

Some Things Better Left Unsaid

I was conceived on Sept 19th, 1939 (my mother was a compulsive diarist). I was born on June 19, 1940 in William Jennings Bryan's house, Fairview, in Lincoln, Nebraska.¹ I assimilated all of Bryan's opinions unconsciously from my environment—all, that is, except his religious beliefs.

On my mother's side I am German and English, though we were told all our lives that we were only English, the family not wanting to admit to German ancestry during the two World Wars. On my father's side I am Scots-Irish (Ulster Scots), the earliest ancestor to live in the USA being Richard Glass who immigrated at Boston sometime in the first two decades of the 1700s. My father's line goes all the way back to Henry I of England, William the Conqueror, and

Charlemagne. (When I proudly announced this fact to Bob Stake who turned me on the genealogy forty years ago, he remarked, "How nice; half of the people I know are descendants of Charlemagne.") The Glasses moved steadily west through Vermont, New York, Michigan, and after the Civil War, to Nebraska. I'm descended from farmers, railroad men, and house painters. My father graduated from the 8th grade. He was a printer at the *Lincoln Journal* newspaper, and his father-in-law was foreman of the press room. Dad was a loyal member of the International Typographical Union. He struck against the arrival of computers in the composing room in the early 1960s and never worked another day thereafter as a printer. When he officially retired, the ITU pension fund, to which he had contributed since age 16 years, was broke. He gave me my cynical view on life, my suspicion of rich people, \$75,000 when he died in 1994, and many painful memories.

I was my mother's prize. My mother worshipped me (as a result of guilt feelings after failing in several abortion attempts); my father thought I would one day be a bum. It is a family constellation much to be wished; it leaves a son, at least, with an obsession to accomplish something to prove the father wrong and with the confidence from the mother that he can accomplish anything. It's a prescription for success—as long as anxiety doesn't take him down.



Fairview, home of William Jennings Bryan from 1900-1925. Converted to a hospital after 1925.

¹ William Jennings Bryan (March 19, 1860 – July 26, 1925) was an American politician . He was the dominant figure in the liberal wing of the Democrat Party. He was thrice a candidate for President (1896, 1900 and 1908). He was Secretary of State under Woodrow Wilson, 1913-1916. Bryan was a devout Presbyterian, a supporter of popular democracy, an enemy of the gold standard, banks, and railroads. He was a peace advocate, a prohibitionist, and an opponent of Darwinism on religious grounds.

My mother graduated from high school and was an accomplished musician. She played 2nd chair violin in her high school orchestra, which won a national competition at the University of Iowa in 1928.

Although as a child I could do no wrong in her eyes, I disappointed her mightily by dropping interest in a succession of musical instruments: piano, clarinet, violin. Although not devoid of talent, I quickly realized that in Nebraska, the boys who played instruments never seemed to have dates with girls.

Junior high and high school were devoted entirely to sports and girls. Football, basketball, track & field, and baseball all summer. My early childhood home contained only two books: The Bible and *The Sugar Creek Gang in School*, which was likely an unreturned library book. (The Wikipedia says that the Sugar Creek Gang series of children's books "chronicles adventure situations told from a faith-based didactic perspective.") There was just enough money for food and coal; books would have been out of the question. The only book I read (repeatedly) between ages 12 and 16 was *The Bob Mathias Story*. Jim Coleman was studying the American Adolescent in the 1950s. I could have saved him a lot of time and effort if he had simply given me a call. He concluded that the prestigious adolescent male in America was athletic and intelligent but not studious. Right. I refused to do homework, was expelled from a couple of classes for backtalk, and graduated 200th in a class of 220. But each year I would pick one class (Geometry as a Sophomore, Physiology as a Junior, Chemistry as a Senior) and knock the top out of the curve, just to show them I could do it if I really wanted to, but I didn't want to.

As for religious entanglements, I was saved for Jesus at age 10 by my grandmother's brother, a traveling evangelist based in Los Angeles and associate of Robert Schuler of Crystal Cathedral fame. He extorted a pledge from me to join his ministry after high school. I lived in dread of fulfilling that promise for the next six years until I discovered in a used book store the atheistic writings of the French Enlightenment philosophers—Baron d'Holbach was far and away the most powerful writer. Atheism became my religion and the promise to Uncle Everett became meaningless. My only brush with religion since was conversion to Judaism in 1993 on the occasion of marriage to my wife Sandy. Reform Judaism has everything a person could wish: an inventive cuisine, a 5000 year moral-ethical system, and no real theology.

I learned a great deal in high school: how to survive in a bureaucracy, that all grownups do not necessarily deserve the same degree of respect, that America is the land of second chances...oh, and that almost everything you learn in K-12 is irrelevant to life after school. Some call this The Hidden Curriculum, but I hardly see anything hidden about it; it reveals itself readily to anyone who looks.

I went to college primarily because of an aversion to manual labor. The only college I knew about was in my neighborhood: Nebraska Wesleyan University. I applied, they gave me a test...the PSAT I now know, and on the basis of that score gave me a scholarship that paid most of the tuition. All that I missed by blowing off high school was remedied in two years by the wonderful, dedicated, hard-working



Paul Heinrich Dietrich (Baron d'Holbach)

professors at Wesleyan. The foreign language I never learned in high school—didn't even enroll after having dropped Latin within a week—became the German that I acquired well enough for a major ("Hauptwerk") under the tutelage of Professors Keller and Pfeiler. The math that I refused to learn at Lincoln Northeast High School was taught to me in 18 weeks by the meticulous pedagogue, Professor Wampler. When I vouchsafed to my Wesleyan philosophy Professor Rosentrater (a WW I hero who nearly became the subject of a movie the honor of which went to the famous Sergeant York), he smiled and told me that I would have to wait. I was too eager for success to be a philosopher.

I transferred to the University of Nebraska in my hometown for my Junior year and finished a BA in German and Mathematics in three semesters. I was married, supported by my wife, and did janitorial work at night. Consequently, I was primed for a new job when I ran into a high school friend crossing campus one day who told me that there was a computer programming job in the Ed Psych dept with a professor named Stake. I went quickly to the department office and introduced myself as a computer programmer. It was 1960, and few people knew what a computer programmer was, and I was certainly not one. But I became one in about a week.

(Subtext: The subjects you learn in high school are not important; career counseling is a waste of time, most paths are opened purely by chance; useful knowledge is so specific that trying to teach it in school years in advance of its use is pointless. I was taught to work hot metal at a forge in the manner of a blacksmith in junior high school in 1953. Moreover, the things you really need to know—about money, nutrition, your legal rights, sex, how politicians really do their business, how to avoid military service, what people who don't look like you are really like, how to watch television, how to play a sport that will last a lifetime—are never taught in school; and not only are they never taught, but they couldn't be taught because teaching them would upset too many vested interests and parental prejudices; as a result, the high-school curriculum is of necessity useless to life as an adult. Surviving it is simply a question of tolerance and conformity. Voila: a philosophy of education.)

Working for Bob Stake led to graduate school—as told in *Ghosts and Reminiscences* (<http://www.gvglass.info/papers/ghosts.html>)—which led to my first real job with Stake at University of Illinois, which eventually led to University of Colorado Boulder. In 1980 I took up tennis by accident. In the manner of all Type A personalities, I went crazy for the sport and moved to Arizona in 1986 so that by traveling back and forth between Colorado and Arizona I could play 12 months out of the year.

Although these notes may seem personal and revealing in some ways, they truly are not. They say nothing about my three marriages, countless years in therapy, my children, my grandchildren, and the other most important things in my life.



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