insults, and on one memorable occasion the bureau AA called my boss, the policy bureau AA, and asked him to fire me. I know because my boss called me in and said: "Ray, you must be doing a good job because Don McDonald just called me and asked that I fire you."

There was a time when the stress seemed too great, and I accidentally discovered that if I took antihistamine pills I could calm myself and not have to worry about the quivering voice. I did it

for several meetings even after my cold had subsided, then realized that I was on a path to drug dependence. So I went back to “cold turkey” and, little by little, built up the defenses I needed to survive in the job.

Near the end of my tour in that position I was asked by the Africa bureaus to take a mission directorship in Botswana. Since the only relationship I had with that bureau was through the job, I had to assume that they must have thought well of me because of my performance in that job. I would love to have accepted, because mission director was the step I needed to take before being considered as a bureau assistant administrator, and at thirty-one I would have been the agency’s youngest mission director ever, but Botswana had no schools for my girls. The practice was to send primary school kids to boarding school in Switzerland. It was easy to say no.

d. Office Of Agriculture

In 1979 I was looking at never being promoted again. I had converted to civil service when I returned from assignment in Honduras in 1976, and was determined to develop a business life, and a stable growing-up environment for my girls, in Washington, D.C. So when an opportunity to take a technical advisor job in the Office of Agriculture, with a promotion, came up, I reluctantly applied and was selected. Several weeks after joining the office, which comprised a group of fifty-five PhD agricultural scientists and another thirty program and administrative support personnel, I joined the majority invited to an out-of-town retreat to talk about reorganizing. President Carter had put some dynamic new people in the bureau where we resided, with Sander Levin (now a Congressman from Michigan) as Assistant Administrator, and a young fellow about ten years my senior named Tony Babb as his Deputy. Sandy and Tony were unhappy with the Agricultural Technical Support Program, the agency’s largest, and the personnel running it. The office director, a former university Vice President, was leaving, and plans were to shake things up and develop new leadership.

As the new guy in the office, and the only professional without a PhD, I wasn’t even sure that I’d be welcome at the retreat, and I sure wasn’t very interested. My rule in life was to do my homework first, then speak, and I hadn’t yet learned enough about the office to offer helpful criticism. I was also aware that the fifty-five agricultural scientists who were used to running things were wary of me, seeing me correctly as one of those fast-talking project development types.

I must have said something that drew the attention of the retreat’s facilitator, Leon Rosenberg, president of a high powered consulting firm employed to run the meeting, because on the second and final day I was called out of the room to talk to Leon and Tony Babb, who was chairing the function. They advised me that I had been selected to take over as acting director of the Office of Agriculture, that I was to rule through a troika comprising two other officers, that I was to take a zero-based approach to program, budget and personnel, and that I was to raise morale.

I was stunned at the effrontery and impracticality of the request, and said as much. I told them I was intrigued at the challenge, but did not believe that a troika could work, that I was not at all sure that there were any fundamental problems with the program, and that causing all the disruption they requested and raising morale were mutually exclusive objectives. I also advised that I had recently started an investment business that I hoped to eventually do full time, and that keep-

ing it going precluded me working more than fifty hours per week at my USAID job. My response must not have put them off because ten minutes later I was introduced to the room as the new director. The reaction from my fellow participants was stunned silence.

One of the senior members came to me several days later and confided, “Ray, I feel as if my world has been turned upside down.”

The next year running the agency’s agricultural program was one of the most productive times of my life, and at the same time one of the least satisfying professionally. I first focussed on getting the work flow under control. The prior director had worked a sixty-hour week in the office, took work home every night, and was always behind and thus holding up office productivity. I dedicated myself to reading everything in his office, and cleaning out the backlog. When I had satisfied myself that his individual division chiefs were competent, I began to delegate the substantive decisions about agricultural research and development to my division chiefs, leaving myself free to concentrate on workflow, budget, and long-term planning. Immediately morale went up among the division chiefs, and as the work flow began to accelerate everyone else began to smile. A lot of well-motivated people had been suppressed and held back for a long time, it seemed, and though they were uncertain about this stranger at the helm, it sure felt good to be productive.

Getting the typing done more expeditiously turned out to be one of the thornier problems. We had eight secretarial slots, but because they were graded so low we couldn’t keep more than five filled at any point in time. I first attacked this by bringing in word processors, and obliging every officer to learn to use them and start keying in their own memos and other small jobs. Then I reached out to a contractor I had used in my investment business, Keyboard Communications, and retained them for large scale typing assignments (e.g. research papers and policy studies), of which we generated many. Productivity went through the ceiling, and morale climbed even more.

A few weeks after employing Keyboard Communications, I received notice from the agency’s assistant administrator for administration, its general counsel and its chief of contract management, that I was under investigation for illegal contracting. Someone from the agency’s union had complained, it seems. I was scared, but furious and feeling self-righteous, so decided to take the offensive. I called the chief of contracts, who had threatened me with dismissal, and told him to “stuff it” – that the contract is legal as well as necessary. I explained that the CIA and the Goddard Space Center were both using Keyboard Communication for typing services, and USAID has the same contracting rights those agencies have. There was lots of behind the scenes whispering for a few weeks, as my fate was reviewed, and finally the agency managers backed down. No one apologized, mind you, and when the chief of contracts followed my lead with his own contract for typing services at three times the size, he did not call me to say thanks. But that is how USAID worked. All the onus is on defending the status quo. Change is tolerated from time to time, but it is never appreciated, and if one makes too many changes the likelihood of a bad ending is very high.

After a year or so at the helm of the Office of Agriculture I was getting restless to return to my profession of project development. I had completed the portfolio review and made a few changes. The budget review was completed and with improved management the agency in-

creased my funds from \$60 to \$90 million per year. As to personnel, I made no changes because it wasn't necessary. The staff I inherited was performing magnificently; the productivity problem had been with management itself. I received very high marks from my bosses, and so felt bold enough to approach them with an idea out of "left field."

I was convinced, by 1980, that the agency's inclination to provide economic development assistance to third world countries in the form of technical advisors was grossly inefficient. The agency liked to boast, when facing Congress at appropriation time, that 90 percent of foreign assistance funds are spent in the U.S. on American advisors and American technology. The average American advisor cost roughly \$1,000 per day (in present day dollars) while the average third world salary ran less than \$10 per day. That meant that the multiplier effect of funds spent (normally every \$1 spent in a community creates \$7 in economic activity because the money is recycled so often) went to the U.S. rather than to the country we were trying to help. American advisors, if they spent any money at all in the country being assisted, spent it on hotel rooms, imported food, and luxury housing. These are sectors that enjoy very low multipliers because the majority of components are foreign manufactured and the hotels are often foreign-owned. I wanted to see more of our foreign assistance money traveling directly to the target third world countries where it could be spent on local resources, advisors and the like. Instead of hiring a Price Waterhouse accountant in Washington, D.C. to do a study at \$1,000 per day, hire one locally. Instead of hiring a corn geneticist from the University of Iowa, hire one from the local university and leave it to him to reach out to Iowa for "state-of-the-art" information if it is lacking locally.

The way I saw to do this was to start a worldwide program for transferring resources through small business investment companies. Take off on the model that was developed in the U.S. Find a local businessman willing to put his own money at first risk, and offer him a line of credit for additional funds, perhaps five times what he can mobilize himself. Charge him to invest the money in businesses he understands, locally with partners he knows and can trust and can oversee without leaving town. In the process the quality of investment decisions should improve, the cost of management should drop dramatically, and virtually all of the funds transferred should be spent in the local economy we are trying to help. I was confident that I could do something with this, and went to my bosses with a request to turn over the directorship of the Office of Agriculture (a GS-18 job) for a return to my GS-14 project development officer status and a \$100,000 budget for developing the new concept.

The agency doesn't like it when someone refuses to follow predictable paths, but based upon my achievements in the agricultural office folks didn't want to refuse me. I went to work full-time developing my concept, involving in the process venture capitalists in D.C., New York and elsewhere, and eventually came up with a proposal for a worldwide international small business investment company program (ISBIC) which would spawn hundreds of subsidiary ISBICs around the world. Long-term funding would be in the range of \$1 billion, with start-up funds of \$40 million. It was the right idea at the right time, and was approved by the agency during the closing months of the Carter administration.

With Reagan recently elected and everyone having the belief that he would be friendly to such a business-oriented proposal, the administrator, my bosses Sandy Levin and Tony Babb and I all

agreed to hold off on implementation of the ISBIC program until he could be sworn in. We wanted Reagan to take the idea to heart as his own, believing that would have a better result over time.

Things didn't work that way. Reagan put a very weak, inexperienced person at the helm of his private sector program, Elise DuPont, the wife of the governor of Delaware, and she didn't understand it. After about year's time milling about, the money allocated for the ISBIC was hijacked for a small, D.C. operated investment fund operating from Ms. DuPont's office, and in short order it was squandered on bad investments and expensive consultants. The idea of the investment fund lived on, but the model for how to make it work died stillborn.

e. Enterprise Funds

My last management job in USAID came to me in 1990. I was working only two days a week at USAID, and the other three at the International Finance Corporation (IFC). I had recently suffered the loss of my life's savings and investments, including our family home, in a business fraud in western Pennsylvania, so was less productive than usual in the business realm and looking for challenge elsewhere while I sorted out my business life.

USAID had recently committed \$0.5 billion to development of venture capital funds in Eastern Europe in hopes of jump-starting those economies after the break-up of the Soviet Empire. I had warmed the agency to the idea of placing funds into venture capital programs when I was promoting the ISBIC, but unhappily, the only part of the message that was understood was the name; venture capital. No one knew what it meant, and absent any definition the agency turned to Wall Street for its definition. That proved to be a very expensive mistake.

In 1989 the Bush White House established four venture funds (enterprise funds) to be capitalized with USAID resources; one each in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria. Each was to be headed up by a White House friend from Wall Street, and each would also have a board of directors of politically prominent people personally appointed by the President. Jackie Kennedy's boyfriend, a jeweler, Lane Kirkland, a labor union official, and Jim Sullivan, a civil rights leader, were examples of such appointments. The notion was that if these brilliant capitalists were turned loose in Eastern Europe, somehow the American business genius would asset itself and wonderful things would happen. USAID was instructed to hand over the money and stay out of the way.

After a year of watching these new institutions develop, with almost no information as to what they were doing with USAID funds, some of the senior professionals in the agency grew nervous and cast about for a program manager. I was widely known for my relationship with the ISBIC, and also as a man with significant private investment experience, so was contacted and invited to return to the Agency full time to oversee the enterprise fund operations. I couldn't resist, even though it meant a significant reduction in pay from my contract at the IFC. Finally, I thought, I would have a chance to help the agency to place resources into developing countries in a way that would stimulate meaningful economic growth.

From my first day on the job it was clear that I was entering a highly sensitive political environment absent leadership and direction. My immediate boss was a woman who had just been appointed, by the White House, to serve as a special assistant to the new agency administrator. She had previously been an academic dean at Kansas State University, while he had been its president. Neither of them had the foggiest idea what they were doing, but both dressed well, moved about purposefully, had good posture, and spoke eloquently. When I reported for duty she (the former academic dean) was clearly relieved. The enormity of the task of overseeing the enterprise funds had begun to sink into her consciousness, I believe, and she was looking forward to moving into the administrator's personal suite of offices so that she could make a living advising him rather than attempting to manage something on her own.

I devoted myself to learning all that I could about these four venture funds I was to oversee, quickly discovering that the agency didn't even have complete files of the basic legal documents (White House agreements, corporate charters, etc.). At the same time I set out to meet the key players, who turned out to be the following:

- Carol Adelman, President Bush's appointment as assistant administrator for Eastern Europe. She had once done some consulting to USAID as a nutritionist, had been friends with Marilyn Quale (the Vice President's wife) in college, and was herself married to Ken Adelman, a prominent Republican who was on close terms with Vice President Quayle and had formerly been Reagan's appointee as administrator of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.
- Bob Burke, a career State Department employee who had risen to the rank of Ambassador serving in the backwaters of Eastern Europe. He was a hard-eyed, commie hating blowhard who saw the agency's enterprise funds program as a weapon in the "us against them" war he had been fighting with Stalin and successors since World War II.
- Larry Eagleberger, President Bush's appointment as Deputy Secretary of State. Eagleberger was also a career diplomat and prided himself in his acumen for back room dealings and artful use of power, the standard tools of diplomacy. Overlaid on Eagleberger, however, was also an ambition to move out of the State Department soon and find a way to make lots of money selling his skills and contacts in the business world. The Wall Street luminaries involved in the funds were seen by Eagleberger as sugar-coating on these wonderful piggy-banks the White House had established in Eastern Europe.

Initial meetings with these individuals were surprisingly similar. All were surprised to learn that I had been hired to establish some management controls, and warned me that the White House had explicitly stated that the funds were to be left alone. My guidance was to go ahead and look around, but "don't be intrusive." My belief was that all secretly worried about what was happening to the agency's money, but none dared to ask and none would support me if, in the process of finding out, I offended the President's powerful fund directors.

With this as background, I dove into my new task with enthusiasm, first constructing a file so that I could understand what I was dealing with, and then going around to meet all of the players. I learned, early on, that one young local attorney had done all of the initial legal work, basically

using a boiler plate set of documents from a form book and changing the names and dates. For that puny effort he had been rewarded with exclusive retainers by all of the funds, was already earning lucrative fees for time billed to the funds, and was in the process of setting up branch offices near the three largest funds' field offices in Warsaw, Budapest and Prague.

When I introduced myself around the funds' offices in D.C., I learned that below the level of president the employees were inexperienced in venture capital (as were all the presidents), only a few could speak the language of the country in which they were investing, none that I met had ever worked abroad, and management systems to direct and control cash were non-existent. There was lots of enthusiasm and pride about their status as pioneers in a White House inspired operation, and obvious pleasure about the opportunities to travel abroad and command meetings with wealthy businessmen seeking loans and equity.

Along the way I met a USAID program officer who warned me to be careful, noting that a very senior-level predecessor, a career foreign service officer, had accompanied John Birkland, Chairman of the Polish-American Enterprise Fund, to the White House when Bush announced the new venture, and when he broached the subject of management controls so that the use of U.S. government resources could be tracked Birkland had reacted angrily, saying: "Controls? There will be no controls! If you are confused about that let's get the President back in here immediately." Birkland, it seems, was chairman of Dillon Reed, the Wall Street investment house that had briefly been employer of both President Bush and Bush's father before him. Later that week, my source told me, the USAID officer in question was fired from his position as deputy assistant administrator for Eastern Europe.

By the time I had been on the case four weeks I felt it coming together despite all the threats. The fund managers and employees had come to realize that I understood the business they were in, and only wanted to help them to be successful. As enticement, I offered them access at no charge to USAID's large contracts with Price Waterhouse and Coopers & Lybrand accounting firms if they would use them to set up management and accounting systems. That, I reasoned, would be a good deal for both sides. I also arranged a meeting in Washington, D.C. for the presidents of all of the funds. Larry Eagleberger, the Deputy Secretary of State, agreed to host it in his private conference room. All the leaders and their assistants showed-up except John Birkland. He sent a vice president who, when he spoke, revealed unwittingly that his fund had placed about \$60 million already, but had no systems to monitor the investments, all equity positions in companies generating no current revenue, and had no plans to invest in anything that might generate revenue to meet the fund's payroll.

Subsequently I traveled to the funds' field offices in Eastern Europe to meet the remainder of the staff, and my findings only worsened my fears. These people didn't have a clue of what they were doing, no one felt responsible, and the managers of the Polish Fund appeared to be preparing lucrative business opportunities for themselves in the companies in which they had invested. I documented all that I learned, coaxed and cajoled fund operators to try to take a more business-like approach, and gave gentle warnings that there would be a day of reckoning if inappropriate practices were not corrected.

When I returned to USAID from the field trip, I could see a light at the end of the tunnel. The Polish Fund, about which I was most concerned, had shown some interest in my suggestion that they set up a program to make medium term loans to small businesses as a way to generate current income. That would be good economic development practice, and would solve the current income problem. A stop-over at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) in London had resulted in an expression of interest in investing \$75 million in a subsidiary Polish Fund. That would help by spreading our fund's obscenely high operating cost over a larger financial base, and at the same time I hoped it would bring a greater level of professional scrutiny and management control. Then the other shoe dropped.

I had written a hard hitting report to my bosses, but it was upbeat because I indicated a strategy for solving the problems we had gotten ourselves into through poor initial structuring (especially the management and board appointments) and subsequent neglect. The funds were on a path to financial insolvency within five years, I noted, but with a few adjustments this could be arrested. Response from Adelman, Burke and Eagleberger was silence. Then a middle manager came to me, looking very frightened, and said: "Ray. Your report must never see daylight. You can't show it to anyone, nor can you talk about it." A few days later I was informed that my continued involvement with the Enterprise Funds was not welcome, and I was put in charge of the agency's very large Eastern Europe Privatization Program instead.

I went sadly, but understanding that there was nothing I could do short of going to the *New York Times*, and that was unlikely to have a good result. When a bad policy is supported the White House it is not easily undone. So I moved along.

A month later something wonderful happened. I was working at a blistering pace on the agency's privatization program for Eastern Europe, getting lots of good things done without political interference, when word reached me that John Birkland had written to Larry Eagleberger announcing his plan to set up a subsidiary Polish Fund with money from the EBRD. It was the plan I had suggested when at the EBRD. It turned out to be sensitive because the State Department didn't want any foreigners involved with their "piggy bank" but feared saying no to Birkland because of his White House connections. So State sent the letter to USAID, hoping that someone would argue against the proposal. My USAID colleagues, not understanding any of it, sent the letter on to me for reaction. I was not keen to get myself back into trouble with the folks who called the shots at State, but wrote an honest answer anyway. It took the form of a precise, succinct description of why the investment was good for the fund, and it had the intended purpose. Folks at State gave-up their opposition to the investment. Another result, unintended by me, was a decision by Eagleberger to make me disappear altogether. Orders went to Adelman to fire me, and I found myself in her deputy's office with him (David Merrill, subsequently rewarded by being appointed ambassador to Pakistan) acknowledging my invaluable work for the program, but saying, "Ray. You have to go. If you don't, I'll be fired myself."

We talked, I recognized that I could no longer be effective in the Eastern Europe program so long as the Bush administration people ran the show, so I agreed to move to another bureau provided that an appropriate job could be identified. That turned out to be a venture capital advisor position in Africa, so I accepted. What I didn't understand was that my "persona non grata" status in the Eastern Europe program, would continue indefinitely, and my reputation as a "non

team player” would be indelibly spread through the entire agency forevermore. It took six more years, during which I was able to put together a number of additional interesting projects for the agency, but my days as a public servant were numbered. The only thing lacking was an excuse to remove me from the scene. That was accomplished with a large scale reduction in force in 1995.

3. Meaningful Professional Challenges

The thing that kept me in USAID for twenty-nine years was the sheer abundance of professional challenges. Here was an organization with roughly \$6 billion in taxpayer money to spend each year, ostensibly on projects to support economic development in the third-world, and it was staffed by bright, often Ivy-educated people whose ambitions were to travel abroad, have interesting relationships, and to enjoy bureaucratic status. The work itself was secondary. That meant that there was an enormous vacuum of ideas and the focussed energy it takes to create and build. For me it was like a dream, having all these resources for doing good at my disposal. I, in turn, answered a huge need for the agency. USAID had lots of people who wanted to get along, go along, and enjoy the ride, but virtually no one with the vision to try new approaches to solving difficult problems and the courage to battle the system and follow through. I willingly played that role for twenty-nine years, just for the sheer joy of it, hoping all along the way that from time to time something good would come from my efforts.

a. Small Farmer Credit

Fairly early in my USAID career I came to understand that the greatest barriers to doing good with foreign assistance were the high-cost, sometimes ill-advised technical advisories by my in-house colleagues and contractors we hired from the various Washington, D.C. consulting firms. I learned that the most knowledgeable person as to the productivity of a two acre plot of land in rural Paraguay is actually the man who farms it. I came to understand that the \$1,000 per day advisor from the University of Kansas, despite his PhD, and his facility at getting on and off airplanes around the world, is as likely to give poor advice as good advice. Increasingly it became clear to me that the cost of our consultants was completely out of “sync” with their value. If we had \$10 million to invest in improving farm productivity in rural Paraguay, at best \$1 million of that amount was actually spent in Paraguay. The system was not efficient.

Providing credit to the target beneficiaries, most typically small farmers, seemed to me to be a wonderful way to put the money directly into the hands of the people we wanted to help. They, then, could decide how to spend it, I reasoned. If there was a use for new technology they could learn about that from their community seed and equipment dealer. So I became an advocate of providing capital through credit schemes, thinking that it might reduce leakage to middlemen. So what did I discover?

Rural credit programs were set up by USAID beginning with the predecessor “Point Four” program in the late 1950s. The U.S. enjoyed a very effective small farmer credit program in the Midwest, and Hubert Humpfrey, then a Senate leader, urged that this technology be transferred to Latin America. The idea was simple. We would hire some of the most talented agricultural credit advisors working in Minnesota and the Dakotas, and send them to places like Paraguay to

replicate the credit systems they knew from back home. These involved small banks in secondary cities staffed by local people, the most senior of whom had college degrees. The farmers were known to the bank staff, indeed often the bank staffers had farms of their own, the roads were good, everyone had an automobile or two, and clear title to the farms had been well established since the surveys associated with The Homestead Act in the late 19th Century. The system worked as intended, and the credit made available to the farmers enabled them to modernize their equipment, purchase seeds and fertilizer, even buy land from neighbors who elected not to continue farming.

How did it work in Paraguay and elsewhere in the third world? Not too well. Because the secondary cities in which the banks were established had few college graduates, it was common to recruit leadership in the national capital. Finding top level people in a third world capital willing to start life over in a sweltering, rat-infested secondary city was impossible, so staff quality was usually poor. Because the road networks were rudimentary, it was difficult for the target small farmers and the bank employees to make contact with one another. Because the small farms were typically a day to two day's travel (on foot or by horse awhile, then on a bus) from the bank, and the language or dialect spoken in the target villages was different from that of the bank's employees, communication was poor and trust was nil. Things were further complicated by loan application processes that required the borrowers to try unknown and untested farming technologies as a condition to loan approval, or to draw up elaborate plans and deal with long and complicated application forms. These tasks were exceedingly difficult for that majority of target borrowers who did not read nor write, and who were careful about trying untested theories on land needed to feed their families. Add to all of these crushing problems the desire of the lender to take a mortgage to protect its loan, from a farmer whose land had never been surveyed and was so far from the bank that seizing it as collateral was impractical anyway, and you have a program that couldn't possibly work.

So why did I take an interest in credit programs? I felt that the odds of fixing one type of program (credit) so that it would channel resources to the intended beneficiaries were better than those of fixing the whole range of programs that squandered money through foreign technical advisories. I made reform of small farmer credit programs a priority activity for me as early as 1971, and added reform of small business credit programs in general to my agenda a few years later, and battled for these objectives until my forced retirement from the agency in 1995. Progress was made, but only in inches. It took about twenty years to get the agency to agree that subsidizing interest rates was foolish; that farmers and small business borrowers are not rate sensitive. It took just as long to get the agency to accept that it was the terms and conditions of our lending that kept borrowers away from the door, and explained why in Paraguay the traditional neighborhood moneylenders were able to retain 98 percent of the market share despite charging interest rates that ranged from two to five times as high as our own.

I guess the great lesson in all this was a realization of the profound arrogance of my USAID colleagues in the face of so much evidence of improper practices. There seemed to be a belief that if one hails from the U.S.A. he must be smart, and thus any "hair-brained" scheme we associate ourselves with should be made to work, and if it doesn't, it is because the poor third-world fellow we are trying to help with our scheme is "resistant to change." Absent any "bottom line" test of effectiveness, as one would face in the business world, we in USAID were quite able to

throw money after the same bad idea year in and year out, and when our ineffectiveness was recognized, to attach any explanation for our failure that pleased us. Along the way USAID placed about \$20 billion into agricultural credit schemes, and the last time I checked only a handful of the many score lending programs we started were still operating.

b. Venture Capital Programs

My second great passion in USAID came to be venture capital. Here again, I reasoned that if we could channel funds directly to the parties concerned we could cut out the vastly overpriced foreign technical advisories and actually see more than 10 percent of a country's foreign assistance budget reach the populace. Furthermore, by placing the individual investment decisions in the hands of people who had lived and worked in the country where the venture fund operated, and requiring them to invest their private capital along with ours, we would get far better investment decisions than could be made by career civil servants with no business experience, commuting back and forth to, say, Africa, from their lives and jobs in far away Washington, D.C.

The premise is good, but as with every other program it involves itself in USAID found many subtle ways to render it ineffective.

I had become aware of a few programs to employ economic development assistance through venture capital funds back in the mid-1960s. There were two such programs in Latin America (ADELLA and LAAD), several in Europe (SIFIDA and CDC) and one in Asia (PICA). Although none of these programs had made vast amounts of money, all but one (ADELLA) still survived, despite having to work in the natural marketplace without continuing subsidy from USAID. All had suffered serious problems at the outset, mainly due to poor structuring by their USAID organizers, but because they had sober managers they took note of their problems, made structural adjustments, and went on to build viable, self-sustaining development programs. In addition, the U.S. Small Business Administration had developed its own venture capital program and, in the process, had established hundreds of owner-operated venture capital companies throughout the U.S., all of them engaged in self-sustaining economic development and some of them very profitable. I wasn't proposing to reinvent the wheel. All I wanted the agency to do was learn from this experience, and build upon it.

In 1980 I took advantage of the good will I had acquired from reorganizing the agency's Office of Agriculture, and got myself assigned to look into a way to put the agency into venture capital in a big way, and got a budget to enable travel, purchase of consulting time, etc. After much hard work over a twelve-month period, I had come up with a program called the International Small Business Investment Company (ISBIC). The ISBIC provided a basis for the agency to start hundreds of affiliate ISBICs throughout the world, all of them locally owned and managed, with local manager's money at first risk. It was, for all practical purposes, an international application of a business structure that had engendered development of the venture capital industry in the U.S. The agency set-aside \$40 million to start-up this new venture.

When the Reagan people were appointed to leadership positions in USAID, my ISBIC project was viewed as competitive. Many of the new crop of political appointees dreamed of hitting it big in international business, and saw their USAID appointment as a stepping stone toward this

goal. They took immediately to the idea of venture capital, but had no interest in making the money available to foreigners to invest and manage. Because USAID has no bottom-line test of reasonableness, such as need to show financial viability, they opted, instead, to set up a venture fund right inside the USAID office in Washington, D.C., and to fly themselves around the world looking for ways to invest it directly. The \$40 million set aside for the ISBIC was made available to them. They set up their little in-house venture capital subsidiary, the ISBIC concept died, and after a few very heady years of flying around the world investing in factories and farms in places as diverse as Bangkok and Nairobi, the \$40 million had been lost.

What was not lost, however, was the agency's enthusiasm for venture capital. Being clever, none of the people who lost the money took responsibility for losing it, and all enhanced their resumes with notations about experience as international venture capitalists. Thus the mystique of venture capital continued to grow in USAID, and in its sister organization the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) until by the time of this writing the two organizations together have some \$5 billion invested in forty-five venture capital schemes. Amazingly, somewhere between most and all of these venture capital companies has been structured to keep control in the hands of the U.S. leadership, none of whom has personal cash at risk, and few of whom have prior experience in venture capital or ability to speak the language of the country in which they are investing.

My favorite story is about the first of these to be set up by OPIC, with a \$1.4 million subsidy from USAID to underwrite high salaries for its managers. It is proof that truth can be stranger than fiction.

Between 1975 and 1980 I visited from time to time with a very attractive, well-dressed and well-spoken man in OPIC named Graham Williams. Graham had an ill-defined job at OPIC, but fancied himself a budding business tycoon. He knew that I was a part-timer at USAID, and building a business as an investment syndicator and manager while forming small venture capital funds. One day I had coffee with him and we talked about my fourth such fund, a publicly registered offering that was focussed on investing in historical rehabilitations in Annapolis, Maryland. Graham asked for a copy of the prospectus. A year or so later I learned that Graham had put OPIC into something called the Africa Growth Fund, got a copy of the prospectus, and "lo and behold" it was a reproduction of my recent offering, however applied for a very different purpose. I felt sick because I knew that the structure could not possibly work for what OPIC was attempting to do.

OPIC's fund worked like this. Three attractive, nice-dressing, smooth-talking Harvard MBAs residing in Hartford, Connecticut, had persuaded Graham that they knew how to make money in Africa, but they didn't want to live there. If OPIC would pay them handsomely, they would be willing to operate an Africa Growth Fund from Hartford, commuting back and forth to the twenty-odd countries in Africa looking for investments, placing funds, and managing the investments. It worked just about as well as if they had been from Upper Volta, and decided to commute back and forth to North America looking for investments, placing the funds, and managing them. Imagine, working through translators and investing in Panama City, Guatemala City, Mexico City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Toronto and Anchorage while you travel from hotel to hotel, calling home to Upper Volta every night to see how your wife was handling the kids in your ab-

sence. It was a disaster! \$5 million in equity was raised by OPIC by putting pressure on their corporate insurance clients, the boys from Hartford paid themselves \$750,000 per year in management fees, OPIC contributed its credit guarantee for \$20 million, enabling the institution to borrow money at 1 of the Treasury Bill rate, and USAID threw in \$1.4 million management cost subsidy over three years. What that meant, in practice, was that the management company paid itself regularly, and when the equity investors got restless management would draw on their OPIC line of credit to borrow money to pay another dividend. At the end of the day few of the investments worked out, the OPIC credit line was fully drawn, and outstanding debt far exceeded cash left to pay it.

I was used to seeing USAID and its development assistance colleagues like OPIC make a mess of things, but wasn't that the point of my opting to work in USAID? My job was to try to fix the system – make it work. I hammered away at trying to get USAID into venture capital, and then at trying to get them to do it sensibly, for the last fifteen years of my career. To date, I have nothing to show for it. Billions of dollars have been wasted on foolish schemes, the agency still has not learned anything from the experience, and Washington, D.C. is now brimming with self-styled venture capital advisors who have resumes from one failed transaction after another, but written in such a way that they appear to be successes.

c. **Recognizing And Dealing With Shameful Behavior**

Interestingly, this summary of my greatest professional challenges leads naturally to the last: learning to recognize and deal with bad behavior. The most curious thing I know about USAID is that so many nice people who wouldn't run a red light, or steal their neighbor's bicycle, so comfortably engage themselves in reprehensible behavior on a grand scale so long as it is acceptable to the bureaucratic culture in which they work. It reminds me of the willingness of Germans to look the other way, or even participate, when their own culture decided it was desirable to rid the country of Jews. More recent examples include the actions of the Hutus against their Tutsi neighbors in Ruanda, or the Serbs against their Albanian neighbors in Kosovo. Aristotle's theory that men have within them a sense of natural law that, if listened to, can show him how to develop a progressive and civilized society, seems not to apply in all situations. It certainly does not apply in USAID where people from the best families and schools gather for well-paid careers in a glamorous international employment environment, and then systematically squander public resources meant to encourage economic growth in poor countries on one thoughtless "boondoggle" after another. I don't mean to suggest that Aristotle's theory of natural law is invalid, mind you, but rather to suggest that failure to listen to the voice within can have disastrous consequences.

Contractor Abuse

The first thing I noticed was what I will call **contractor abuse**. Much of the work of USAID is done by outsiders; people who work by the day, sometimes from their homes but more often from one of the myriad boutique consulting firms that are dotted around the D.C. beltway. These are, for the most part, people just like us in USAID. Many would have preferred to work on the inside, but for one reason or another had never secured direct employment. A few prefer the independence of being contractors. What is true in all cases is that the relationship between the

contractors and USAID is not equal. USAID hires whom it wishes, and the contractors accept the terms and conditions given them.

When disputes arise, as they do regularly, there is never any question who is going to win. A contractor may disagree with a decision made, but taking the disagreement to a higher authority is out of the question. In theory the contractor could be proved right, but he would never work again for USAID.

I grew so tired of seeing my employer abuse contractors, and being unable to prevent it, that I made it a point, during the last decade I worked at USAID, of telling any contractor with whom I was negotiating work that he would likely be abused during the course of the contract, and there was nothing he could do about it if he wanted to stay in business. I wanted such people to factor this likelihood into the contracting decision so that if, indeed, abuse did occur, it would already have been accounted for in his bid proposal.

Made Men

It was not long before I discerned another curiosity about working in USAID. There were **very different classes of employees**, and they were **held to different standards**. Foreign service officers, which I was during my first eight years in the Agency, were at the top. They enjoyed better pay, far more perks, and a special status that allowed them to “wheel and deal” for their selfish interests. It reminded me of the Mafia culture exhibited in a movie of the time, “The Godfather.” Foreign service officers were the “made men” of USAID.

Foreign service officers distinguished themselves with their penchant for petty crime. Scheduling business trips to enable vacations in glamorous spots, arranging expensive private schools and numerous trips to and from home for their children at company expense, purchasing furniture and automobiles prior to assignments abroad so that they could be shipped at USAID expense, and admitted tax free, then sold at obscene profits; these were standard perks of being a “made man” in USAID.

Occasionally the arrogance that this instilled spilled over into the foreign service officer’s behavior in domestic life with serious consequences. A colleague I shall not name, for instance, objected to his wife being passed over for a promotion by her Fairfax County government supervisor, so called her supervisor to offer a deal: “I won’t tell your boss about your womanizing if you will do the right thing and promote my wife.” That behavior, which his USAID colleagues found not objectionable, got him charged and prosecuted for extortion, and ultimately convicted of felony extortion. Happily for him, he was still a “made man” in USAID so didn’t lose his job nor any discernable reduction in responsibility or authority.

Overriding Political Interest

Overriding political interest is a phrase that gets lots of use in USAID, and is employed to cover up large scale corruption. My favorite such case involved a \$6 million fraud by conversion related to a project in Uganda. Put this, too, under the category truth is stranger than fiction.

In the early 1990s I was working in the Africa Bureau as the D.C. based private sector advisor for the region. A very interesting project for development of cashew farming on land abandoned since the government had expropriated it from Asians under Idi Amin's ruthless dictatorship came to my attention. I was intrigued because it was to be financed by a \$6 million debt-for-equity swap, and required only a very modest loan from USAID to cover the first-year cash flow needs; money to purchase wild cashews from Ugandan farmers and induce them to plant seedlings for more productive trees. The USAID mission had inexplicably branded the project a loser and refused to consider it.

I studied the plan, talked to the agribusiness operator from Colorado who had put the project together, and then to the associated insurance company in New York (AIG) which was willing to forgive a \$6 million debt of the Ugandan government provided it would contribute a long-term lease on the abandoned land and some long-abandoned cashew processing equipment which had been donated by the government of Belgium years earlier but never taken out of the boxes. I satisfied myself that it was a wonderful project which USAID should support. Then the USAID mission in Uganda dug-in its heels and refused to cooperate, not explaining why.

About that time AIG's collection department, which had been working on the same \$6 million debt in parallel with the debt for equity department, learned that it would have an opportunity to collect the obligation the old fashioned way. The then president of Uganda, Museveni, had purchased an estate for himself, with government funds, in Switzerland, which AIG had identified. In addition, Museveni was scheduled to travel to Washington, D.C. to attend an African chiefs of state conference, flying to the meeting in a government-owned Boeing 707. Perfect! AIG would simultaneously seize the estate in Switzerland, and the airplane in Washington, D.C., liquidate them, and pay itself the \$6 million from the proceeds.

I learned of the plan from AIG's debt-for-equity chief, so used this information to press my colleagues to drop their opposition to the \$1 million loan request and let this wonderful little project go forward. It would have created 2,500 jobs for farmers, and started a major foreign exchange earning industry on 100,000 acres of abandoned forestland.

We held a meeting of the Africa Bureau's highest officials, including the general counsel, who had come to me earlier pleading that I not let any backroom deals be cut here. To my amazement, speaker after speaker argued that we needed to back the mission's opposition to the project, even if it meant paying Uganda's \$6 million debt with our own funds, and that the challenge was to find a way to do this so that neither the press nor Congress would find out about it. When it came my turn to speak, I argued for making the \$1 million loan and thanking our lucky stars for such a good project opportunity. I also noted that the option being discussed looked to me like "fraud by conversion" and thus illegal. I was met with silence; even the general counsel failed to speak. There were several other meetings on the subject in the next few days, to which I was conveniently not invited, then the paperwork went forward to transfer \$6 million of USAID's foreign assistance budget to AIG to clear the debt. In return, AIG was to keep quiet, and would get the Colorado agribusiness operator to keep quiet. AIG asked the Colorado man what he needed for his trouble, paid him \$100,000, and the conflict seemed to disappear.

Musaveni would keep his secret estate and his airplane, AIG was paid, and no one was any the wiser.

There was a brief scare a few days later as the U.S. ambassador to Uganda, a California businessman appointed by Reagan, learned of the caper and objected, threatening to file a complaint at the White House if it were not undone. I ran into USAID's desk officer for Uganda a few hours after that happened, and he confessed to being very worried. More meetings were held, an alternative way of disguising the fraud by conversion was devised so that the ambassador would not know about it, or at least not feel involved in it, and the deal was closed.

Self Dealing

Having recognized the prevalence of so many corrupt behaviors, it is a bit like "piling on" to mention another, but the ubiquitous nature of self-dealing in USAID is such that one cannot discuss life in the agency without tipping one's hat to it. By self dealing in the USAID context, I mean making decisions with respect to agency affairs that are in one's own career interest rather than in the interest of the stated mission of the agency. A good example of self-dealing is the behavior of my colleagues in the just mentioned case of fraud by conversion. Those people in the room weren't stupid. All of them had to know that if it is necessary to hide one's behavior from the press and Congress then it surely must be questionable. Most of them must surely have recognized that transferring money between accounts to pay the debt associated with an unrelated transaction six years earlier had to be questionable. Yet all went along. Even the general counsel, who later was given a mission director appointment.

Day after day, in every way, USAID officers who wish to move ahead engage in self-dealing. It explains what is happening at the project review meetings when everyone looks to the head of the table for a hint before taking a position on a new investment. No one in USAID tries to do the right thing in light of his understanding of the agency's mission, or its mandate from Congress. No, what everyone tries to do is whatever will make him popular; whatever will advance his career. Office directors fight for more budget even when it is clear that other offices can make better use of the money. Individuals accept assignments for which they are ill-suited because it will advance their careers.

One can argue that this sort of behavior manifests itself everywhere in the world; in private businesses as well as in government. There is a critical difference, however; a difference that makes self-dealing in an environment like USAID's many times more destructive. In USAID there is no bottom line test of effectiveness for what the agency does. It can throw away money on wasteful credit and venture capital schemes year after year, and no one will ever object because the agency is not expected to show a profit, but rather simply to place the money. The whole emphasis is on moving the money, and there is little concern as to where and how.

What of my colleagues in USAID; those sons and daughters of America's affluent middle class? Many of them went to the finest learning institutions money can buy; a surprising number of them had once been class presidents. How do I excuse them for participating in this self-serving, amoral subculture seemingly without any appreciation of the terribleness of it. Is it any different than my childhood friends marching off to receive their first communion, telling God they would

never sin again even though they knew full well they would, and feeling no fear or remorse or ambivalence of any kind? I went along with that, albeit feeling guilty and remorseful. Is this what it was like in WWII Germany, when folks were dividing the spoils of their absent Jewish neighbors? Was Aristotle wrong when he said that there is such a thing as natural law, a uniform code of civilized behavior that is present in all men of all cultures, and we need only to look within ourselves to find it. Of course he also said that those who can't find it within are deranged; that something has rendered them unfit to live in society. Can the pressures of a large corporate culture such as that in USAID do such a thing to its employees? Does that excuse such behavior, or just explain it?

4. Lessons Learned

I learned a great deal about life, and about myself, during my twenty-nine years in USAID. I learned much more than I want to talk about in these musings. I will deal here with only two classes of lessons: one dealing with the possibilities of government organizations in general, and another dealing with how a fundamentally dysfunctional bureaucracy such as USAID survives years after it has lost its drive to accomplish the mission it was established to perform.

a. What Governments Can And Cannot Do

Irrespective of whether a government organization is at its peak effectiveness, or has deteriorated into profound dysfunctionality, it is now clear to me that there are certain things that governments can do effectively and others that it cannot do. The lesson is important because over the years governments have grown ever larger, and are depended upon to perform an increasing variety of tasks in society. If we can understand which of those tasks it makes sense to ask our government to perform, we can all enjoy better results and better lives.

Policy and Infrastructure

Based upon my USAID experience working with governments around the world, I noted that when programs dealt with setting policy, collecting taxes, training police departments and building and operating very large infrastructure projects we were often successful. This is so, I believe, because these kind of projects serve large collectives, and for the most part no other institution in society is sufficiently broad-based to carry them out. Individual preferences don't matter much when it comes to policy, or social and physical infrastructure; the best one can do is determine the collective preference and go with it. People understand that. They do not refuse to enjoy the protection a dam gives as regards flood control, or a police department gives as to crime control, because they opposed how the dam was built or the department set up. People are willing to defer to their governments for these types of activities and accept the consequences.

Retailing Goods and Services

It was during a 1981 evaluation of USAID agricultural projects worldwide that it dawned upon me the extent that governments everywhere have gotten into retailing goods and services. Roughly 80 percent of USAID's investment in agriculture is focussed on retailing. Agricultural extension, agricultural credit, agricultural inputs such as fertilizer and seeds; across the spectrum

we are out there helping our host country governments retail to their farmers. And we are making a terrible mess of things.

When I asked a sample of 1,000-odd farmers in northeast Thailand what government projects had done the most to help them advance in the past 30 years, far and away the most mentioned projects were infrastructure activities from the 1960s -- small dams, irrigation systems and the like. Yet since the 1960s all USAID assistance to Thailand has been in retailing goods and services such as advice, seeds, fertilizer and credit. When we asked these farmers who they look to for goods and services, the great majority referred to their local feed and seed dealer. They trusted him more for advice than they trusted the government extension agent. They preferred to purchase their seeds and fertilizer from him, at higher prices, than to go to a government distribution point. They favored borrowing from their feed and seed dealer, often at dramatically higher interest rates, to hiking to town and standing in line at the government supported bank.

Why is this? The answer, I realized after much reflection, is that government programs don't have room for feedback mechanisms. Services tend to be delivered to one person at a time, and individuals want to have some say-so in what they buy. If you don't give them that say-so, or at least listen to their thoughts and answer their objections, you will lose the customer.

The genius of feedback mechanisms is best illustrated with a crude example. Imagine how toothpaste is made in a command economy such as that of the recent Soviet Union, and compare that with how it is done in a market economy such as we enjoy in the U.S. Command economies are like government programs, with decisions made from the top down. In the Soviet Union a committee of scientists would gather because the government had instructed them to make 200,000 tons of toothpaste to solve the problems of dental health. They would discuss the latest scientific research into bacteria-killing formula, and a package for keeping the product safe after purchase, and the product would be put into production. Efficient and scientific, right?

How is toothpaste produced in the U.S.? There is the mandatory look to the scientists, of course, but in addition survey teams hold focus groups to talk about people's preferences, and visit super markets to interview customers. They ask about color, taste, texture, the size and technique for packaging, the color of the package, the instructions on the package, etc. Then they produce 100,000 units, and offer it in a small test market. The survey teams then return to ask more questions, and customer feedback is once again put into the process so that adjustments can be made. This process of requesting and processing customer feedback never ends, and the result is that Russians will pay twice as much for American toothpaste as they will for their own.

Until governments can learn to treat the objects of their programs as customers, listen to their complaints and suggestions, and remember that "the customer is always right" they will not succeed at retailing goods and services.

When I look at our own government, I note that perhaps 80 percent of what we spend tax dollars on is retailing. We have massive departments of agriculture, education, housing and health that do almost nothing but retail, and they do it poorly. Primary and secondary education has been operated as a government monopoly for the entire 20th century, and the result has been desultory. Meantime, education at the university level is largely private, and our higher education

programs are viewed as the best in the world. The government got itself into retailing medical services to veterans of American war after WWII, and the result is a massive nation-wide complex of expensive hospitals that military personnel do everything in their power to avoid because they are so poorly, though expensively, run. And so on.

b. Bureaucratic Maturity

My former boss and dear friend Bob Chamberlain had a lot to say when he introduced me to the term bureaucratic maturity back in 1971. Bob himself is a deep thinker, and though much more comfortable in USAID than I, and a dedicated team player, he never lost track of his inner sense of right and wrong. He might have sinned as much as anyone, but at least he knew that he was sinning and sometimes felt sad about it.

My goal to reform USAID from within as a way of leveraging my own desires to do good was laudatory on its face, but I can see now that it was not ever achievable. Bureaucracies seem to have cycles, like other life forms, and at birth they are raw bundles of nerves and energy straining to do something; to do whatever they are asked to do. Later, as their "*raison d'être*" is established, and a clear mission statement developed, they can function effectively, at least for a time.

All too soon, however, lethargy sets in. It comes in the form of employees who look to the bureaucracy to earn them a living. It comes in the form of careerists. Bureaucracies, like General Motors, that have to retain financial viability over time to stay alive, suffer less from this than government bureaucracies. That bottom line test of worthiness is inevitably applied to everything that corporation does, and to everyone in the corporation. Unproductive individuals can hide for years at a time, giving the appearance of productivity by the way they dress and talk, but eventually they are found out and then marginalized so that they do not put too much drag on the organization.

In a government environment, however, there is no objective test of effectiveness. There is no need to make a profit. There is no customer feedback as to quality of product. It is like a command economy, pure and simple. If your mission is to produce 100,000 tractors a year, you do it. Never mind if they are inappropriately designed for the intended users. Never mind if they are of poor quality. There are no feedback mechanisms; only the order to produce.

USAID works in that way. Congress gives it a budget each year, and tells them to place that money into development assistance programs by year's end or the money will be returned to Treasury. To have to return any of the money to Treasury would be an admission of failure, so it never happens. Rather, it gets moved by whatever means is easiest and offers the least likelihood of reflecting poorly on anyone engaged in the process.

Yes, USAID does have a mission statement reflecting substantive developmental goals. No, that statement does not interfere with moving the money. Rather, it provides the cover story that is placed on every tranch of money that flows. It provides the rationale for projects and programs undertaken.

A mature bureaucrat is one who understands that maintenance of the organization, and through that his job, is the true “bottom line.” Every decision is made within that context. As bureaucracies begin to rigidify into self serving employment agencies, the circle of players steadily widens to include first all of the senior people, then all of the officers, then all of the staff, and eventually even the myriad contractors who live from the agency. At the end of the day, there is no one in the circle who will put the mission ahead of his job. Even some of the members of Congress most closely associated with the program have “signed on” to the sham.

Reform from within is not possible once a bureaucracy has matured in this way. It can only be changed through violent shock from without.

Tales From My Business Career

My journey from Ray Solem, construction worker and later student, to the world of business seems rather improbable on the surface. From whence came this interest in something as tawdry as business? How does one associate a business career with a drive to serve the less fortunate, and my life-long interest in politics and policy? I’ve given the subject very little thought, but as I write this I can imagine how it probably happened; why it was a natural development for me.

The defining aspects of my personality are that I am ever the optimist, and I never see things as they are, but rather as they might be. I am, in a phrase, a visionary.

Lots of visionaries are called dreamers, and indeed that is probably fair. They have these visions of what could be, but lack the discipline, determination, skills and confidence to make them happen. I think that my father was a visionary, though I don’t recall any specific vision he ever shared with me, and except for an occasional burst of energy on a project (e.g. on the occasions when he ran for political office), he seemed content to live in the present. By my definition, therefore, my father was an ineffective visionary – perhaps bettered labeled a dreamer.

In my own case, I am vastly overbuilt in the departments of discipline, determination and confidence. As to skills, whether analytical or social, I’m probably about average. So combining these aspects of my personality, one has the tools to be reasonably successful at anything that doesn’t require lots of skill and brains. So why didn’t I apply myself to becoming a labor organizer, or a politician or preacher?

Eric Hoffer, the now deceased longshoreman philosopher from San Francisco once said that in traditional societies the most creative minds have been drawn to religion, philosophy or the arts. Since the industrial revolution unleashed a Pandora’s Box of possibilities early in the 19th century, however, the best outlet for creative energy has been the world of business. I think that Mr. Hoffer has “nailed it” for me. I came to understand that in the world of business, if successful, I could have maximum freedom (financial independence) to pursue my own creative energies in constructive ways, without having to answer to anything but the marketplace. I do not resent marketplace discipline because it is not ambiguous, nor is it personal. If I am rejected in the marketplace it is not because of my religion, politics or personality. It is simply because my idea or project was not financially viable. I like the ultimate impartiality of that, and the structure it provides. Creativity without structure of any kind is unlikely to lead to any good result, and as a

confirmed “do gooder” I judge myself by results – by my tangible contributions to making the world a better place.

So, when I met Don Pearson during the first days of my USAID internship, and he began to talk about the joys of business and wealth in his glowing, enthusiastic way, I was “all ears.” Here was a man talking about a world I had always held in disdain in a way I hadn’t imagined. His abundantly clear interest in wealth for the privacy and comfort it could provide him interested me not at all, but its value as a ticket to the freedom that comes with financial independence, and as a means of achieving power, set my mind racing. At twenty-five years of age, I was finally ready to consider options never before confronted.

1. Early Starts

a. Pearson’s Investment Fund

Clearly my baptism in business was Pearson’s little investment fund. I had no role in establishing it, and no role in shaping its policy. All I was to the fund was another investor. Even so I learned a lot about myself in a business context. I learned, for instance, that financial risk is easy and natural for me. I borrowed the first \$1,000 I put into the fund, and a year later I borrowed another \$5,000 to invest. All the while the fund was losing money, and when I cashed out after three years, the first of the investors to withdraw, I retrieved less money than I had invested, and felt not a whisper of disappointment. Don had taken me to school on the joys of investment, and in the process also taught me about financial leverage (working with borrowed money). True, in this case the leverage worked against me, but I got the idea and made lots of money applying leverage successfully in later transactions. In fact, it was the residual of funds taken from Pearson’s investment fund that financed my first home purchase in 1971.

b. Economic Development Commission

While running USAID’s technical training program in northeast Brazil, I became aware that the nine northeastern states of this vast country were not only poor because the natural resource base was poor, but also because they enjoyed a disproportionately small share of federal government largess for dams, roads and the like. They were treated a bit like colonies, appreciated for whatever wealth and taxes they generated for the larger body politic, but not places where one would want to invest.

As I reflected on this, I thought about my own state, North Dakota, and wondered how it does in comparison to states such as New York and California in competition for federal assistance to education, health, infrastructure and the like. At the same time, I was packaging projects for USAID investment, and learning the process of extracting federal grant assistance, albeit in the somewhat different international development context. I realized that I was on to something.

My first business plan was a scheme to apply this knowledge to help a similarly isolated, rural state in the U.S. to increase its share of federal grant and loan assistance. The strategy was to show the state how to package and market grant and loan assistance applications more successfully. The specific angle was to have the state’s governor set up an economic development com-

mission staffed by high-level program development people on loan from the very federal agencies from whom assistance would be solicited under the federal government Interpersonnel Exchange Act of 1970. It was a natural! I would convince a governor to go along, appointing me director of the new economic development commission, then I would go into the Departments of Agriculture, Education, Health, Housing and so forth and recruit a well-placed person from each for a prestigious two-year detail to my commission. Under the act, the state would only have to pay half the salary, so GS-14 and GS-15 managers would be within easy reach of state salary ceilings.

When I returned to Washington, D.C. from Brazil, my enthusiasm for testing this scheme was one of the reasons I passed on many overseas assignment opportunities. I went to the Congressional Directory to look for candidate Congressmen to approach and came up with two: Manuel Lujan, Republican from New Mexico, and Art Link, Democrat from North Dakota. I liked Lujan because he was Hispanic, and life in New Mexico appealed to me. I liked Link because he was from my own state, and coincidentally the person who defeated my father's bid for the State Legislature in 1954.

Both men gave me meetings, listened carefully, and explored the matter back home. Lujan was frank with me. He said that the current governor was a Democrat and would not deal with him, but indicated that he himself was thinking of running for governor and if he did so, and won, he would be back in touch. Link spoke similarly, saying that he was planning a run for governor and needed to deal with that first. From his demeanor, I was uncertain of his enthusiasm, so was caught by surprise six months later when he called me to announce that he was coming into D.C. to attend his first national governor's conference, and could I book an evening with him to discuss the economic development commission.

Art and his aide did spend the evening in our home in Bethesda, talking into the early morning hours about politics in North Dakota, business development problems, and how our state has long been exploited by the New York railroad and banking interests, the Chicago meatpackers and the Minneapolis grain millers. It was such fun, like being back in Zap with K.W. Simons.

At the end of the day, Art was unable to get his Republican-controlled legislature to agree to establish the commission we envisioned, but he did invite me to come to the state to serve in his cabinet as deputy director of the Department of Business and Industry Development. His aide, Thern Kaldahl, explained that the governor planned to rid himself of the current director, who was a drinker, but needed some time to get it done and meantime wanted to prepare me for the job. His call, and the invitation, came like so many calls from Art, in the middle of the night. I remember it particularly well because it came just before Christmas, on a bone-chilling night, and he made it clear that he needed me in Bismarck within two weeks. I was in the middle of reforming USAID's project development process through my new policy management job, thought it over a day, and declined.

What does that say about my first business deal? Well, I didn't make any money, and it didn't work out exactly as anticipated, but all in all I felt it was time and energy well invested. And of course my idea, which in 1971 had only been adopted in New York and California, has now

spread throughout the nation and even into most large city governments. I feel proud to have been associated with it to the extent that I was.

c. **CORSOL**

CORSOL stands for Cortinas and Solem, two friends who decided to go into business together. It started around 1974, when I visited the basement of a fellow from whom I had purchased a house. By that time I had parlayed my incipient investment and rehabilitation skills into four home purchases in as many years. Harry Lawson had just sold me my fourth, and he was showing me an invention he had spent ten years trying to do something with. It was a circular slide rule packaged to work as a shirt pocket sized currency converter. I was dazzled!

Harry's concept was to put an advertisement on the back, and get an airline to give his thing away to every ticket holder. These were the days of fixed exchange rates, so international travelers were always looking for rate charts in magazines, newspapers or on the occasional brochure advertisement. A rate chart that could translate any currency to any other, and worked with floating rates as well as fixed rates, seemed too good to be true. So I bought it from him. He was exhausted from failing to sell the product and so the price was right.

I'm shy and very reluctant to engage people in conversation, and this was essentially a marketing scheme, so I determined that I should get a partner who had good social skills. I had met Carlos recently at a Georgetown cocktail party, where I first saw him standing on a chair with a glass of wine in his hand declaring: "I love America! There is no better place! When I came here I couldn't speak English, and I got a job washing dishes, and look at me now!" That is the sort of testimonial given in a room full of born rich, cynical liberals I couldn't resist, so I introduced myself and we became friends.

Carlos and I were a good team. I did all of the technical work, developing my first ever brochure, articles of incorporation, business cards, letterheads and the like. We worked together on the creative ideas, and the talking was left to Carlos. We visited factories that handle small plastic products in New Jersey and learned how to lower the price of our product from 25 cents each (Harry's cost previously) to 6 cents, and we compiled a list of target customers - major international airlines. It was during these meetings that I discovered something important about myself. In dealing with busy, high-level executives, I was in fact better suited than Carlos. His style was to charm and make friends. The airline executives we met in D.C. (vice presidents for Congressional affairs) and New York (senior vice presidents for marketing) were very busy guys who only wanted to see the product and hear the pitch. I was better at that than Carlos.

We invested six months of energy and a few thousand dollars with CORSOL and never made a sale. One day, in New York, the senior vice president for marketing with Air France set our hearts thumping by putting his arm around Carlos as we left and saying: "Son, if you'd brought this to me six months ago, before the oil embargo drove up our fuel costs, you'd be a rich man today. Right now, though, we just don't have any money in our promotion budget."

Another failure? Not the way I saw it. I was learning more with each transaction, and meantime building a small nest egg with my home rehabilitation activity. It would just be a matter of time until I made something work.

d. Rehabbing Houses

I, like most people, least appreciate what comes most easy to me. Just as the early career opportunities in USAID for big jobs were not appreciated because they came too easy, nor have I ever fully appreciated my success as a small time home rehabilitator. It all seemed too natural to brag about, yet in the end it formed the basis for future business successes, as well as the financial means to try new things.

It started with our first home on Lindale Drive. Just back from Brazil, and with \$5,800 remaining from the \$6,000 borrowed dollars I had invested in Pearson's investment fund, I had down payment money and the desire to purchase a home. A realtor friend found us a two bedroom, one and one-half colonial near the National Institute of Health in Bethesda for \$31,000. I now needed money to finance a badly needed rehabilitation.. I went to my credit union, where I had recently paid off on the earlier \$6,000 loan, and they advised me that my credit is good, but they didn't do home rehabilitation loans. If I wanted to buy a car, or furniture, that would be different. It sounded to me like I was being coached, so I came back a few days later with an application for a \$5,000 furniture loan, which was approved.

My construction skills, at that point, were very few and specialized. I knew how to run a jack-hammer, mix cement, paint, and bolt together massive steel forms. I knew nothing about household electricity, plumbing or appliances, but I had lots of self-confidence. I went to the neighborhood hardware store, bought a collection of books on home repair, and went to work. Electricity, I learned, works just like the Washington, D.C. beltway, with current going back and forth. Dishwashers, toilets, lights and locks were just as simple. I was on a roll.

Over the next few years Sanna, the kids and I changed homes at least once each year. Making each house our home was critical to getting high leverage financing, and also reduced the scrutiny from home repair regulators. I learned to do everything, and do it fast. As we refined our methodology, I would time a new home purchase so that when we settled, usually on a Saturday, all of the new kitchen and bathroom appliances were already purchased and ready to deliver. I would take two weeks leave from USAID, go into the house at 7:00 each morning, and with Sanna and the girls to run errands, bring lunch and hold the other end of things, I'd work until 7:00 in the evening. In this way, in two weeks I could strip a house completely (floor and wall covering, kitchen cabinets and appliances, bathroom fixtures, all lights, electrical and door hardware, and put it back together so that it was brand new. Friends at USAID were none the wiser because I had done it in the time they took to visit the beach.

As a result of these efforts, by the time I accepted a foreign service assignment in Honduras in 1975 I had accumulated the small financial base, and the massive self-confidence, that would be necessary for me to launch a more formal business career upon my return to the U.S. a year later.

2. Becoming An Investment Syndicator

While assigned to USAID's loan office in Honduras in 1975-76, I finally came to terms with my great love for business deal making, and my unwillingness to any longer serve in USAID's foreign service. True, the overseas work was exciting because it put me into different cultures, and provided an opportunity to work in another language, but aside from that it was like living and working in a cocoon. My office space, home, the kids' school, the commissary where groceries were purchased, social life; all of these things were the same everywhere. Maids cooked the meals and cleaned the house, and the USAID administrative officer fixed the toilet and arranged for medical care. For a timid person who wanted to seem courageous it was ideal. For a genuine risk-taking warrior like me it was stultifying.

In Honduras I discovered still another problem with my USAID job. I had grown to enjoy working seven days a week, late into every evening, pursuing a wide variety of government, business and public service pursuits simultaneously, and suddenly I found myself in an environment where I was not allowed to pursue outside business activities, public service opportunities were limited, and if I went into the office on Sundays I was alone and without air conditioning.

For a time I considered raising resources in the expatriate community to develop a recreation association (pool, tennis courts, etc.) because there was a shortage of such facilities in Tegucigalpa, but after contemplating it awhile, I decided that to invest my time and energy trying to make life even more cushy for a group of people who were already spoiled beyond reason made no sense. Then one day I found myself talking to one of the owners of a skin diving resort on the Honduran island of Ruatan, and my creative juices began to flow.

a. West Indies Trading Company

The Pirate Den was a 30 room resort built of local material on an extraordinary reef which had a worldwide reputation among scuba divers. Construction had been financed with the life savings of a crippled American civil engineer, recently retired, on land owned by a local businessman and preacher. Ed, the engineer, and Sam, the preacher, knew nothing about inn-keeping, and after five years of operating their magnificent facility at an average occupancy of about 18 percent they were getting discouraged. Ed wanted to get his \$150,000 out of the deal and return home to New Jersey. Sam wanted to continue as an owner, but needed a resident operator to replace Ed.

On my second or third visit to the Pirate Den, where I would occasionally spend a weekend diving, I sat down and talked with both men about buying Ed's share of the inn plus a bit more, to give me a controlling interest. I told them that though I was not interested in living on Ruatan and working day to day, I thought that I could improve their marketing performance by reaching out to Americans in Tegucigalpa and in the U.S. They were intrigued, and over the next several months the concept of the West Indies Trading Company, my very first project that required raising money from strangers by selling shares (syndication), was born.

The West Indies Trading Company (WITC) was to be a chain of ten skin diver resorts in the Caribbean with sales focussed on North Americans; a sort of "Club Med" for skin divers. The re-

sorts would be purchased from the vast array of nicely built and well located resorts already in place around the Caribbean's best reefs, but failing due to inability to market the space. Small resorts, such as those favored by skin divers, simply didn't have sufficient resources to advertise themselves in the U.S. media. In addition mail service was generally unreliable, fax and email communication had not yet been invented, and telephone service was sporadic. The job of attracting clientele from the U.S. was virtually impossible for a single resort acting alone. With a cluster of ten such resorts, however, each located on a different famous reef, we could advertise, and we could handle repeat customers because we could offer a different reef experience each year. This appeal, plus some standardization and quality control on diving equipment and the cuisine, and a Miami-based travel agent, and WITC would be a winner.

I told Ed and Sam of my vision, convinced them both of its viability, and offered them a price for their hotel based on its economic value at the then current 18 percent occupancy. That meant that I would be buying it for around \$200,000; a tiny bit more than they spent building it. The terms were \$1 down payment, and the balance to be paid when I had increased occupancy to 60 percent. Everyone understood that at 60 percent occupancy the resort would be worth \$1 million, and that I would then be able to borrow all of the money to pay off Ed and Sam, but they both liked it. Ed wanted his money back, and Sam hoped to remain in the deal with significant ownership. Sam and I traveled to Tegucigalpa to get the blessing of his "patron," Ed Smith, who owned one of the country's largest banks and the country's largest insurance company. Ed had just purchased an airline, Belize Airways, and had plans to service Honduras. He not only blessed the deal, but also agreed to give me "courtesy" on his airline so that I could commute between D.C. and Ruatan at no cost. He also agreed to give me the use of his public relations department at no charge, and the anticipated refinance loan when we got occupancy up to the level at which I would exercise my option to buy the interests. At the close of that meeting one of his employees, the president of the bank, came to me offering to purchase a 5 percent interest for himself, paying for it at the same rate I was paying.

This was pretty heady stuff for me, and it was all happening in my spare moments, mostly on weekends. I realized that I had a knack for deal making, as well as love for it. I also was beginning to accept that full-time work at USAID was just too pedestrian for me. I needed to break the tie and get on with my life. I advised my boss that I intended to resign the foreign service in June and return home to I knew not what. The likelihood of civil service employment in USAID's Washington, D.C. headquarters was high, but I also considered burning the bridge entirely and focussing on my WITC transaction.

b. CTS Associates, LP

On returning home to D.C. I reviewed my options and made some quick decisions. USAID wanted me badly because of my Portuguese language and deal making skills. Portugal's colonial empire in Africa had just broken up, and five new countries were casting about for alliances with either the Soviet Bloc or the West. I wasn't clear which way things would go. I had long wanted to go "toe to toe" with the Russians, and I had enjoyed earlier trips to Africa, so couldn't say no. I signed-on with an office that provided project development services to Northwest Africa. This region included Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau and Sao Tome-Principe, all of them newly inde-

pendent and enjoying close attention from the Russians, East Germans, Chinese, Cubans and so on.

At the same time, I reviewed my options as to future business directions, reminded myself that my girls were still young and needed a father close to home, and decided to put aside the WITC for a time (too much travel and too hard to blend with USAID work) and focus on real estate. I wanted to move beyond purchasing and rehabbing single family homes, one at a time, as I had earlier. Now I was ready to work with other people's money and make larger deals. I was ready to become an investment syndicator.

At the time I didn't even know the word, much less how to do it. I started, instead, by putting my first prospectus on a yellow writing pad. It read:

“Investors give me \$50,000. I buy three houses at \$50,000 each with 80 percent financing . I rehabilitate the houses, rent them for a few years, then sell them for \$75,000 each. Profits are split 75 percent to the investors and 25 percent to me. Along the way I earn a real estate commission on the purchases and sales, a fee for rehabilitation, and a fee for management.”

I didn't know it at the time, but I had just laid out the framework for a real estate “blind pool” investment fund – the hottest real estate product of the late 60s and 70s.

I fiddled with my one-page prospectus for several months, showing it to friends, attorneys and accountants and asking for feedback; continually adding to it as I learned more. Almost everyone warned that I shouldn't do it, saying that working with other people's money would surely put me in jeopardy with securities regulators and unduly complicate my life. I studied for the real estate exam, passed and joined a firm in Bethesda. The realtor's association in Chicago had a library, and I began to draw upon that for information. After about six months time I was ready. I had completed what I thought was a pretty sharp prospectus, had a good business plan, and two of my most senior friends from USAID, both self styled experts in real estate investment, had joined me as partners. We were CTS Associates, LP (Cohen, Thompson and Solem).

Raising money proved to be extremely difficult, and my partners, who I had thought would attract cash like magnates, were of no value to me. At the end of the six-month process I had raised virtually the entire \$50,000 myself, and found myself working alone on selecting the properties to purchase as well as rehabbing and managing them alone. Shortly after completing the “raise” I traveled to Chicago to take a course from my new trade association's special affiliate for syndicators, the Real Estate Securities and Syndication Institute (RESSI). The teacher talked all week about how someone should put together a blind pool for investment in single family homes, which were then inflating in value nationwide. On the last day of the course, before the final exam, I showed him my prospectus. When we finished the exam, several hours later, he addressed the entire class with my prospectus in hand, praising it for its professionalism. He asked if he could use it for classroom material as he taught the course around the U.S., and I proudly consented. For about a year after that event I received calls from around the country asking me to consult on preparation of “blind pool” offering materials.

In the end, CTS made only very modest returns for its investors, my co-sponsors and me. For me, however, it provided a priceless introduction to the world of investment syndication, and set a course for the next decade of my life.

c. Developing Credentials

One of the things I learned early in my career as a real estate syndicator was that the purchase, management and sale of large-scale real estate properties in the D.C. metropolitan area is a very mature business engaged in and controlled by a handful of families who have been doing it for two or more generations. These families own most of the local wealth and prefer to invest it with one another. They also own the banks, and prefer to lend bank resources to one another. Finally, they own most of the real property, and prefer to sell it to one another.

Why this emphasis on dealing with one another? It is common sense, really. Why invest with a stranger if you can just as easily invest with a friend? As to lending, the loan officers are trained to skip the business plan preliminaries and look at the signature line because they know that someone not already wealthy is a poorer credit risk. What can you take as additional collateral from a government employee with no assets beyond his home? As to buying properties, I learned that I couldn't get full priced contracts accepted on shopping centers and office buildings because the sellers knew that no local bank would offer me a purchase money mortgage if I or my family was not already wealthy.

I put on my "thinking hat," and devised a mind numbing strategy to overcome these obstacles. First, I would have to become a cash buyer, I reasoned. I had to show enough ready cash to relieve concerns of the property sellers and the lenders. That suggested that I become a "blind pool" syndicator because that implied raising the money in advance of making any purchases. Conventional wisdom was, and is, that a person can't raise money for blind pools absent long experience, but I had already succeeded at a small such offering so felt I could do it again.

Second, I would have to learn to raise money from strangers because I did not have rich friends. This, too, was and is believed to be impossible absent a track record, but CTS included two strangers for every person I had known previously, so I felt I could make it happen as well. I would need a better strategy for making myself known, however.

The latter challenge led me to complicate things even further by getting into the arena of public securities offerings. Conventional wisdom was and is that public registration is prohibitively expensive and cannot be afforded except where one is raising millions of dollars. I learned that the average public blind pool offering in 1979 cost \$250,000 in legal fees alone. With accountants and printers also involved, the cost likely rose to \$350,000. I thought, however, that with my USAID background writing and packaging and dealing with layers of bureaucracy en route to approval, I should be able to do 90 percent or more of this work myself.

Finally, I thought about what I might do to make myself more attractive to strangers looking to invest. I couldn't pretend to be a local person from one of the families known to be established in real estate, but maybe I could gain recognition in other ways. In the end I did the following,

all with a view toward making myself known as a competent professional in the field of real estate investment:

- I joined the National Association of Realtor's Real Estate Securities and Syndication Institute, and got myself elected as president of its Maryland, D.C. and Delaware chapter. This opened doors with many regulators, making it easy for me to negotiate approval of my public offerings.
- I took every class offered by local colleges, the National Association of Realtors, and a variety of private professional training companies on the subjects of real estate and securities, then put together a curriculum to teach what I had learned to others. By 1981 I was teaching real estate investment and real estate securities at the University of Maryland, Montgomery College and Northern Virginia Community College.
- I got myself licensed as a real estate broker in my own firm, and also as a securities broker-dealer in another firm owned by me. I also established separate companies to manage partnerships, manage property, place mortgages, package investments, and a parent company to oversee all of the special purpose companies. I called the little conglomerate Equity Fund Group, Inc.
- I got myself elected to the board of directors of a credit union, and then elected treasurer. This helped me in the local financial community because in my capacity as treasurer I purchased jumbo savings certificates (\$1.0 million CDs) in many of the local banks. That kind of financial clout gave me access to the bank's vice presidents; relationships that would make future business dealings easier for me.
- When I saw how well my teaching materials were received by students, I pulled them together into a book that was published by Acropolis Books in 1983, and then republished in a revised edition by Prentice Hall in 1988. I also wrote articles for several professional journals on technical subjects related to my profession.

In the final analysis, none of these specific achievements interested me. I just wanted to be able to raise money from strangers and create wonderful projects that would be enjoyed by people and would pay my investors a fair return. The specific activities were hoops I jumped through to get where I wanted to go in my chosen profession.

d. Career Highlights

My goal, as I pulled together my little company, was to work my way up from my very small first syndication, which raised \$50,000 and purchased around \$250,000 in property, to transactions raising \$25 to \$200 million. I wanted to do one deal per year, leaving myself time to spend with Sanna and the girls, and by going with a larger deal size I could do that and still earn \$5 to \$25 million per year for myself. By the time I reached fifty years of age, I hoped to "squirrel away" at least \$100 million and then be ready to channel my energy into something more creative and challenging with a focus on public service. I was interested in finding a way to deal with refugees held in various internment camps around the world; finding a place where they

would be welcome and able to invest their energy into building a future for themselves and their children as opposed to waiting in line to be fed.

My second transaction was much like CTS, except the partners were the twin brothers who operated the real estate brokerage in which I was licensed in 1979, Brian and Kevin Kadow. Once again I went into the transaction assuming that my partners could raise money, and once again I was wrong. Maryland Residential Investors had the additional distinction of being a public offering, being registered as the first public “blind pool” in Maryland. This experience taught me a great deal about the securities business, and made me a mini-celebrity as I brought the offering to registration for just \$3,200 in total costs; less than 10 percent of what intrastate registrations were costing at that time.

Thereafter I did another small private offering to invest again in homes, then took a big jump to something enormously more complicated; a public “blind pool” with a limited registration with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), that would invest in historic rehabilitations. In one stroke I was taking on the SEC registration process, known to be very expensive and cumbersome, and real estate development of larger properties. Had I the maturity I now enjoy, I would not have attempted this.

The packaging and registration process was challenging but fun. I selected a well-known securities attorney who charged \$200 per hour (in 1981), but agreed to let me do the lion’s share of the packaging work, only calling upon him for his legal expertise. That meant I had to keep him away from all writing and editing – just an occasional meeting for feedback. In this way I would hold his cost to around \$2,500. When I was through writing, my attorney was in shock at how little I had drawn upon him. I then took the prospectus to the SEC myself, without his support. He was disappointed, but it was I who had a comfortable relationship with the regulator based upon my service as President of RESSI. On the day of the final registration conference my attorney advised me that he had to change the terms of our deal and write a broader opinion than he had, and it would cost \$5,000. I was very unhappy, spoke to Tom Baudhuin, the regulator, and he said: “Ray, I don’t give a ‘rat’s ass’ about his legal opinion. I’m going to approve your registration with or without it.” What a wonderful feeling it gave me to know that I didn’t have to be vulnerable to that sort of extortion.

The big lesson I learned from my first SEC registration was the value of publicity, of getting into the news. It happened quite by accident. The real estate market had taken a dive in 1981, and no one was calling on my “tombstone ad” in the financial pages. Five months had gone by, and I hadn’t sold a single interest. Out of desperation, I tried something new. I wrote a press release, similar to what I had done five years earlier to promote a public service undertaking, and sent it to local and national newspapers and magazines. It extolled the virtues of historic rehabilitation, and quoted me making thoughtful remarks. Bingo!

We got into a half-dozen newspapers, and the phone started ringing, callers almost begging me for an appointment. I held two group meetings during the final two weeks of my offering period, and 65 percent of the people who came to the meetings invested.

This transaction, Equity Fund Properties, was the first I did that made me some money. Five years I had been in the business, transitioning from working with my own money to buy and rehabilitate single family homes, and consistently earned less than I had earned working alone. Friends and business associates were all telling me I was foolish to change my approach; that I had a sure thing and should stay with it. They were right, of course. I had enjoyed a sure thing, and if my goal were to make money and live comfortably I would have done just that. But that wasn't me. I was in business for the sheer joy of creating something out of nothing, and the bigger and more difficult the arena the better. I didn't mind taking the risk of failure, and I didn't mind all the hoops I had to jump through before finally making it work.

In later years I steadily grew my business, each year finding it easier to raise money and get into larger deals. I purchased a failed land development project from a gentleman in Leesburg, Virginia and built a community of 216 colonial homes, called Fox Ridge. It was very profitable but came within an eyelash of disaster due to some zoning difficulties. Then I purchased a shopping center in Rockville, something that had been on the market for more than a year but no one wanted it because it was a known loser. That turned out to be my most profitable transaction, and now, fifteen years later, I have bought out my investors at a very handsome profit to them and continue to own and manage the project with Sanna.

All in all, during the period from 1977 until 1988 I formed nine progressively larger syndications, working steadily toward my goal of transactions in the \$50 to \$200 million range, usually making modest returns, but in a few cases doing very well. Then the other shoe dropped.

3. PERFORMAX

At the close of 1987 I was enjoying my life as an investment syndicator like never before. I had a half-dozen pleasant young people working in our office on the eleventh floor of the Landow Building in Bethesda, one of them an attorney, several recent MBA graduates, and the others recent college graduates who were interested in learning how to syndicate investments. I was fairly well known because of occasional newspaper stories about me and my deals, having a book on the street, public speaking engagements and the like. What I seemed to have attracted were kids who wanted to be mentored by someone a bit older than they were. At that point in my business career we had experienced some near disasters, but always managed to pull through and make our projects work. In a phrase, I was "self-realizing" in my investment career, well on my way to my goal of retirement by age fifty and moving on to the ultimate challenge of full-time public service.

Recent transactions we had "passed on" after substantial investment in feasibility studies included a \$35 million apartment building development in Quantico, a \$40 million luxury apartment development just outside Old Town Alexandria, and a \$9 million office development in Gaithersburg. We had also just given up on a \$400 million project to develop a nationwide chain of auto care centers in partnership with GEICO Insurance Company. It was a new concept I had developed to cluster all the major auto repair chain stores together on rush hour traffic routes and make things easy for customers by providing them up-scale waiting areas, transportation to work, cell phones or beepers to report on work in progress, etc. We let go of that after a year's planning with GEICO's chairman, Jack Byrne and its president, Bob Snyder, who were enthused about building them around GEICO operated auto diagnostic centers. Unfortunately for

us, the investment went to committee at GEICO shortly after Warren Buffet had purchased controlling interest, and he and GEICO's chief financial officer felt it was too much of the company's money to commit to real estate. Sigh! "That is the investment business!" I said to myself, as I retired the file and forfeited a \$15,000 deposit on the initial site purchase.

Maybe I was careless because the PERFORMAX transaction was so small compared to the projects we had been studying, and those recently completed. Maybe I just wanted to finally say yes to a friend who had brought me so many transactions over the years, all of them refused. Whatever, when old friend Alex Eucare came to me with a scheme to purchase an engine remanufacturing facility in suburban Pittsburgh, I didn't reject it outright. I told Alex he could negotiate for the business from my offices, and if he were successful in striking a really safe bargain I'd look at it.

After a dozen or more phone calls to discuss details, Alex had something I thought I needed to review simply out of respect for his efforts. I called upon another old friend, Leon Rosenberg, who was a "hard nosed" and intellectually brilliant management consultant with some familiarity with technology, and asked him for his preliminary views. He came back with a rationale that had appeal. He pointed out that the investment was a cash business, and should do best when the general economy is weak. All of my other investments were the opposite. So I got on the phone, struck a deal to purchase the business for two times the prior year's net income, however with the sellers taking back paper for half that price to ensure fair dealing. Then Leon and I got into my car and drove to Pittsburgh to look it over

On the way out to Pittsburgh I talked to Leon about my standard line in teaching investment syndication: never invest in something you can't run yourself, and never invest outside your neighborhood where you know the rules and the players. I was shattering both rules of thumb in this deal, but based upon the purchase terms we had structured, it seemed less risky than several earlier ventures I'd undertaken successfully.

We met the realtor representing the seller in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, and shared a couple of drinks the evening of our arrival while talking about the sellers and the business. I liked her. She seemed to be a simple person with small town values, she had taken many of the real estate investment courses I had taken and now taught, and she claimed to have known the sellers for years, vouching for their rock-solid honesty. I began to consider her for a spot on the new company's board of directors.

The next day we visited the factory, and were similarly dazzled by what we saw. The factory was sparkling clean, there were jobs in process everywhere, Bill, the primary machinist (said to be dying of juvenile diabetes, thus the motive to sell) seemed a hard working bright fellow, and Julie, his common-law wife and factory manager, was a burst of fresh country air. At 6'6" and 360 pounds, Bill was seriously overweight though strong and agile. Julie was about my size, 6'1" and perhaps 190 lbs. and scurried around the business wearing a bright smile and scruffy, unflattering casual wear. Her files were as immaculate as the factory floor, and when we learned that they operated primarily as a cash business (minimal use of banking services) we felt it was consistent with what we were seeing. It just meant that I'd have to take extra care with my due diligence, looking at work orders, invoices and income tax filings carefully to reconstruct their

balance sheet, and we'd also set up a matrix that would enable us to verify the flow of work through the factory floor.

Between assurances from the realtor and the impressions I got of the sellers, I had zero concern that I was dealing with a criminal organization.

Months went by as I dug further and further into the seller's books and records, trying to learn the business so that I'd know how to grow it further until finally, in August of 1988, seven months from striking the deal, we settled. It was a big day for me because I did the legal work in a one hour meeting as Sanna, the girls and I traveled west to Colorado to enroll Karen in college. I had raised \$400,000 in equity from a half-dozen of my favorite investors, and borrowed \$1.1 million from Pittsburgh National Bank, guaranteeing the loan personally. Plans were for Julie to stay on as president, continuing to run the facility but with financial and accounting support from my Equity Fund Group staff. Bill would continue to work under a contract as long as he was physically able. We would take a few months to consolidate the new operating arrangements, after which I would go to work expanding the markets for my new factory to build it into a mid-Atlantic power house. With western Pennsylvania machinist labor rates being half what there were in D.C., Philadelphia and Virginia Beach, and the talent pool huge, I was confident that I could build a large company in a matter of several years, at which point we would take it public and extract substantial investor profits.

Thirty days after closing on the purchase I received my first indication that things were not working as they should, so I began to follow the situation closely. Our customers had abandoned us in droves and business was down to just 10 percent of what it had been prior to the purchase. I spent more time every week in Pittsburgh, talking to folks at the factory and driving around the area to visit customers. People were acting very "spooked" around me. I held a meeting on the factory floor and told everyone that if we couldn't recapture our customer base I'd have to make some changes. I was talking about Julie, but the employees thought I mean them. The next day one of them went to my on-site accountant and "fessed-up" saying that the factory had never done any more business than it was doing at present, and I had been deceived with cooked books and a "salted" factory floor. Oh my!

My reaction was to ask the employee to keep quiet about talking to me so I could have the weekend to mull things over and come up with a strategy. I knew that my life had just been irreversibly changed. I could see already that the chances of losing everything I had worked for was high, including the home in which we had raised our children. I felt certain that Sanna would take these losses very hard. Most of all, however, I felt profound shame about letting down my investors. These were people who had trusted me to take care of them. I considered settling the score by taking my life, leaving enough insurance money to pay back the investors in full, and also leaving Sanna and the girls more than enough to carry on comfortably without me. I wasn't feeling sorry for myself. I just felt terribly responsible, and obliged to consider all options.

In the end, I determined that suicide would not please anyone. My investors had also become my friends, and I would only be making them feel responsible. As to my own financial assets, home, kids and marriage; I decided that the worst case scenario probably meant losing physical property, having to steer the girls to low cost public universities, and possibly losing Sanna be-

cause I wouldn't be able to deal with her extended sadness and sense of loss. After mulling that over I thought, "So what am I afraid of? I can handle that."

My next decision was to decide whether to fight or run. My advisors said that smart people, faced with massive fraud like this, simply file bankruptcy, sue everyone standing, and get on with their lives. I sensed that they were right, but it didn't feel right for me. I wanted to treat this as just a surprise setback in a course already charted, and try to overcome it. I wanted to fight to save the business, and vowed to do so at any cost. The following Monday morning I presented myself at the Westmoreland County prosecutor's office and asked to talk to a detective.

For the sake of brevity, I'll skip over the myriad details of the next ten years of my life and summarize high points:

- A surprise search of the seller's home revealed two sets of books for PERFORMAX, showing that income had been inflated ten-fold. Also discovered were books concerning four earlier frauds against banks and insurance companies, all undiscovered and successful.
- Arrest warrants resulted in immediate charges, and the case was remanded to trial a week later by Derry County Judge Gianinni. That hearing was interrupted twice; once when one of my witnesses fled the stand in tears and only returned when I chased him down ten miles away and gave him a pep talk, and again when the seller's attorney, the *consigliere* (I learned this much later) for the Pennsylvania Mafia, invited me into a private conference and made me the offer I couldn't refuse, which I refused. Unfortunately for the sellers, Gianinni was not under Mafia control so he remanded the case to trial.
- I took over operation of the factory myself, using every dollar I could borrow to try save the business. We increased sales five-fold, putting us into break-even, and increased orders eight-fold, but the banks had "redlined" us because of the bad publicity surrounding the arrest and trial, and I ran out of money to complete the save.
- My employees and I received numerous death threats, we were broken into twice, one of my machinists was kidnapped, beaten and tortured, but we could not get the Westmoreland authorities to take action to stop the abuse.
- Thirteen months after the purchase I was forced to file Chapter 11 bankruptcy to avoid an IRS seizure of our bank accounts, and six months thereafter a Pittsburgh judge threw the company into involuntary liquidation, thus killing our efforts at resuscitation.
- After eighteen months of failed efforts to get a trial started, one of my attorneys revealed the great secret kept from me, that the sellers were protected by the local Mafia, and I would never get them to trial. I confirmed that with a local newspaper reporter learning, in the process, that the *family* also controlled the district attorney and the judge assigned to the case.
- I wrote to Governor Kerry and Senator Heinz for help, sent the story to the newspapers, and finally received a call from the district attorney telling me: "Your troubles are over. We're going to make a deal." My efforts to get the sellers "off the streets" ended with an arrangement whereby Julie would get probation while Bill and two others would go to jail. Bill was the guy threatening to kill folks, so I was content with that, and the others were just expendable "schleps" I hadn't even met.
- When Julie "ratted out" her friends as part of her plea bargain, she named the Century 21 broker as a co-conspirator. The district attorney wasn't interested in her, so I sued Century 21

International for damages, initiating a ten-year litigation finally settled with my giving up in exhaustion in 1998. Though I inflicted great harm on Century 21 in the Montgomery County District Court, the Maryland Supreme Court and indirectly in the U.S. Supreme Court, I never received financial compensation for my investor's losses and my ten years of time and legal fees trying to gain recovery.

What did I learn from the PERFORMAX transaction, and how did it change my life?

- It effectively ended my investment syndication business. Because I vowed not to go back to new transactions until I could finish the PERFORMAX fight, which took ten years, I was an older and different man by the time I was free to return to the fray.
- My life plan, to turn to full-time public service at age fifty, using my accumulated wealth and business power to render me effective, was scrapped. Life had become much more complicated than previously.
- I learned, beyond any personal doubt, that I have the courage to do what I believe is right. Eighteen months of looking for bombs under my car before turning the key, and an incident of standing chin to chest with my 6'6", 360 lb. tormenter as I fired him, removed any doubts I might have had.
- I confirmed what I had long believed; that money and material comforts are not essential to my happiness or sense of self-esteem.
- I learned that I could be beaten, and beaten badly, despite my most intense efforts, and confirmed that the American legal system is not a place to seek justice. It is a place to resolve disputes short of violence, a venue that vastly favors the wealthy and powerful, but makes no pretensions whatever to providing justice.

More important than anything, however, PERFORMAX taught me to live one day at a time; to stop and smell the flowers and enjoy simple things. I put behind me forever the tendency to defer gratification, living always for tomorrow. I believe that I still live a virtuous and generous life, but it is wonderfully richer and more personally rewarding since PERFORMAX made me a pauper in fear of losing his life.

Public Service

When I speak of public service, what I mean is any activity that is done selflessly with a view toward making the world a better place for society in general. By my definition Che Guevara, who was executed as a political terrorist, is just as much a public servant as is Mother Teresa, who was memorialized as a modern day saint. Both appear to have lived and served selflessly, and through their fame, and the power of example, to have leveraged their respective missions enormously. Whether a person's public service has a good or bad result is a separate question. In my mind the virtue comes from trying to serve a higher purpose, and being willing to sacrifice one's personal comfort, safety or fortune toward that end.

As I have often said to my youngest daughter, Karen, as she struggles to shape her own public life as a publisher, and thus a leader, in her community of competitive rowers: "You can't control how people will react to what you say or do. You must have the courage to act as you feel appropriate, relying upon your own conscience for guidance, and let the chips fall where they will."

a. Federal Employees for Non-Smoker's Rights

How a reserved person like me got involved in witnessing for non-smokers rights is an unlikely story. I am not an assertive person, and I don't recall, even now, ever asking a person not to smoke in my presence. All I ever asked for was to leave the window or door open a crack.

I started smoking myself at around age 10. We kids would gather cigarette butts from the sidewalks in Alexander and, when we were in the mood for cheap thrills, would climb a tree, or sneak into an abandoned building, and smoke. Later, when I was about 12, we learned that we could roll horse manure, if it had dried in the sun for about three weeks, and smoke it. That gave us an endless supply of tobacco at zero cost. My dad was almost never without a cigar in his mouth, either smoking it or chewing it, and I knew that one day I too would be a cigar smoker.

At age eighteen I gave up cigarettes and switched to cigars, feeling they would be less harmful to my lungs. In those days we didn't worry about cancer, but we did know that smoking gave you shortness of breath, so was hard on runners. By the time I turned twenty I noticed that the cigar smoke was causing me skin problems; in fact the inside of my mouth was constantly speckled with canker sores. So I gave up smoking altogether.

During my tour in Tegucigalpa, in 1976, I had a boss who was addicted to cigars. Where most of the men in the Latin America Bureau liked to light up cigars during formal business meetings, filling the room so full of smoke you could barely see across it, Marty was never without his cigar. I had long since grown accustomed to the smoky meetings, and accepted that about once a week I'd get a mouth full of canker sores for a few days. Now, with Marty in my life, I was never without the sores. One day I decided to speak out, so as Marty and I talked in his office, I told him that the smoke caused sores to grow in my mouth and, even as I opened his door, I asked would he mind if I propped the door open. He waited a minute, then got up and closed the door. I then opened his window a few inches, he waited a minute, then got up and closed it. He had pushed me too far, and I made a mental note to rectify this sort of abuse for everyone.

Six months later I found myself back in the U.S., having resigned the foreign service, and as soon as I settled my work situation I resolved to dedicate part time to the smoking issue. I was reasonably certain, by then, that passive smoke was harmful to all people, I knew that it went on everywhere in the State Department and USAID workplaces, and I knew that it was impossible to work in these organizations without being subjected to passive smoke. There were a handful of people in USAID who occasionally spoke up in meetings, asking that smokers stay on one side of the room, or that the door be propped open to allow the smoke to escape. They were never given any consideration. In fact, they were regarded as "fussy old ladies" and laughed at and about. I didn't want to take on the system in that way. I didn't want my professional effectiveness compromised.

I decided that my approach should be to harness the legal system to do the "heavy lifting" for me. It would be like a business deal. I would be the plaintiff in a legal action, and the government would be the defendant, and we'd slug it out in court. Nothing personal. Few of my colleagues would even know what I was doing, and they could smoke their brains out until the day

that the law told them to stop. It seemed simple enough, so I got on the telephone to seek an attorney.

First I called Ralph Nader, who at that point had made himself famous suing the car manufacturers. He blew me off. Then I called Georgetown Law Center, where a fellow named Nick Banzhoff had been involved in suing the airlines to provide a small no smoking section on domestic flights. He told me it was a dumb idea. Then I called George Washington University Law School and was blown off again. After all that I was incensed so I called Banzhoff back and told him I was going forward with or without support, and did he know any attorney in town who might take such a suit for pay. He recommended Joel Josephs, a former law student of his.

When I met with Joel I was immediately “put off” by his demeanor. A brand new law school graduate, he was entirely too eager, and I sensed that he was also weak and indecisive. I told him that I believed that I have a “common law” right to a safe and healthful workplace, that I could demonstrate that passive smoke is harmful to my health, and I could prove that my workplace is permeated with passive smoke all day long. He eagerly agreed to take my suit, so I asked him his price. He replied: “\$150?” I said: “\$150! Are you kidding? This suit will take several years to litigate, and will have to go to the Supreme Court.” Joel then said: “\$1,500?” I said: “Please, Joel, we’ll need expert testimony, there will be multiple briefs.” Joel just looked at me helplessly. So I said: “Look. Let’s do it this way. I’ll write you a check for \$150 today and you can start on our complaint. In the next few days I’ll set up a national organization for fundraising, and as the money comes in we’ll pay you for your time. We’ll do our best to raise money, and you’ll work for whatever we can raise.”

Joel grinned nervously and we shook hands on it.

That afternoon, upon returning to the State Department headquarters building where I worked, I went to the cafeteria to think about what to do next. I really had no idea. As I sat at one of the tables drinking coffee I noted that over my head hung a small sign that read: “No smoking.” I wondered to myself how that had come to be placed there, noting that one small section of the massive cafeteria was thus demarcated. I walked back to the kitchen and inquired. The answer was: “Some jerk made us do that. I think his name is Alli.”

I had no other leads, and it wasn’t yet time to close shop for the day, so I went to the USAID phone book, found a William Alli, and called. He warily acknowledged being the guy behind the signs, so I told him I had plans to dramatically curtail smoking in the entire federal government, and would he join me in the cafeteria to talk about it. We met five minutes later under the same sign.

Bill was a wimpy looking guy, but his appearance was deceptive. He had been a Marine in Korea, loved a good fight, and when I explained that I planned to sue the government to provide me with a safe and healthful workplace his eyes began to shine mischievously and he asked: “Is that legal?” As we got further into the subject of organizing, he offered. “Ray, I’ve already got an organization with a letterhead and a post office box. We are called Federal Employees for Non Smoker’s Rights; FENSr for short.” I asked to see and he produced a bargain basement looking letterhead printed in green ink, with a German eagle for a logo. Gulp! Not what I would have

chosen, but it was free, and ready to use. I asked Bill how many people were in his organization, and he replied: "What do you mean?" I asked: "How many people can you get \$50 from?" He replied by looking thoughtful, raising fingers one at a time and saying: "Well, there's me, Ray and Frank. Three!" he concluded. I thought I'd better rephrase the question because I didn't like the answer I had just heard so I asked: "Fine, Bill, so how many people can you get to come to a rally." His answer, I figured, would surely number in the hundreds. Bill looked thoughtful, and once again began counting on his fingers, finally answering: "Twelve! I can count on twelve!" OK, I said. Let's do it.

During the next three days, in about eight hours of my time and perhaps five of his, we worked a miracle that still amazes me today, as I reflect. I felt that we needed to get into the newspapers if we were ever to grow beyond a group of twelve, and raise the money to pay for my lawsuit, and I hadn't a clue how to accomplish that. I knew that the President held press conferences from time to time, and I wanted to do the same thing. We agreed that we'd never be able to get the press to come to us, so we needed to go to them. In D.C., we reasoned, they are in two places to find the local press corps: Capitol Hill and the White House. We hadn't a clue how to get into the White House, but Capitol Hill seemed a possibility. Who did we know who would help us hold a press conference on Capitol Hill?

I purchased a Congressional Directory from the State Department book store, and we turned pages. Bill found a Congressman from Massachusetts, a Jesuit priest who taught at Georgetown University, Father James Drinan. He said that he believed that Drinan had spoken out about the evils of smoking. So I gave it a shot. I returned to my office (our meetings were always in the cafeteria), dialed Drinan's office, got a secretary on the line, asked her to transfer me to the administrative assistant and waited. I knew that getting the Congressman on the line was not realistic, but that his primary staffer, the administrative assistant, would probably take a call. I also knew that the assistant would be a "hard nosed," busy professional, and that I'd have to catch his interest immediately or I'd be listening to a dial tone.

A hard, Boston Irish voice came on the line: "Yeah!" I lunged for the close: "How would the Congressman like to get on national television giving his views on passive smoking?" I asked. The voice hesitated about five seconds, then said: "You kidding?" "No sir!" I replied. "I can arrange that." The voice quickly responded: "What do I have to do?" It almost sounded like "Whom do I have to kill?" I replied: "You have to get me a room suitable for a press conference in the Rayburn Office Building on Thursday morning at 10:00 a.m." "That's easy! he replied. "Who are you anyway?"

After calming the assistant's beating heart, and confirming our room reservation and the Congressman's willingness to speak from a text we would prepare, I returned to my meeting with Bill to discuss next steps. We reasoned that some sort of press release would be good to help organize our thoughts, make sure that everyone got the quotes right, and also to give advance notice of our event. How else would anyone know that we were holding a press conference if we didn't tell them? So we cooked up my first ever press release, sitting in the State Department cafeteria. I was quoted making angry, warlike statements, Bill was cast as the philosopher, quoting the Greeks, we threw in some science quotes from a prominent physician friend, Ray Ravenholt, whom we were sure would join us, and then we prepared some material referring to the

Congressman without quoting him. By 5:00 Wednesday night we were happy with it, so I hiked downtown to the National Press Building, took the elevator to the tenth floor, and circled every floor going down, sliding our press release under about 75 press office doors.

Thursday morning I drove to Capitol Hill, asking Sanna to accompany me because I didn't know what I was getting into, and wanted back-up support. I wasn't completely sure I'd be allowed into the building, and I had no idea if anyone would come to hear us. We walked into the room we had reserved a half-hour early, and the scene set my heart racing. There were TV monitors everywhere, and probably fifty reporters and photographers milling about. I had made the arrangement for Thursday morning because (1) I'd heard that it was the slowest news day of the week and (2) a morning conference would give time for the reporters and TV editors to get copy ready for the evening deadlines. Even so, I was amazed.

I made myself busy trying to look like I knew what I was doing. Sanna and I found folding chairs and a podium in a closet so arranged a sort of stage for the speakers, and I proceeded to hand out more press releases to anyone interested. Then Bill Alli showed up with a group of a half-dozen Indians dressed in all white clothing and turbans. Gulp! Some of FENSR's twelve members, I gathered. At one minute before starting time a fellow with a priest's collar appeared in the doorway with a young man at his side holding onto a briefcase. I assumed that it was Congressman Drinan so met him, handed him his script, and as I led him to his chair I urged him to hold his remarks to three minutes, and to stick to the script. He seemed happy for the structure.

That night our story was on CBS, NBC and ABC news, in all cases as the lead story. The Congressman and I each got about thirty seconds air time, and the analysis comprised another minute. Two weeks later we had letters and donations from 2,200 strangers from around the country.

The lawsuit moved slowly, as I had assumed it would, taking three years to reach a final decision in the U.S. Supreme Court. Along the way we took every opportunity to get into the papers with our story. One of our defendants, the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, Joe Califano, was a reformed smoker and he took our demands to heart and put them into effect immediately in HEW by executive order. We demanded that the current policy that allowed smoking everywhere except where signs say "Don't Smoke" be reversed to allowing smoking nowhere except where signs say "Smoking Permitted" and in such case there should be special ventilation to contain the smoke so that it doesn't affect the air elsewhere. The President's domestic policy staff invited us to a meeting in the White House where we were asked to remove Carter and Mondale as defendants, pleading that it was unfair since they didn't smoke and agreed with our cause. We replied, "Fine. All they have to do to be removed as defendants is put our demands into effect by executive order." The staffers protested, saying that they had looked into that and determined it would be too costly to rework the ventilation systems in the thousands of federal buildings.

Along the way I felt some pressure from my co-workers, but not enough to interfere with my professional effectiveness. The smokers who approached seemed to either fear or despise me, many non smokers thanked me for my work, and the folks at the Tobacco Association referred to me as a communist and a "nut".

At the end of the process we were defeated by the legal system. Judge Richey, who later became famous for his Watergate decisions, dismissed our claims, comparing them to earlier unsuccessful noise pollution lawsuits to restrict fans use of kazoos in football stadiums. We ridiculed him in our press release following his decision, referring to him as: “Judge Charles R. (three packs a day) Richey, known for his frequent smoke breaks ...” In the U.S. Court of Appeals we got a three judge panel that listened to the Justice Department lawyer argue that there is no proof that smoking is harmful to health then called her to the bench and chastised her for her facetious arguments, and subsequently called our attorney forward saying, paraphrasing: “Sorry fellows. You have a good cause, but it is social change you seek and this bench doesn’t want to rule. Take it to the state legislatures and get laws passed.” The U.S. Supreme Court concurred with them.

Whatever came of this, my first large-scale venture in public service? Well, I believe that with all the publicity we generated we were major players in bringing about the social and legal changes that have resulted with respect to public smoking. Indeed, it has taken state and municipal laws to bring about the changes accomplished, and FENSR people played a role in that process all over the nation. Result: I’m pleased with what was accomplished and proud to have been involved.

2. Lafayette Federal Credit Union

Public service in a field where one already has interest and experience has the greatest chance of being effective, and my five-year involvement with Lafayette Federal Credit Union (LFCU) is a good example. From my first day on the Board of Directors of LFCU I was able to contribute, and by the time I departed I had, through my efforts to awake this near comatose institution, created a growing, snarling financial service company with vastly improved capabilities to serve its membership. Along the way, however, it was “touch and go.”

I showed up at my first meeting the only newly elected director on a board of nine veteran members from USAID, Export Import Bank, Small Business Administration and Peace Corps. All were nice people infused with various degrees of self-important feelings about their roles, most of them seeming to believe that their primary concern should be protecting the assets of the fifty plus year-old institution from reckless management while delivering small denomination personal loans to the membership. No one had any notion of serving the membership more broadly, and there was absolutely no interest in changing the way things had been done for decades.

Following the annual membership meeting at which I had been elected to the board, we newly elected directors huddled for a five minute meeting where I was elected treasurer. Thus I prepared for the first monthly directors’ meeting by reading the credit union’s financials. I noted that member borrowing was very low, and because of this over half of LFCU’s assets were placed in large denomination (jumbo) savings certificates in local savings and loans, all of them at four-year terms and earning 7 percent. This I found strange given that inflation at the time was rising fast, already being near 7 percent, and also given that member borrowings at the time were earning around 12 percent. At the meeting I asked the manager, who sat next to the chairman instructing him as to what to do and also answering most questions directed to the chair,

about this. Why was he placing LFCU funds in long-term CDs at 7 percent when it seemed likely that America was in for a bout of inflation. He replied, very curtly, that it was LFCU policy to do this. I got the impression that the question was not appreciated, and also that my fellow board members were embarrassed by my affront to the man in charge.

A month later we held the second LFCU board meeting of my tenure, I noted in preparing that circumstances still seemed to favor my suspicion that inflation would continue, so I asked the question again. This time the manager was ready for it, and slammed me hard. I followed his dismissal with another question, asking if there would be penalties to pay were LFCU to borrow its money out of these CDs and reinvest it short-term at rates currently 2 percent higher than we were earning. The manager answered with a scathing lecture about credit union culture, the wickedness of disintermediation (a fancy word for moving funds from one institution to another to get the highest possible return), and the need for me to “learn how the game is played.” My colleague board members were all embarrassed for me, and about half seemed angry as well.

I invested some time between the second and third board meetings to talk to the fellow board members I judged most likely to understand economics, and attempted to win them over to my viewpoint that current economic circumstances (increasing inflation) suggested a strategy of “going short-term” with our investments even as we worked to increase our member borrowing. When the next meeting rolled around, I raised the question again, and called for a vote. The manager and several of the long-time board members were shocked at the request, but it was my right as a director to do so. I won the ballot by a margin of one. LFCU would never be the same again.

Two important things came out of that crucial vote. First, I was authorized to borrow out of the CDs paying 7 percent and put the funds into short-term notes. Over the next three years, as inflation soared into double digits, the rates we earned on that money rose to as high as 15 percent. LFCU made a killing, and salted away over \$500,000 in excess reserves to invest in institutional development. The second critical result was that control of the institution began to shift from the entrenched management to the board. I sensed it happening, knew that three to five of the directors were hostile to change, and at the fourth meeting called for a vote on a plan for interim meetings of the LFCU executive committee at the mid-point between the monthly meetings. This would give the president, vice president, secretary and treasurer a chance to discuss credit union business in depth, and thus act more knowledgeably at the monthly meetings. These leaders comprised the bulk of the votes I had been able to influence. I further proposed that the interim meeting be held over lunch at one local restaurant or another so that it would be less intrusive on people’s work time.

You would have thought I proposed a “stick-up” from the way the members reacted. Several of the old-timers looked at me like they’d caught me stealing cookies, and told me flatly and coldly that there would be no squandering credit union resources on fancy lunches on their watch. I protested, claiming that it was a normal accommodation to directors in business, and then took the offensive, insisting that LFCU must stop acting like a club and play by the same rules all successful businesses play by. It was tense and the outcome of the vote was unclear. When the dust cleared, I had won again by a single vote, and I knew whom I needed to weed from that board if I was to accomplish any reasonable reforms.

Over the next several years LFCU blossomed as never before. The interim executive committee meetings helped the leadership to understand better what was going on, and after a time the manager, who also attended, began to offer helpful suggestions to balance his continuing objections about change. We began to look at a range of new services to members, and to make that kind of analysis possible for part-time directors, I proposed semi-annual retreats at pleasant hotels in the region, wives included. This sparked another nasty fight in committee, and once again I won by a single vote. At each of these meetings we would review another new service, bringing in experts to teach us at a Friday night session and again on Saturday morning, then by Saturday afternoon we were ready to vote. In this way we embarked, over the next several years, on programs in home mortgages, second trusts, credit cards, checking accounts, high-rate CDs and so on. Every service we offered was successful and “in the black” within a year, and by the fifth year of my tenure we had tripled our asset base from \$15 million to \$45 million, our loan-to-share ratio was up from 50 percent to 80 percent, we had salted away large excess reserves, and we paid higher member dividends than ever before.

One of the last innovations I promoted at LFCU was to reform the employee pension system. They had a plan much like the old federal government plan: it wasn't portable, it took a long time to be vested, and for those few who worked long enough to enjoy its fruits, the pay-out was poor. We changed that, taking the best aspects of private retirement plans into a package I would have liked to enjoy myself including portability and substantial employer contributions into employee savings plans. As a result of this new system, LFCU has secured a loyal staff that is the envy of many credit unions, and all are looking forward to retirement with substantially higher annuities than their civil service counterparts.

My tenure at LFCU ended on a sad note. By 1985 there were no longer any members on the board who were afraid of change, and I was promoting a move into development of a service company to offer members opportunities to purchase stocks, automobiles, insurance and other products at a discount through their friendly credit union. America's banks had recently moved in this direction, which promised to make it harder for credit unions to compete for customers unless we did the same. I believed that the best way to handle this would be to set-up an area-wide Credit Union Financial Services Association (CUFSA), and join all of the local credit unions into one such program. I structured such an organization to benefit everyone, however putting LFCU in a promoter role so that it would benefit a bit more than others, and put the whole thing into a non-profit corporation that I would run for the member credit unions.

When the transaction had been sufficiently studied and vetted with credit union leadership in Washington, D.C. and in Madison, Wisconsin (headquarters for Credit Union National Association), I announced to LFCU's board that I wanted to propose it at our next retreat, and that I would resign the board beforehand so as not to influence the vote. I resigned, made my presentation, and with me absent LFCU conducted the first vote to go against me since I joined the board.

I was crestfallen, but was so busy with Equity Fund Group at that time I didn't pause to mourn my loss. Later, several of my colleague directors set up partial and very poor imitations of what I proposed, putting themselves in charge. I don't know how they have done, but LFCU has been a strong and dynamic institution ever since.

3. Influencing Public Opinion

A public service activity in which I have engaged consistently since my sophomore year in college is political opinion writing. It is a variation of that approach to service I referred to earlier as writing and shaping ideas; a sort of “backyard philosopher” version. Though I don’t feel intellectually equipped to write full-blown treatises on political thought and philosophy, the occasional irritable outburst is well within my capacity and, in an incremental sort of way, can help to shape public perceptions over time.

My first such effort, I recall, was a short op-ed piece I did for the local daily newspaper where I spent my first two years of higher education, Jamestown, North Dakota. President Kennedy was attempting to summon the courage to face down the Russians over missiles in Cuba, and I fired-off a zinger titled: “The Monroe Mockery” in which I took the President to task for failing to live up to the vaunted aspirations of an earlier President’s so-called Monroe Doctrine. I felt good about having been given an audience of thousands for my political analysis, and shortly thereafter President Kennedy did force the Russians to withdraw the missiles. Not bad work for a college sophomore, I might say, but then I’m not sure that the President, or any of his insider advisors, read our local paper.

Over the years I have followed suit, always trying to keep apprised of social and political developments, to understand them within a framework for virtuous living, and to take every opportunity to share my outlook with anyone within my sphere of influence. Thanks to Professor Neifert’s advanced writing seminar, that occasionally included the readership of whatever local or national newspaper I thought would take an interest.

I recall a poignant such experience in the harsh D.C. summer and winter of 1972. A nice looking gentleman about fifty years of age, and his wife, took up positions outside the State Department’s diplomatic entrance, directly under the seventh floor window of Secretary William Rogers. They stood silently all through the sweltering month of July, holding a sign that read: “Help us free our children from the Bulgarian kidnappers.” I took note of them several times a day, as I went in and out of the diplomatic entrance, but did not stop to inquire. There were, after all, always demonstrators in D.C.

The couple remained in their place during August, September, through the fall, and on into what proved to be a very cold winter. They never spoke, rarely did anyone ever stop to talk with them; they just stood there, now bundled-up in heavy coats with ruddy cheeks and frozen breath, looking somehow enormously simple and dignified in their act of witnessing.

On December 23, about 3:00 in the afternoon, my resolve to ignore them broke, and I stopped to talk. Goodness, what a sad tale! It seems that in 1965 husband and wife had resolved to get out of Communist Bulgaria and start life anew in America, so they left their two young daughters with his parents, purchased a round-trip cruise to Turkey, and “jumped ship” while in Bucharest. The American Embassy refused to give them asylum, so they finagled ship passage to Algeria, and there found refuge for two years while negotiating for asylum in the U.S.

When the U.S. finally agreed to admit them they moved to a Bulgarian immigrant community in Chicago, took factory jobs, learned English, saved their money, and waited out the five year residency requirement for citizenship. In June of 1972 they were sworn-in as full fledged Americans, whereupon they quit their jobs, gathered their belongings and savings, and traveled to the corner of 22nd and D in Washington, D.C. to demand help getting their children back.

They told me they had not imagined that the Government of Bulgaria would refuse to let their children join them, and that they could not rest until the family was back together. The girls, now twelve and nine, were safe with the grandparents, but the grandparents felt too old to raise children and everyone wanted the family together. I couldn't maintain my focus on my own problems and challenges in the face of this heart rending story. I shook the man's hand, thanked him for sharing, and told him I'd do what I could to bring the power of the press to his aid. I had no idea how to do that, and he probably had no expectations.

Before going home that evening I called William Rasberry, my favorite columnist for the Washington Post, to pitch the story. He was polite but told me: "Great story, but not what I do." I then called George Will, who wrote a lot about East-West politics, and he rudely replied: "I don't get my column ideas from callers, thank you." Then I thought: "TV. This is a perfect piece for the 7:00 news on Christmas Eve." So I called Channel 7, got whomever answered the phone, framed this two minute spot for Christmas Eve, and received a positive response. Thinking that it couldn't possibly be so easy, I ran out to the corner to tell my new friends to prepare to be interviewed by a TV crew the next day.

The TV crew didn't come, and the couple remained at their post through the holidays. To my shock and joy on New Year's Eve, as I busied around our house preparing for the festivities, Sanna screamed: "Ray, come quickly! Those people who lost their children are on the news." Indeed, Channel 7 had come through, and the treatment was compelling.

I never saw the couple on the street after that, several weeks went by, then one day as I was passing through the diplomatic lobby I saw the husband walking along side Secretary Rogers, trailed by several Secret Service agents. I pushed through and tapped my friend on the shoulder. He turned, recognized me, and with a conspiratorial look on his face smiled ever so slightly and whispered: "They are offering to send us to Bulgaria to meet the kids and see if they want to come to America. I'm holding out for the kids to be sent here to decide. The Communists have had seven years to brainwash my girls and I need time to get reacquainted." Secretary Rogers glanced irritably at me, the Secret Service agents seemed surprised that the man would know anyone in the building, and my friend turned back to his host as they continued walking toward the Secretary's private elevator. A few weeks later I saw a small item in the Washington Post telling of the family's reunion and I thought: "If I never accomplish another good thing working with the press as long as I live, I'm satisfied."

There have been many causes over the years, usually the grand sort of initiatives that appeal to men of ideas. I find it easier to get excited about ideas than specific situations. A piece I wrote for the two D.C. newspapers in the early 1990s, exposing the hidden \$1 million parking subsidy given to high level State Department and USAID employees, a subsidy that rises to \$100 million annually when extrapolated to the entire federal government, got attention on Capitol Hill. Both

the House and the Senate, within weeks, went to work on legislation to end this subsidy, then while the bills were in conference someone realized that passing such a bill might raise questions about similar hidden subsidies given to the members and senior staffers on Capitol Hill, so the bills died stillborn.

Trying to influence public opinion and do good by writing for publication is mostly thankless work. It is a distraction from normal remunerative activities, you offend at least as many people as you please, and most of your work never gets into print anywhere. I remind myself, as I labor over this editorial or that, of the many letters for publication that bounced around between Boston, New York, Philadelphia and several small towns in Virginia awhile back. These, too, were written by solitary men, many virtually unheard of in their time, but eventually they impacted others, the ideas spread, and our own American Republic was their legacy.

Living Life For A Higher Purpose

“So am I a fool or a genius?” I like to teasingly ask whomever is in earshot when I’m embarked on my venture of the moment. It’s a joke, but it’s also a serious question. I really have no idea how I will be remembered a few years down the road. I’m not certain what my friends would say right now. I think that with our society being the way it is, it probably depends upon whether I die rich or poor. People spin these things as they will, and if I leave my children wealthy they will probably feel grateful and give my life a positive spin. Or course I could also get lucky, like an earlier idealist I’ve read about. He achieved no particular status in life, and at an early age he was hung for being a snitch. I often wonder if Nathan Hale pondered the worthiness of his life in the moments before they pulled the scaffold out from under him.

I think that it is ok to joke about these concerns, but they shouldn’t rise any higher than that. We can’t know how others will regard us, and we can do very little to influence such opinions over the long-run. All we can do is live our lives from day to day in the best way we know how. Those with lots of talent will make a larger impact, for the most part, and there is nothing we can do about that. All each of us can do is our best.

For steering the course, however, I think we can make a choice. We can take the easy road, going where life leads us, living for the moment, and disappear into nothingness. The expression that describes this choice is: “If you don’t know where you are going, any road will get you there.”

Alternatively, all of us have the choice of setting our own course; charting our lives by the voice we all have within. Aristotle called this voice (awareness) natural law. Christians call it conscience. Whatever label you are comfortable with, it is the guidance that helps us all to realize our potential as humans, and to achieve our potential as a society. I feel lucky to have enjoyed an active relationship with this internal guidance system, and the longer I live the more certain I am of its value. I don’t deny being confused, daily, by the dissonance of pressures to perhaps earn more money than I need, to seek ever more security, or to attempt to elevate myself in the eyes of my peers. That admitted, I can’t really represent myself as a role model. I guess what I want to say to my daughters, the intended readers of this tome, is that the little voice has never failed me, I believe it is the divine guidance system which makes sense of the lives of us all, and

I hope that you both find within yourselves the quiet spaces for listening and the courage to act according to its guidance.