

39th Storyworth: What Were You Like As A Teenager?

I suppose I was pretty much like most teenagers; not really conforming to any single model, as I was trying different ones on for size all the time. One way in which I was seemingly contradictory was my efforts for my lawn care and snow clearing business, which was my means to have funds which were mine to select to do with as I pleased, vs my schooling. I was ALWAYS at best a C- student, which was why it seemed so paradoxical that I was one of only four students chosen to represent the school in 12th Grade for the Annual Math Contest. Let's just say I did better than two of the others ;-). But WHY it seemed absurd was that I had flunked 9th grade, and would subsequently get 13 credit hours behind at Clarkson in my Freshman Year because I was busy playing Commando in freezing swamps while my contemporaries were busy getting laid. At least THAT effort won me the Superior Cadet Medal that year, my ONLY bona-fide government issued "award" for my direct actions I was to earn throughout my life, save for the US Patents I was granted much later.

However, while that medal occurred while I was still a teen (for another six or so months ;-)) it was not my only award. I cannot recall the specific year, but I had to be about 13, and we had a fire started by my brother playing with matches over a paper-filled box on the upper back porch. I heard the yelling, and when I ran up to see what was going on, I quickly realized it was beyond MY ability to do any more than get my sibs out of the house and call the fire department which was literally only a half block away. For that I was given a nice plaque which is currently in storage by my daughter, along with all my Porsche related valuables which were not stolen by my ingrate landlord thief in Hastings. Don't get me started...

I also won many different rewards like tape decks and subscriptions as a teen from the Boy Scouts and the schools for a variety of sales related activities. I got my Dad's salesmanship, it seems, because I was the hands-down best salesperson for candy, magazines, trinkets and what-not used as fund-raisers by the various sponsoring organizations. Must have been my pitiful look as I rang every doorbell in town practically. And having demonstrated my prowess the previous selling season, all were happy to give me a head start over the "competition", so I pretty much saturated the market before they even got a chance ;-).

I was a bit of a lone wolf as a teen. While I had a close buddy, Bill Bolitho, neither of us would have made even honorable mention in any sport, at least until I set out to play JV Baseball at FDR High School. That led to my follow-on earning my Varsity letter as well, although my only field activity was as a line coach – I could neither hit nor field to save myself, but I had a good sense of situational awareness ;-).

Bill and I used to build models, primarily plastic kits, but also flying balsa models including those which used glow-plug engines (not motors, something people regularly get wrong, which are electrical devices ;-)) and fuel with castor oil mixture. In fact, when I failed 9th Grade, mostly because I rebelled against their requirement that I take a foreign language, and ONLY French and Spanish were available, neither of which I wanted, I was granted the ability to take the Shop class I really wanted. So I set about to build a model plane which would take off, do aerobatics, and return to me because I was lazy. It functioned on a timed cam. And made the Guidance Counselor ask "What's wrong with this picture?" Thankfully, although he insisted I had to again take the rest of the AP program courses, he got them to waive the language requirement.

Which in itself also proved to be prophetic, as I soon took up poetry and writing in my literature course, and even had some of my works published once I was in High School. That was where I had my "first love", although she could not have cared less. But that's also part of teen years. And while I could not possibly tell you where that poem I wrote for her is right now, I recall fondly the last line, which suggested that others might scoff at the idea, but that I knew what love really was. And a review of my website writings, which include these Storyworth items as requested by my daughter, as well as most of my Porsche Club articles, will consume enough of your spare time to last a lifetime at <http://www.holzerent.com/pdfpages.htm>

I was still just barely a teen at Clarkson when I decided to take up the guitar, about which I have written extensively elsewhere. I thank Gordon Lightfoot for “Yarmouth Castle”, the Potsdam Music Store for explaining how a 12 string was different, and for practically gifting me the carcass which became mine when it was damaged in a fire there during my freshman Xmas holiday, and I had the skills to repair it. I am simply looking forward to the defeat of this Covid stuff to enable me to again perform for appreciative audiences ;-)

My molded plastic models were typically cars and warplanes, and almost exclusively from the ‘60’s and ‘40’s respectively. What I consider unique about my efforts was the detail with which I painted dashboards and instrument panels respectively. In later life once I was in the Porsche Club that interest continued, and I acquired numerous high-detail (read expensive ;-)) models in both plastic and die-cast metal, and added details on my own to many of them. Those, too, are in Jess’ hands, and likely to become heirlooms for my granddaughter, Ainsley. I have not a clue where you might find anything I actually DID during my teen years, however, including High School Yearbooks and the like. But I CAN tell you I looked like a dork, and if you see my acne and bush cut hair, you would understand why you’d never guess it was me ;-)

As I’ve noted before, the reason I was chosen for the Math Contest was my repeating my SAT’s despite warnings to the contrary. On my first go-round I had gotten adequate scores to get into Community College, which coincided with my GPA in everybody’s eyes, but only borderline to get into Clarkson as an Engineering School. So when I was bored sitting in pre-calc and the teacher announced me as one of the school’s “representatives”, I was justifiably puzzled. When she asked if I had seen my latest SATs, she told me to go immediately to the Guidance Office, where they showed me a 50 pt improvement in my Verbal score to just below 500, but a 719 of a possible 800, which is 99th percentile stuff, in Math. Who knew? ;-)

Yet, looking back at my career, and especially considering the postings like Facebook which ask if anyone has ever actually USED Algebra, I always respond that hardly a day goes by that I do NOT. Between Algebra, as taken in 9th grade, and Statistics, as taken in my MBA, I must honestly say that all the rest of pre-calc and diffy que (differential equations ;-)) have proven to be pretty useless for a guy who NEEDS grease under his fingernails and built machines to damage the fork truck which would run into them, instead of the other way around. But those two maths emphatically represent how good decisions are made; by comparative analysis numerically, and by seeing how they compare with the rest of the data which represents your particular “universe”. I never intended to build commercial aircraft which would have to fly, nor bridges and buildings which would have to survive hurricanes and earthquakes. But I DID intend to make machinery do my bidding, and made controls systems and machinery which would produce products people would buy in the real world, and then worked with people all over the world to make those things happen. As soon as I got past my teen years and started growing my beard ;-)

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