

28th Storyworth: What Were Your Favorite Subjects In High School?

After having failed 9th grade, some of what you are about to read will seem a bit odd and illogical. Thanks, Mr. Spock, but it is nonetheless true. I had failed Algebra in the first go round, but I'd failed most of my subjects. I was rebelling against being forced to take what I considered to be one of three dead languages; Spanish (what did I know?! ;-), Latin and French. I was such a moron that it NEVER occurred to me that Montreal spoke French, nor that much of NYC soon would speak Spanish. Had they offered German, Russian or Japanese, I might have at least tried ;-)

Anyway, to say I was unmotivated would be an understatement of epic proportions. I had wanted to take shop, but I was on the AP track, and there was no room for actually doing something fun ;-). But when I had to repeat, I was again ASSUMED to be a person of little interest to the academic world, so they let me take shop, and as you might have read elsewhere, my first project I built a model airplane which did aerobatics then came back to me. And I got a visit from a Guidance Counsellor for whom that did not compute. So he arranged that I could omit a foreign language in favor of my favorite subject when I repeated 9th grade.

At the HS level there was no SHOP option – that was in the BOCES program which was another campus and the whole lot. The nearest thing to it was “Mechanical Drawing”, a sort of pre-cursor to a career as a draftsman or such. But I was extremely fortunate that I had two highly influential teachers that year; Gordon Bainbridge and Al Finck, who taught Mech Dwg and World History respectively. The WH was an AP course, as were most of the rest of my classes like math. On that subject, recall that I tuned out as a C- student, so was rudely awakened in Senior Year to be TOLD I would be one of the school's four competitors in the National Math Contest, based on my 719 Math SAT score, a 99th percentile result, which was accepted by Clarkson, who could not have cared less if I even COULD speak English.

Oddly, I also took well to English, although not really English Literature. I could not have cared less who Chaucer or Byron were, nor why they mattered; but I WAS interested in poetry, which came from nowhere and remains a “bent” to this day. Mind, not in the classical sense, but more in the music spoof lyrics sense, so they HAD to rhyme and fit a song tune. I also was by then also noticing girls, and so I wrote some love poems which were actually published in the school's newsletter, so I participated with that as well. I am afraid my memory banks have long since failed to recall much about them, but they seemed pretty good at the time ;-)

And as an aside, on that subject, I have NEVER been a fan of Shakespeare, although I am well aware of the philosophies behind many of his works, which most of you know span both history and romance, as well as societal mores. I simply could never get past his word choices, although I DO realize I am just as broad spectrum as he ever was. Mine, however, are more familiar to the present. But you can see that SOMETHING rubbed off in the way of authorship, whether purposely or not by my teachers ;-)

Anyway, back to the subjects at the heart of this treatise (see? ;-). Al Vinck was NOT the favorite among the parents of his students, not least because he tended to remove most of the kids' rosy glasses through which their histories had been portrayed previous to him. He was, along with my Mom's insistence that “as long as you are in my house you will go to my church”, even as Al was telling us many of the not so niceties of the Catholic Church's exercise of power, which sadly continues even to this day, making even the rulings by the supposed “reformer” Pope Francis still seem draconian to me, and which caused me to leave my catholic upbringing terminally. The problem, as with many bureaucracies, is he isn't alone and has precedents he must consider. But I reject ALL formal religions for the same reasons, because MEN have agendas, and NOBODY REALLY has any clue what god herself actually wants, based on all the empirical evidence around us.

That might make my participation with Dawn's Whitelaw Presbyterian seem a paradox, until you realize I do so because SHE wants to be a functionary there, and I want only to support HER. Pretty simple distinction, but it also means I don't do ANYTHING without integrity, which means the best job I know how.

But back to the treatise at hand. Al Vinck was my first exposure to "tell it like it really is", which I have found to be an essential ingredient in my career as an Engineer and Manager. If you can't do that first, you will be hard pressed to automate any process, because you will never understand WHY it works as it does. So I feel my career, and my life, have been substantially affected by his tutelage. I was also affected by a Math Teacher, Bob Bragg, who happened also to be the football and baseball coach, as I played the latter of those, winning both JV and Varsity letters in the sport, although my efforts were more as a line coach than an active player. I guess between those two men, my model for INTEGRITY was pretty well established.

Mr Bainbridge was my favorite character in HS. He was an airplane enthusiast, an artist, and a true mentor. I was fortunate enough to have him as a teacher for all three years at FDR HS. The first year was simply mechanical drawing, something I use to this day. But he also taught me to think three dimensionally, which has allowed me to draw things like a freehand exploded view of the mounting and assembly of my pool enclosure when I sought permit in Liverpool and their town engineer could not imagine how it would work. When he showed up for final inspection afterwards, he STILL had not realized it was a high R value balloon because it was double walled polyethylene sheeting, and he thought sure it would be terrible for energy efficiency, and would collapse under snow loads. Maybe HE did ;-)

But it turned out that engineers really get very little done themselves. They accomplish through the efforts of others. But those efforts depend upon clear instructions they can follow if we were to achieve my visions, some of which were entirely new concepts. Mr Bainbridge taught me how to achieve things like that, and he was a true artist. I am sad to report that I no longer have the two pieces of artwork he helped me create by scalar drawing from model airplane artwork which I made poster size; a B-17 model of the Memphis Belle, and a Fokker Dreidecker, a three wing fighter plane from WWI, having had them stolen by a former landlord whose integrity was simply non-existent, when he stole my possessions in his barn I rightly rented. Don't even go there. And the NYSP and Hastings court judge were little more than enablers for that scumbag, who stole over \$20K worth of my possessions, including my favorite trophies from the ONLY Porsche Parade not held in the USA, some gorgeous polished aluminum loons on green granite bases I won for Tech Quiz as usual.

Anyway, Mr Bainbridge had me for three classes; Mech Dwg, Advanced Mech Dwg, and Architecture, the last of which was basis for my learning the symbols for and making a model of a home I would have loved to live in, had I ever been able to actually build it; a ranch style 3 BR 2 BA above a two car garage within a hillside. The model took 2nd place in the competition that year. Mr Bainbridge also was instrumental in matching me with a guy rebuilding an Aeronca airplane at the Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome for whom I did prep work on the framing in return for flying lessons, which led to my soloing, although I never actually got a pilot license – CNY weather is not economically good to justify that, so I had to suffice it with Porsches which could fly even in snow. THAT was REALLY my favorite subject in High School. Along with girls ;-)

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