

# **Life's Lessons Learned**

An Eclectic Collection of  
the Author's Observations and Experiences  
as He Met Life's Challenges  
and Opportunities

**by Robert E. Wilson**

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### **Cover art**

Front: Ensign Robert E. Wilson in the Pacific, holding a live lobster. He appears to be preparing to learn one of Life’s Lessons.

Back: Robert E. Wilson (center) with his brother-in-law, Bruce Merrill; and his father-in-law, Malcolm H. Merrill, cleaning gutters at Thanksgiving, at 814 Cragmont, Berkeley, California. The three of them look like hobos, which is especially charming, given that Dr. Bruce Merrill was a doctor of dental surgery, Robert had an MBA, and Dr. Malcolm Merrill was a world renowned medical doctor with a master’s in public health.





# 1. GOOD ADVICE FOLLOWED

## Where to Start?

I suppose every writer is faced with my dilemma when writing a book, especially one with a wide variety of subjects to cover. In my case, I have roughly 60 generally separate (but sometimes related) subjects that I've included in my rough outline for this book.

And of course the question is: Where do I start? I've been a kid growing up in Little Rock, Arkansas and New Orleans, Louisiana (NOLA); a college student at Tulane University (also NOLA); a widely-travelled naval officer; a graduate student; a purchasing clerk for Standard Oil's shipping subsidiary, Chevron Shipping Company, in San Pedro and Richmond, CA; a labor relations representative for Matson Steamship Company on the San Francisco waterfront, handling shipboard-generated grievances; a long time human resource executive for the Postal Service in San Francisco, CA and Eugene, OR; a husband, father, scout leader, active church member, jury member.....among other things. In the process, I've gained a wealth of experience and insight and (hopefully) wisdom.

I might logically use chronology, and start with my early childhood memories and influences; but I'm afraid I might turn you, the reader, "off" if I did that, and you would stop reading the book and miss out on some wonderful stories and experiences.

So I have chosen to start off with one of my favorite stories—in this case a vicarious experience—gained from Lucile Johnson, mother, wife of an army officer, certified marriage counselor, and a guest lecturer on the LDS Church series of lectures called "Know Your Religion." I shamelessly picked this story to "hook" you and make you want to read the whole book. Regardless of your religious beliefs or lack there of, you will love this story by a woman who was known for using "visual aids" in raising her family.

Here's the story from my notes—one with a moral. It is typical of what you will find throughout this book if you are willing to wade through some of the more mundane chapters. It's about Parenting and Agency, as told by Lucile Johnson. So buckle your seat belt, and here we go!

## **Lucile Johnson, Master of Visual Aids**

A lot of time has passed since that talk, but I recall that Lucile Johnson was married to a U. S. Army colonel, and that she was a trained and certified marriage counselor. At the time this incident took place they lived at the Presidio, an Army base on the extreme northwest corner of the San Francisco peninsula and part of the city of San Francisco. The approach to the south end of the Golden Gate Bridge actually bisects the Presidio, which is the last San Francisco exit before preceding across the bridge into Marin County. This information will be important later in our story.

I first heard Lucile speak at a church "Know Your Religion" lecture in Oakland, California, sometime in the early 1970's. She was talking about parenting, and the role that what she called "visual aids" can play in teaching life's lessons to youth—and her frequent use of visual aids in raising her own children.

I will never forget one example of a “visual aid” she used to get a very important point across to her teenage daughter, who had just turned 16 years of age on a Saturday, the very day the following story took place. The age of 16 is significant in the “Mormon” church [Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints] because it is something of a rite of passage for LDS youth, since most parents subscribe to the church’s recommendation that children not single-date until they reach age 16.

Lucile’s daughter—Beth, I’ll call her—was attractive, like her mother, and had already been asked out on her big first solo date that night, and was looking forward to this event with perhaps more anticipation than was warranted and with an altered and inflated view of her status in life and in her family.

Early that day Lucile had taken Beth with her to visit an old friend in Walnut Creek, California, which is about 40 miles one way from the Presidio, through some pretty heavy California traffic, even on a Saturday.

As they were driving back from Walnut Creek in late afternoon (so Beth would be on time for her first solo date) Beth caught her mother completely off guard by stating:

“Mother, now that I am a woman, I want to say that I’m sick and tired of you....and Dad....and the Bishop...and my seminary teacher and my Sunday School teacher and my school teachers and my young women’s leaders....always telling me what to do and robbing me of my free agency!”

Lucile was shocked at this speech, and though not unskilled at “thinking-on-her-feet”, wisely realized that almost ANY response to Beth’s declaration of independence—proffered as it was as essentially a challenge—was fraught with danger to their mother-daughter relationship. If she said “Now listen here, young lady,.....” and began to assert her parental rights and responsibilities, a big verbal battle would erupt, and lead to a major donnybrook.

On the other hand, if she let this inappropriate and misguided statement go unchallenged, it could cause Beth to think she was free to take pretty much what actions SHE felt were appropriate, even though her judgment and experience were considerably limited.

It was a real dilemma.

So Lucile offered a silent prayer. She said “Oh God, please send me a ‘visual aid’—something to help me teach my daughter of the importance of heeding the counsel of all of us who are trying so hard to guide her through the pitfalls of the teenage years. Help me find a way to show her the folly of her statement without harming our relationship.”

Words to that effect.

From Beth’s statement—issued as a challenge as it was—it was obvious that she was expecting a reaction from her mom. SOMETHING!

But Lucile said *nothing!* Not one word!!! Instead she continued to drive as if nothing had happened. She navigated through Orinda and the Broadway Tunnel into Oakland, and across the Bay Bridge, then

along the bumpy streets of the San Francisco waterfront piers and Van Ness Avenue until she reached the on-ramp to the Golden Gate Bridge.

As those of you who have ever taken that on-ramp know, there is a right-hand exit from the on-ramp that says “PRESIDIO—LAST SAN FRANCISCO EXIT.” The exit is a generous, gradual one, so that even if at first you don’t make a move, there are still perhaps 5 seconds when you can still make it off the bridge off-ramp safely, if belatedly.

Lucile was in the correct, far-right lane as she approached the Golden Gate Bridge and the Presidio exit, a turn and exit she had taken countless times. But this time she did something different. Though in perfect position to make her exit, she continued straight ahead.

Beth immediately noticed that her mom was not starting to drift right into the exit off-ramp and exclaimed with increasing alarm and pitch and volume:

**“Mother,?...mother??? Mother—you’re gonna miss....MOTHER! WHAT ARE YOU DOING? YOU MISSED THE EXIT!!! HOW COULD YOU MISS THE EXIT??? YOU’RE GOING TO MAKE ME LATE FOR MY DATE!!!.....”** Etc., Etc., Etc.

Meanwhile Lucile did not say a word, but just continued to drive across the Golden Gate Bridge as if nothing had happened, took the first off-ramp (Sausalito), which lets you go *under* the north end of the bridge, and get back up on to the bridge heading south, back to San Francisco and the first southbound exit into their home in the Presidio.

When her daughter finally ran out of breath Lucile announced with determination equal to her daughter’s earlier proclamation:

**“I’ll be darned if I’m going to let some stupid sign rob me of my free agency!”**

Beth sat in stunned silence for the two or three minutes it took them to get back across the bridge as the impact of Lucile’s statement hit home.

Lucile took the first, Presidio, exit, and in a minute pulled up in front of their house. Beth hopped out of the car, still a little upset but instructed, shut the car door briskly and said through the open window.

**“You don’t have to say a thing. I get the message!”**

Beth DID get the message. The analogy was perfect. Here was a simple sign, giving absolutely great advice. If you want to go where you want to go (the Persidio), take this exit. And if you chose to ignore that advice there will be unpleasant consequences. You will end up some place you did not want to be.

Moral: “Free” agency (or, less redundantly, “agency”)—untempered with wisdom—could easily lead you astray if you were not careful. Here were her parents, teachers, bishop, youth program leaders—all of whom had her best interest at heart and scores of years of combined experience in making good decisions— giving Beth the best possible advice they could to reinforce all the true, proven principles of living a good life her parents had been teaching her for years—principles to guide her to a destination

that she really wanted to go (temple marriage, family, righteous living, etc.); but if she exercised her agency foolishly and rejected their advice, she could end up someplace she *really* did not want to be.

And Lucile credits her Heavenly Father for inspiring her to think of this wonderful “visual aid.”

Isn't that a wonderful story?!!

### **Irene Ranker's Interesting Advice**

Lucile Johnson's story about the importance of exercising agency wisely and being willing to accept good advice reminds me of four other examples of advice, wisely followed.

The first of these involved a surprising incident that occurred on what we called “Temple Hill” in Oakland, CA, in probably the fall of 1960, and involved a friend, Irene Ranker, then the Relief Society President of Walnut Creek Stake. For non “Mormons” a “Stake” is the equivalent of a Catholic diocese, and like a diocese, oversees a collection of individual congregations (called “Wards” in our church). So she was a person of some influence.

I had first met Irene Ranker as a dinner guest in her home. Her daughter, Elaine, and I had met and worked together at Zion National Park in 1953, several years earlier, and had remained in touch.

In addition to her formal calling as Relief Society President, “Sister Ranker” (as we called her) was a formidable person by nature—a natural leader. She was a widow when I first met her, but her husband, Dr. Emory Ranker, had been Stake President of the Walnut Creek Stake, and was a highly respected doctor AND community and church leader. We do not have social ranks in our church, but if we had lived in jolly old England (which was often not so jolly) they would have been nobility. They were just wonderful people.

Well, Irene Ranker was well acquainted with the Merrills, Jean's folks, and apparently with Jean. And on this particular occasion I was standing outside of the Oakland 3rd Ward building which is located on “temple hill” when I saw Irene walking out of the Oakland Temple on her way to her car. Then a strange thing happened: Irene deviated a good 30 or so feet from her line of travel and headed straight for me. As she got within speaking distance she said to me, emphatically, **“Bob Wilson, if you don't marry that Jeannie Merrill you're just stupid, just stupid!”**—and then, without another word, turned and walked away from me toward her car.

This was totally unexpected advice, but not unwelcome. It was actually an unneeded-but-welcome reinforcement of my own observations and intentions. By then I had been dating Jean about a year, and had already wisely concluded that Jean was indeed the girl for me. But it didn't hurt to know that other people, less emotionally involved and whose intelligence and judgment I respected, shared my conclusions about the wisdom of my choice for a mate—the single most important decision I would make in my life as far as happiness in my life was concerned.

And it has provided me with a little playful fun. I often tell people that I “had” to marry Jean; otherwise I would have appeared “stupid” in the eyes of Irene Ranker, whose good opinion I was anxious to maintain. ;-D

## **Rosemarie Dunden's Wisdom**

The second example of good advice (followed) occurred while working as the Director of Human Resources for the U. S. Postal Service in the Eugene Post Office (and Eugene “Sectional Center” which I will explain later). Well barely. The advice was given the next-to-last day on the job.

You see, I was blessed to have as my secretary one mature woman named Rosemarie Dunden. She was a few years older than I, and she was mature, wise, and an effective secretary, and I'm sure she helped me avoid errors of all sorts while assisting me.

Rosemarie worked for me and later worked for the Mail Processing Director at the Gateway facility, where she was also held in high regard. She was happily married to Walter Dunden, a manager of a large company in Eugene.

Rosemarie retired before I did, but she made a point of returning for my retirement luncheon which took place on Thursday, April 2nd, 1998, my next-to-last-day on the job, and as she passed through the line of well wishers gave me this excellent advice: **“Bob, learn to say ‘NO’.”**

Rosemarie—perhaps from experience—had learned that retired people are fair game for a myriad of people who are looking for free labor for their pet cause or causes, and that they will be only too happy to involve you in same—and, if you are not careful, to distract you from YOUR post-retirement goals and desires.

It was good advice, and I/we have been careful to budget our time so that we do not neglect OUR top priorities, particularly our extended family and *their* needs.

One seeming exception: Since retirement we have served two part-time missions for our church: The first as managers of our church's Employment Office, using my special knowledge as a personnel professional to help people learn how to efficiently hunt for jobs. [As you will later discover I was a management recruiter, with considerable experience in interviewing, and something of an expert in résumé preparation]. We did this for two years, four days a week, and helped roughly 300 people a year to write dynamic resumes—the kind that lead to interviews (no interview, no job). It was gratifying when people we worked with had success in finding work.

The second mission involved finding housing for LDS missionaries in the Oregon Eugene Mission of our church, covering an area from roughly Eugene to the California border and as far east as Klamath Falls. We did this for 1.5 years, and averaged about 5 hours a day. There were 10 things that had to be done to open up a new apartment and 8 things to close one. We developed a matrix to assist us as we might have half-a-dozen apartments in flux, and without a matrix we could easily drop an important “stitch” (like turning on the water or lights). With a matrix you never forgot to do necessary things. Any blank spot on the grid meant you still had some work to do.

These two missions were major time commitments; but we could take breaks for family occasions, and we could stay in our home and take care of our pets (one cat, one Chihuahua doggie)—unlike many church full-time missions that require extensive time away from home, often in a foreign country. Rosemarie's advice was still good, but we were more than willing to serve a need and accept a “call” from our church to serve others as we did. This is something we had planned to do after retirement.

We did NOT accept random offers not compatible with our own interests. I.e., we generally heeded Rosemarie's excellent advice.....especially when the skills needed were not unique to us.

### **Mom's Advice re. Making New Friends**

In the summer of 1953, between my sophomore and junior years of college, I was fortunate enough to land a job working for the Utah Parks Company in Zion Lodge in Zion National Park. The work was not prestigious, and the pay was minimal, but the opportunity to work in this incredibly beautiful environment more than compensated for the humble nature of the work [I was essentially a janitor, responsible for cleaning the men's restroom and Zion Lodge's auditorium. In U.S. Navy terms, I was "Captain of the Head" or "Colonel of the Urinal" in army terms].

This was going to be my first time, ever, living away from home, and my wise mother, Gladys Louise Gray Wilson, gave her favorite (and only) younger son some thoughtful advice for how to behave when I arrived at this new employment situation—based on her many years of experience.

You will read in subsequent chapters a lot more about my mom, but basically what mom told me, in essence, was this.

She told me I was about to enter a new, unfamiliar situation, and what I did or did not do —initially— could have a profound effect on whether the experience would be a pleasant and successful one, or something significantly less pleasant.

Basically she cautioned me to **make friends slowly**. That is, she informed me that the people who would make the best friends—the solid citizens—would be slower to accept me....that they would be hanging back to see if I was the sort of person worthy of their friendship. Whereas the less stable types would be quick to offer their acceptance, but would be less worthy of my friendship.....the sort of "misery loves company" types. She advised me to keep my eyes and ears open and, essentially, to psyche out the many kids I would meet and *carefully* choose who would make good, reliable friends.

Well, I heeded her advice, and found it sound. For example, I hoped I would meet a nice young lady who would be my girl friend that summer. I noticed that most of my peers were pairing up almost immediately. But I held back and did not immediately try to find someone. I remember thinking that I might end up with no one to date. But I bid my time and looked around at the opportunities.

There was another person at Zion that summer, who was doing the same thing. Her name was Nan Parkinson, a lovely, slender farmer's daughter from Franklin, Idaho. I had met her the first night I was at Zion just after coming off the stage from playing my baritone ukulele, when she told me her brother, Richard, was attending Tulane University (the MC had given out that information in his introduction of me). I did not make much of that comment at the time.

But for several days I noticed Nan, a "cabin maid," sitting quietly at breakfast, in what seemed a pensive attitude. I later found out that she had been initially homesick and had contemplated going back home. I'm glad she did not, because she proved to be a wonderful friend and, eventually, my sweetheart. [She had also been voted "Sweetheart of Franklin High School"—which should give you a clue about her quality, etc.]. She was also an accomplished modern dancer, and musically talented. Nan also helped

introduce me to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and told me of daily family prayer in her home and other positive things.

Mom's advice had paid off. I had lots of friends that magical summer, friends of the better sort. But especially Nan. You will meet some of the others—and learn more about Nan—later when we visit Zion in subsequent chapters.

### **Kathy Minty's Interview Advice**

While working as the Director of Human Resources for the Eugene Post Office / Management Sectional Center, I was approached by Kathy Minty, the daughter of my Personnel Assistant, Louise Minty. Kathy was a former employee who was hoping to be reinstated (rehired) as a postal clerk.

Kathy was young and attractive but had previously been an “iffy” employee, perhaps with a bit of an immaturity problem. She was scheduled to meet with tough old Steve Boydston, our #2 manager at the Mail Processing Center, the next day. Steve would be making the decision whether to hire Kathy or not. She approached me for any advice I might give her.

I told her about being absolutely honest in her answers to Mr. Boydston, indicated some former reputation issues she might be prepared to address, etc.

At the end of our brief conversation I added one more bit of advice: I told her that I would recommend she dress conservatively, especially since Steve was “old school” and conservative. Kathy was wearing decent clothes (slacks, blouse) when she met with me, but she had tied her blouse in a knot at the bottom—which left a triangle of her skin exposed about where her belly button was. It was just a bit too “sexy” and definitely not conservative business dress.

Kathy immediately took exception to my comment. You could see she resented the advice. She informed me in no uncertain terms that “my clothes are an expression of who I am....” Clearly she thought I had gone too far in suggesting she dress more conservatively. I responded to the effect that it was her decision, I was only trying to help.

I found out later that she had called her mother to complain about my remark, and Louise cut her off immediately. Louise later told me she said, “Oh Kathy! Mr. Wilson is absolutely correct in telling you that. I apologize for forgetting to mention it to you ahead of time.” Kathy was surprised that her own mother totally vindicated my advice.

The following day was Kathy's interview. It was also an important staff meeting in the Postmaster's office, involving all six directors, and sometime during the meeting the PM's secretary advised me that Kathy Minty was next door in the front office, waiting to see me. I told her it might be a while before I could talk to her, and she relayed this info to Kathy.

A while later I had to leave the meeting to fetch some document needed and walked through the front office and saw Kathy Minty and spoke very briefly in passing, saying, “Hi, Kathy.....” and noticing she looked super sharp in a conservative, modest, professional-looking gray suit dress added: “Gee, you look very nice!” My comment brought forth a big smile from Kathy.

When the meeting finally concluded, I left the meeting to make myself available to Kathy, only she was no longer waiting in the front office. “Where’s Kathy?” I asked the secretary. “Oh she’s gone,” was the response. “She said she only wanted you to see how she was dressed!” That is, she wanted me to know—and see—that she had taken my advice. And, yes, she got the job. Another example of “good advice, followed.”

### **Carlene Lione and “Fitting in”**

Perhaps the best example of someone following my mom’s advice about “going slow” in a new social situation occurred at Matson Navigation Company, in their personnel office. There were two older women—one about 60, the other about 50. Both were single, and both were very professional and competent in their duties.

They also were a very tightly knit clique unto themselves. They ALWAYS went to “coffee” (took a morning and afternoon coffee break) together.

But as their workload gradually increased it became obvious they needed one more person in their department to assist them. The boss of Personnel, Harry Avery, was a very savvy guy, and he selected an attractive young woman named Carlene Lione (“lee-O-nee”) to fill the needed job.

Carlene pitched right in and wisely recognized the tight relationship between the two older woman as well as their competence. Carlene did NOT make the mistake of assuming she was their social equal. She did not try to socialize with them, but communicated with them only when necessary to determine what she needed to know to do her own job and help as needed. She was all business.

She took her breaks alone and did not try to butt in on the established relationship of the two older women. And Carlene did good work. Gradually she earned the respect of the older two women, and then one day, as they were heading out for their coffee break, it happened: They leaned into the doorway into Carlene’s cubical and said: “Carlene, would you like to go to coffee break with us?”

Carlene was “in.” She knew she was fully accepted, and the two-person clique became a tightly-bonded trio. Carlene’s patience and respect for the two ladies’ informal-but-very-real relationship—and her own demonstrated work ethic—had won the respect of her older peers and their gradual-but-complete acceptance. It was beautiful to watch. Harry Avery had guessed correctly that Carlene would crack that tough clique, and he was right!

I don’t know who advised Carlene in how to behave in a new situation such as described above. Someone must have....or she was wise beyond her years. But it really paid off....and vindicated my mother’s earlier advice to me.

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For some more examples of good advice followed, check out upcoming Chapter 15 on making good choices.

## 2. JUDGING SLOWLY AND CAREFULLY

### Tilly Kraft: The Dangers of Prejudgment

There is an old maxim that says “Don’t judge a book by its cover.” One beautiful example of this occurred in the Salem Sectional Center—an area encompassing all the post offices in a “belt” across the middle of the state of Oregon with its headquarters in the Salem Post Office. It involved the Postmaster of Eddyville, OR, one Tilly Kraft.

I never met Tilly Kraft, but I’d sure like to. Tilly was the postmaster of a small, third-class office in, Eddyville, OR, about 25 miles due west of Corvallis, OR, on highway 20, in the Salem Sectional Center. A third-class post office is so small that it only has one employee—in this case postmaster Kraft—and a postmaster relief replacement casual who fills in for vacations and such. I am indebted to Bob Churchill of Salem’s post office Human Resources (HR) staff who brought this delightful story to my attention.

Officer-in-Charge (OIC) opportunities come about when a postmaster retires or dies suddenly. OICs run the office as the acting postmaster while the lengthy replacement process takes place (advertising the position, accepting and screening applications, interviewing the more qualified, and giving time for the successful candidate to pack up and move, etc.—usually 3 months or so). I’m not sure whether Tilly was ambitious, and wanted to better herself, career-wise, or whether she was just willing to help the Salem Management Sectional Center fill an emergency vacancy, but she was assigned as OIC in a first class office—in Scio, OR, if my memory serves me correctly—until that office could be permanently filled through the normal process.

In this particular office Tilly inherited two male clerks that distributed the mail each morning and helped on the windows, etc.

Now, I should bring to your attention a couple things about Tilly that Bob Churchill brought to mine: Tilly’s appearance was somewhat dowdy and nondescript. She was something of a plain “old shoe” in her dress and appearance; and when the clerks saw her they *immediately* judged her as someone who they could walk all over .... as a sorta joke. And they proceeded to do things they never would have done with their former boss or someone they respected. They talked loud and bantered back and forth in an unprofessional way. They goofed off a bit. This went on all day.

In summary, they acted like immature jerks—like small boys with a substitute teacher who wanted to see how much they could get away with. The fact that Tilly said nothing to them by way of correction confirmed their initial impression that she was a pushover, not to be taken seriously.

Then, as they started to clock out at the end of the day they heard a stern voice say “JUST A MINUTE!” They stopped in their tracks, totally surprised as Tilly said: “I don’t know much about running a first-class post office, but I KNOW WORK, AND THIS SURE AS HELL AIN’T IT!!!!!!.....SHAME ON YOU! SHAME ON YOU! Now GO HOME!”

Tilly had two totally new, model employees the next day. They looked the same and had the same names; but their behavior had completely changed. They had learned the dangers of prejudging (misjudging completely in this case) someone because of initial impressions. In reality, Tilly was a

tough old boot who took no nonsense, and decided to see just how far the clerks would go before she yanked their choke collar. She just gave 'em enough rope and sure enough they hung themselves.

I just love this story and its moral (don't judge a book by its cover). It is a great example of the perils of prejudice—literally pre-judging. There is a divine justice here.....

### **Getting to know people: Fola Muhebi**

When I went to work at the Post Office in San Francisco, my first office was at 520 Mission Street, where the personnel office was. They didn't have room in the main Post Office building for the whole personnel office of 70 people. Of these 70 people, a couple were hispanic, and all the rest were black, and me (and one more guy named Charlie). These people became my friends. I found that they were just like me—the same goals in life, concerns, kids that didn't always behave and so on.

When the time came for me to move to Eugene, Oregon, to become the director of human resources there, one of the personnel teams—all female, all black—put together a 3-ring binder of documents about 3 inches thick with every conceivable action I would need to know in my new position. That must have taken many hours, and I thought that was very nice. I think that gave some indication of how I got along with the good people there.

One lady named Adeline Stallings changed her name to be Fola Muhebi, which was Swahili or something. She had been selected for a fast track program. Her watch face was black, green and red (representing an African country's flag).

She helped me write charges against people who were bad actors. She had very low trust for certain management decisions. She would almost automatically question management's decisions, and I was the one who had to write the charges in several cases. She was very suspicious, as a black person might understandably be, that I was biased. (Here's Bob Wilson, white, father from Georgia, raised in the south). And so I would talk to her on these various cases.

I remember one case where someone had done something that was a fireable offense, and I went on management's side, and the facts were really on my side, but she was not giving them much weight. And then I made her walk through these things and look at both sides of the story.

In one case, she was indignant because one guy got fired immediately and another guy didn't get fired for 30 days. So I called to ask why that was, and was told that in the latter case, the guy was on his 30 days of vacation, and they nabbed him the second he walked in the door. So I explained this to Fola. "Oh," she said. There were a lot of "Ohs." Every question she raised had a good reason for it. But I also went to the trouble to research the reason to make sure.

After a while, she came to the realization that Bob Wilson was fair, and that everything I supported was fair and was the right thing to have done. I eventually won her over, and she realized that if I was writing a bad charge, it deserved to be written. We became very good friends, and the trust was there.

At one point there was a reorganization, and they said I could have whomever I wanted as a Labor Relations assistant, and I said, "I want Fola Muhebi". At that point, she was the one writing the charges, and she was very good at it.

## **Aunt Alice Merrill**

Alice Merrill was the widow of my wife, Jean's, Uncle Thais Merrill, formerly a Ph.D. professor of horticulture, at Washington State University in Pullman, Washington.

Aunt Alice has a well-deserved reputation for frankness, although mere acquaintances might not be aware of this trait.

Following Thais' death, Aunt Alice eventually took a job as a dorm mother and one of WSU's female dorms to supplement her income. In those days dorms were not co-ed and were a safe refuge for coeds. They had strict rules about curfews—about when all the residents must be safely inside their fortress.

On one occasion one of the girls returned to the dorm after the appointed curfew hour, and naturally Alice asked her why she was late.

Well, it turned out that she had been at her fiancé's apartment—alone—and had apparently lost track of time. The following conversation ensued:

Aunt Alice: “You can get into a lot of trouble being alone in your fiancé's apartment young lady!”

Coed (instructively): “Mrs. Merrill, I'll have you know that I can be alone in an apartment with my fiancé and never feel any inclination to do anything improper!”

Aunt Alice's completely unexpected response: “Well if you can be alone with your sweetie and never feel an urge to do anything improper, you'd better get yourself a new sweetie!!!”

The girl, who thought she was setting Mrs. Merrill straight, ended up on the losing end of *that* exchange. And, sadly, another coed in her dorm had to go home mid term (pregnant), so Aunt Alice's concern was a valid one.

Moral: When giving advice or argument to a very experienced, wise veteran, you'd better do your homework. This girl obviously misjudged the conservatively-dressed, middle-aged Alice as an old fashioned, passionless know nothing, and found out she had completely misjudged this book, too, by its cover.

### 3. KINDNESS WHEN POSSIBLE

#### **Hartman Rector: A Source of Happiness**

There is a leader in the LDS Church by the name of Hartman Rector, Jr. He visited Eugene, OR for our stake conference sometime between 2000 and 2010, and spoke at a couple of the meetings. With the passage of time I don't recall a thing he said except one thing, and it was profound.

Leaning on the pulpit on his elbows, and approaching the microphone in an intimate sort of way, he said "Brothers and Sisters, *be nice!*"

Now, that's pretty simple advice. Isn't it!?! "Be nice." But it is also very profound advice. If EVERYBODY would be nice, most of the world's problems—those due to interpersonal relationships—would cease to exist. No wars. No exploitation. No rape. No child abuse. No muggings. No wife abuse. No yelling at misbehaving children in the supermarket. And on and on. If everybody would just "be nice....."

I have learned that when I'm able to be nice to people (most of the time), it makes me feel good about myself.....it makes me happy.

Here are a few examples.

#### **The "Mod" Accountant**

When I worked in the Personnel Office of Matson Navigation (steamship) Company, I ran across a most interesting situation, one in which I was able to make a definite difference. The year was 1969. It involved a young accountant. We'll call Jim. As a group, accountants tend to be conservative in dress and in action, at least they did at Matson.

Gradually Jim, otherwise a good accountant, began to be less conservative in dress AND, more importantly, in manner and attitude. He became more "Mod" in his dress. He began to use profanity in his speech with increasing regularity. He was being something of a young jerk. He more and more frequently found himself butting heads with his supervisor, one of the older and most conservative in the whole company, who had to correct Jim for his conduct. Get the picture? A real "oil and water don't mix" situation.

Finally, one day, in a fit of pique, while arguing with his supervisor, Jim said "I QUIT!"

"Fine," said his frustrated boss, "You can pick up your check in Personnel in 20 minutes!" Clearly the boss had "had it" with Jim and welcomed his resignation.

While waiting for his check Jim showed up in *my* office and it was obvious that the reality of his rash action to quit was starting to hit home. He said "Mr. Wilson, I can't quit! I've got car payments and rent and other expenses. I can't afford to quit."

I responded that he should have thought of that BEFORE playing the macho "I QUIT" card.

To justify his action he complained that his boss had been very difficult to deal with. I asked him what about his own behavior, and had he tried to communicate sincerely with his boss. (Answer: No.) Clearly Jim was implying that it was his boss who needed to change, not him, and didn't like being reminded that he was at least partly responsible for the problems with his boss. And then Jim countered saying "What he doesn't realize is that it is MY generation that's going to be running this country in a few years....."

I reached into my desk drawer and pulled out 120 applications from students at the Thunderbird School of International Management, and fanned them out across my desk. In those days applications could have photographs on them, and what Jim could see was scores of properly and conservatively dressed young men and women, and I said to him, "THESE ARE THE PEOPLE who are going to be running this country in a few years, NOT YOU. THEM. NOT YOU!!!" [The air was a bit charged here.]

He literally reeled back in his chair, as if I had physically struck him, as he realized—perhaps for the first time—that youth alone was no guarantee of success, but that it took more (including conformity to expected social norms, etc.). He was speechless. Literally.

Then I said in a more conciliatory tone. "Look, I understand that your supervisor is not the easiest guy to get along with. This does not justify YOUR behavior and I think you know you have not acted wisely in this situation. But I also know you are a good accountant, and I think you are a good person when you are not acting like a jerk. So here's what I suggest: When you go searching for a new job, use ME as a reference, instead of your supervisor, and I'll be as fair as I can be."

He nodded a sort of thank you and quietly left my office, still somewhat shocked, and significantly more subdued than when he entered.

About two days later I received a call from an acquaintance from Price Waterhouse, a prestigious, nationally-known and respected accounting firm. I may have met the caller at a personnel association meeting once—I don't remember. He said "Mr. Wilson, I have an unusual situation here. We have an applicant, Jim \_\_\_\_\_, who said he worked for your company but that I should only talk to you and not his supervisor. What gives?"

I told him the whole story.....about the most conservative, stiff supervisor in the company, and Jim's gradually going mod and acting contrary to expected norms and being something of an immature jerk. I told him there was no way I could impose Jim back onto the supervisor. I explained Jim's stunned reaction to the 120 applications from the Thunderbird School of International Management, how Jim had realized that youth was no guarantee of success, and that he had grown and aged about 10 years in my office in something like 10 seconds. I told him I thought he had learned a valuable lesson, that in all other respects he had been a good accountant. He was honest and otherwise a hard worker. He had made a mistake, but I thought he would make them a good employee and I hoped they would give him a chance.

That is, I leveled with the Price-Waterhouse guy, and he knew it. I couldn't have made that story up. He said: "Thanks Mr. Wilson. I think we'll give him that chance." And we hung up.

About 15 minutes later I got a call from Jim, and he said “Mr. Wilson, I don’t know what you said, but I GOT A JOB OFFER FROM PRICE-WATERHOUSE. Thank you very much.”

I responded: “Let me tell you what I said....I told him the whole story.....how you had gone ‘mod’ and acted like a jerk, your reaction to the 100+ resumes from Thunderbird, etc. I also told him that I thought you had learned from your mistakes, and that you were a good accountant and honest, and that I thought you deserved another chance. Now if you are going to continue to act immature and not do a proper job for them, don’t take the job because I put my reputation on the line for you.”

His response: “Don’t worry, Mr. Wilson, I won’t let you down.”

And of course he didn’t. My guess is that he was a model employee for them.

I still feel very good about his situation. Here was a young man with lots of potential who had made a serious mistake in judgment, but who, in *my* judgment, had learned from his mistake, and I was in a unique position to help him get his employment life (and attitude) straightened out. And with the help of the man at Price-Waterhouse, we were able to get Jim back on the right track.

And don’t we all need some mid-course correction in our lives from time to time? In religious terms, we all need to repent—and we all hope for forgiveness. That’s what we were able to do, in a small way, for Jim—and show him a little kindness, disguised as chastisement or “tough love”.

### **Napa, California**

This incident occurred when I worked in the Labor Relations office in the San Francisco Regional Office. I was at the time meeting on a Step 3 grievance involving the removal of an injured and recuperating letter carrier who had chased the Napa postmaster around his office trying to hit him (the postmaster) before he had suddenly realized what he was doing, had stopped chasing the postmaster, and had voluntarily left.

For his threatening behavior toward the Postmaster he had been fired.

At the beginning of the meeting on this grievance the union representative admitted that, regardless of our decision, they were not going to pursue the case beyond the present, Step 3 level. They admitted that we had “just cause” to remove the offending employee—that we could not tolerate such behavior, and they could not justify it before an arbitrator.

Then the union used an unusual strategy. They asked: “But do you really want to fire him?”

It was an interesting question, and a brilliant last-ditch attempt to save their union member’s job. Because the union realized that their only chance was to put their hope on “the mercy of the court” (me, in this case).

[Paul Harvey?]. Because the story behind the story was this: The letter carrier had sustained an off-the-job injury, and could perform only such “light duty” as we could find for him to do, and there was not much of that around. As a result, his earnings were only a fraction of his usual wage. He could not pay most of his bills. So he was under increasing financial stress and all that goes with it. He perhaps

thought the postmaster could find more work for him, I don't know, but eventually he became so upset that he physically tried to attack the postmaster and that's what led to his removal.

So what the union said, in so many words, was: If you will reinstate the man—with no back pay of course—time off to count as a suspension—they would personally meet with the man and explain that the ONLY reason he had a job was the goodness of the postmaster, and that he was to NEVER do anything like that again, and if he did, he would forfeit further appeal rights.

So I called the postmaster and told him that the union was not going to appeal the grievance to arbitration, but would accept whatever decision we rendered at Step 3. But then I repeated the union's question, did he really want to fire the man who had acted irrationally under stress?

The postmaster's initial response: He would not object to the employee being reinstated "provided he was reinstated in another office." I told him no dice, it would have to be in his office, but that the union would personally visit and instruct the offending carrier that his job was strictly saved by the generosity of the postmaster (him).

We hemmed and hawed for several minutes, but finally the postmaster—a rather politically powerful one who was an officer in the the Postmaster's Organization—agreed, reluctantly, to give the man another chance.

This was another "feel good" act of kindness that I participated in during my postal career, and I felt good about it, and still do. I was able to help salvage a letter carrier's career...and make a huge impact on his life. Sometimes we have almost God-like powers, and, hopefully, when we do, we'll do what God would do. We all have a great need to repent of our mistakes....

### **Frank Felon**

In my third year with Matson I was made the management recruiter, responsible for interviewing applicants for our entry and mid-level management positions. It took some getting used to, because at first it was difficult to make decisions to turn hopeful applicants down—something that had to be done with regularity, but ran counter to my desire to be a nice guy, etc. But I finally was able to realize that was just part of life as well as definitely being part of my job.

One day my secretary brought a resume into my office—while the applicant sat outside—and I noticed that this resumé was different in an important way. The applicant had listed his considerable skills on accounting equipment such as adding machines, comptometers (an older machine that allowed simultaneous punching in groups of number to be added), but he also responded to the question "Have you every been convicted of a crime?" with a "Yes. Morals charge."

It took some courage to honestly answer that question, as it virtually guaranteed just about no one would give you a job or even an interview.

I asked my secretary to have "Tim" come in.

I shook hands with Tim, and immediately said, "I honestly don't know of any current openings in our company, but I wanted to thank you for being honest on your application. There is one department—our

booking department—that does not always tell me when they have a vacancy, and might be interested in your accounting machine skills, and I will go personally check with them if you will be willing to wait here for a few minutes.”

Tim almost cried. He was on a three-day pass from the state prison in San Louis Obispo and had one door after another slammed in his face. I was the first person who had spoken to him during those three days. Today was his last day. If he could get a job, he would be released early to take same. Otherwise he had to serve his full sentence.

To make a long story short, I visited the manager of the booking department, a delightful maverick named Lou Montoya, and explained the situation....that the young man had been incarcerated on a moral charge (he liked young boys), but that he was eligible for early release based on his good behavior, etc., IF he could get a job, and I showed Lou his resumé.

Lou was interested. He had an opening involving a new computer system he was trying to bring on line (this was before computers were omnipresent), and said he'd like to talk to the young man. With his staff consisting almost entirely of middle-aged women, there would be no moral issues to worry about.

So I returned to my office and relayed this information, and again Tim almost cried. I took him to Lou's office, and the result of that interview was: We offered Tim a position—which of course he immediately accepted, and was soon able to report to work.

I felt (and still feel) very fine about this situation. All I did was put myself in Tim's shoes and show a little kindness—which produced a win-win-win situation for all concerned. Tim got a job—and an early release from prison—and the spirit uplifting that goes with being a productive citizen; we got a faithful employee. Society got a useful, tax-paying, contributing citizen instead of an expensive charge. There was no downside.

### **Service: Jack Evans' Roof**

One Sunday morning, I came to Berkeley Ward after we had moved there (because we had kids now). Jack Evans was the labor relations guy for Stafford Chemical or somebody. His wife was the one who did the Adam and Eve sculptures. She was quite a lady, and he was a little rougher.

I came to church Sunday morning, and I asked Elaine, “Where's Jack?”

“Oh, Robert,” she said. “He's home working on our leaky roof. It's the rainy season. He has had so many calls on his time that he hasn't had time to work on our roof.” (They had a tile roof.)

So I said, “Jean, you can find another way home. I have my work clothes with me, so I'm going to go help Jack get this ox out of the mire.” So I hopped in the car, drove over to Jack's, and climbed his double extension ladder.

As I cleared the top of it, Jack said, “What are you doing here?”

I said, “The bishop asked me to come over here and get your ox out of the mire and your ass out to church.”

He grinned a huge grin, and said, “Are you going to talk, or you going to work?”

So we worked together, and I helped him lift things and patch the roof until it was done.

### **Gratitude**

When Bishop Harold Delamar was released as bishop of Richmond Ward (in California), he said, “I’ve added up the hours from Seminary, Sunday School, Primary, and so on, and I figure it was 1,679 hours that you have donated to our family during my time as bishop.” That was a very touching parting thought.

### **Abbey the Dog**

The United States Postal Service (USPS) is one of the world’s largest bureaucracy. And, as everyone knows, bureaucracies can be either models of efficiency or excuses for impersonal, mindless routine and inflexibility. Sometimes both. But bureaucracies consist of real people, and *sometimes* wonderful things happen, and the often suppressed humanity shows its beautiful head.

This is a case in point. This is the United States Postal Service at its best, and one of the kindest acts you may ever experience (vicariously).

It is not known who replied, but there is a beautiful soul working in the dead letter office of the US postal service who opened this letter from the mother of a little girl, Meredith, who had just lost her old dog, Abbey. Here is the story told by Meredith’s mother:

Our 14 year old dog, Abbey, died last month. The day after she died, my 4 year old daughter Meredith was crying and talking about how much she missed Abbey. She asked if we could write a letter to God so that when Abbey got to heaven, God would recognize her. I told her that I thought we could, so she dictated these words:

Dear God,

Will you please take care of my dog? She died yesterday and is with you in heaven. I miss her very much. I am happy that you let me have her as my dog even though she got sick. I hope you will play with her. She likes to play with balls and to swim. I am sending a picture of her so when you see her You will know that she is my dog. I really miss her.

Love, Meredith

We put the letter in an envelope with a picture of Abbey and Meredith and addressed it to God/ Heaven. We put our return address on it. Then Meredith pasted several stamps on the front of the envelope because she said it would take lots of stamps to get the letter all the way to heaven. That afternoon she dropped it into the letter box at the post office. A few days later, she asked if God had gotten the letter yet. I told her that I thought He had.

Yesterday, there was a package wrapped in gold paper on our front porch addressed, 'To Meredith' in an unfamiliar hand. Meredith opened it. Inside was a book by Mr. Rogers called, 'When a Pet Dies.' Taped to the inside front cover was the letter we had written to God in its opened envelope. On the opposite page was the picture of Abbey & Meredith and this note:

Dear Meredith,

Abbey arrived safely in heaven. Having the picture was a big help. I recognized Abbey right away.

Abbey isn't sick anymore. Her spirit is here with me just like it stays in your heart. Abbey loved being your dog. Since we don't need our bodies in heaven, I don't have any pockets to keep your picture in, so I am sending it back to you in this little book for you to keep and have something to remember Abbey by.

Thank you for the beautiful letter and thank your mother for helping you write it and sending it to me. What a wonderful mother you have. I picked her especially for you.

I send my blessings every day and remember that I love you very much.

By the way, I'm easy to find. I am wherever there is love.

Love, God

Wasn't that a wonderful letter.....from a very wonderful person, one of the several hundred thousand folks who work in the USPS?

Summary: "Brothers and Sisters, Be Nice!" Wouldn't it be a wonderful if *everyone* would just "be nice!" No wars. Fewer divorces. Better family lives and harmony. No bullying. Just imagine!

## 4. STRAIGHT TALK

I guess there are two aspects of “talking straight”. One aspect is in avoiding confusion. The other is telling people what they need to know, often when they might not want to hear it. Here are some examples, mostly from my own experience. The first is one of my favorite stories because it shows how people can make mistakes if they don’t really understand a situation. Some of the others are instructive as well, for other reasons. Enjoy the stories!

### Avoiding Confusion : The Plumber and Hydrochloric Acid

A lot of problems can be avoided if people remember to just simply tell the truth—in clear, unambiguous terms.

This is one of life’s lessons I learned a long time ago.

Consider the story of the plumber in one town who wrote the the U. S. Bureau of Standards to tell them about his discovery—that hydrochloric acid did an excellent job of cleaning out clogged drainpipes. Just dissolved the grease, etc. He hoped that the Bureau would get the word out in one of their next bulletins so his fellow plumbers could benefit from his discovery.

The Bureau wrote back and said:

“The efficacy of hydrochloric acid is indisputable; but the corrosive residue is incompatible with metallic permanency.”

The plumber wrote back to the Bureau thanking them for their letter approving his idea. He told them he had read their letter at a city-wide meeting of plumbing contractors, and that as a result of his findings and the Bureau’s letter, all the plumbers in the city were using hydrochloric acid to clean clogged drain pipes, with the same good results. He ended by again thanking them and expressing his hope that the Bureau would soon publish something about his discovery nationally so that plumbers everywhere could benefit from his great discovery. The Bureau responded to this second letter:

“We cannot assume the responsibility for the production of toxic and noxious residue with hydrochloric acid and suggest you use an alternative procedure.”

The plumber wrote back to the Bureau of Standards expressing how delighted he was to have TWO letters from the bureau endorsing his idea. He told them he had recently read **both** letters to an area meeting of plumbing contractors, and now all the plumbers in the greater metropolitan area were using hydrochloric acid with the same good results. He stated he was looking forward to passing on his idea to the other plumbers at the state plumbing contractors’ meeting the following month, but still hoped that the bureau would publish his findings to the rest of the nation so that plumbers everywhere might benefit from his discovery.

In desperation, the Bureau finally sent the following letter by express mail to the plumber:

***“Don’t use hydrochloric acid! It eats HELL out of the pipes!!!!”***

They got no more letters from the plumber.

The moral of this story is, of course, use the “K.I.S.S.” method of communications (**Keep It Simple Stupid**). If you wish to communicate with plumbers, speak *plumber-ese*. If talking to sailors use language they understand. Etc.

### **Jack Hatton, Terror of the San Francisco Waterfront**

Case in point: Jack Hatton, union patrolman, Marine Fireman, Oilers and Wipers (MFOW) union, who handled grievances for his union on the San Francisco waterfront.

Jack was a real character and very effective at his job. Short of stature, he had been known to engage in actual fist fights in the past when dealing with company labor relations representatives or reps, which at this time in my experience (1965 - 1968) included me! He had short arms, stubby fingers, and a short, round-but-powerful body, and a neck almost as big around as his head. He would have been well cast in a movie as a sort of union goon. He also was an expert in the use of foul language when he got riled.....very articulate in same.

As a new management rep—and compared to Jack Hatton—inexperienced and ignorant of the fine points of the governing “Agreement” between the three unlicensed unions (the Marine Cooks and Stewards, the Sailors Union of the Pacific, and the aforementioned MFOW), I was frankly somewhat afraid of Jack Hatton, who, incidentally, always called me “Wilson” ..... Not “Mr. Wilson” or “Bob,” but just “Wilson”— in a somewhat derogatory tone, like a officer speaking to an enlisted man in the Navy.

I remember being literally unable to sleep one night after Jack had cut loose on me, threatening to “have [my] job”— and more—as a result of some grievance. He could be very, *VERY* abusive. Ironically, those who knew him in social situations said that he was a perfect gentleman in the presence of his wife, whom he apparently adored! I guess there’s some good in all of us.

This background is important for understanding the situation I’m about to describe, and I apologize in advance for some language that is an essential part of the story. The event I’m going to describe occurred on either the SS Monterey or the SS Mariposa—twin passenger ships that sailed every six weeks to the south seas—Samoa, Tahiti, Australia, Tonga, etc. I think it was the Mariposa. And every six weeks, when they docked in San Francisco, they would have several grievances which had not been resolved by the ship’s officers and on board union stewards. These were held in abeyance to be resolved by the shoreside union officials, called patrolmen, and me or my partner in crime and good friend, Ricardo (Rick) Meleski. [Rick’s father was Polish, his mother hispanic. Hence the name.]

On this particular voyage most of the grievances were quickly resolved, including those with the Fireman-Oilers & Wipers—usually referred to as the **black gang** because they used to shovel coal into the boilers that made the steam that powered the turbines that turned the propellers that made the ships go, and in the process, got covered with coal dust. Ironically, there was not a single African American member of the MFOW union, at least in the 1960s.

On these big passenger ships each craft had its own small mess hall / break room, and I was meeting with the fearsome Jack Hatton in the black gang’s break room. I was on Jack’s “turf” so to speak. Jack

was collecting union dues while we met to resolve grievances. I noticed his face was flushed—was a little redder than usual—which meant that he had been drinking before he came aboard. This was a little disconcerting, because on one occasion he had gotten into a fist fight with a management labor rep from another company when he had been drinking. The only reason he wasn't banned from the industry is that the management rep had also been drinking, and was thus considered equally guilty of misbehavior.

Anyway, we were able to resolve most of the grievances, but could not agree on an overtime demand on one of them. The contract did not require it and I denied the grievance.

Now the union could have agreed to disagree and could have advanced it immediately to step 3 in the grievance procedure, and if that didn't satisfy the union, to arbitration within 24 hours—which was before the ship sailed.

But that was not Jack's style. He had learned over the years that he could almost always win a grievance by sheer power of his (abusive) personality. He would just brow beat the management rep (at least many of them from the various steamship companies like American President Lines, States Lines, etc.). This made it hard on the rest of us because it caused Jack to get really nasty ....which he did in this case. He became more and more obnoxious and personal in his attacks. Among the more gentle of his abusive comments was to call me a "Standard Oil Fink"—a reference to the fact that I had worked for two years at one time for Chevron Shipping Company, the wholly-owned subsidiary who ran Standard Oil's oil tanker fleet. The unions hated Standard Oil, because they had been able to break a long union strike by ferrying strike breakers by boat to the Standard Oil Refinery docks in Richmond, CA, which was safely behind Standard Oil refinery fences and out of reach of the unions. Standard Oil forced the unions to settle for a contract that allowed half of all tanker crews to be non union, so the sons of Standard Oil officers could earn college money. And earned the unions eternal enmity in the process.

So Jack brought THAT up, and much more. His voice got louder and louder, his words more and more abusive. I kept saying "no" to his demand, but even though by then I had a year of experience, in his mind I was just that relatively new ex-Standard Oil fink kid (I was about 30 at the time) and he figured I would eventually cave like many other labor reps did. And, as I said, I was also totally on his "turf," in the black gang mess/break room, with about 20 union members enjoying seeing a management guy getting raked over the coals by Jack, who wouldn't take no for an answer. And no neutral witnesses in case something happened.

Well, enough is enough. Jack was being a total—and very abusive—ass. Clearly he did not realize that when I said "no" I meant "no". Finally, in desperation, I changed my communications to something I knew he would understand. In front of Jack and all his audience I said "Jack, F\_\_\_ You!!!"

THIS he finally—and instantly—understood. He understood the argument was over. He *knew* I meant "NO!"

He exploded—verbally—threatened to "tie up the ship", have his crew members not sign the necessary Coast Guard "articles" required for a foreign voyage, have my job, and other threats.

I'm not stupid. There was a well-anchored table between us, and the door to the black gang's rec room was closed behind me, and I slowly backed toward it, and when I could get a word in edgewise, told

Jack that if he had any serious business to conduct, I would be up in the ship's main lobby for another half hour, and that otherwise he could just go to hell.

Then I went up to the ship's main lobby and got on the phone to call my boss, Victor Hugo, to let him know what had happened in case he wanted to engage in any damage control with Hatton's union leaders to stop their boy from screwing up the required Coast Guard crew sign-on, etc. It took me 20 minutes before I could get through to Vic, as his line kept being busy.

Finally I got through, identified myself and IMMEDIATELY (with laughter in his voice), Vic said "Bob, I just got off the line with Jack Hatton, and he said you said a very bad word to him, which frankly I'm surprised this could come from a good Mormon boy. Can this be true?????" He was obviously enjoying himself during this conversation. I explained that I was not actually profaning, but merely using the only effective way I could to communicate with Jack ....who obviously did not understand the word "NO" in English or American, and that I had been forced to shift to "Sailor-ese" as a result. And that I'm certain that he finally understood I wasn't giving in to his non-contractual demand.

It was clear that Vic was proud of me for standing up to Jack, and said he'd call the union office and make sure Jack didn't do anything stupid—which he (Vic) did and he (Jack) didn't.

I'm not proud of the fact that I had to use such language, which I had never used before nor since. I hate that word. But it proved useful and necessary in this case.

And it also did something else even better. Five days after the incident on the Mariposa the *SS Luraline* arrived from Hawaii. It was in the last stages of docking, and I observed Jack Hatton less than 10 feet away, where the crew gangplank would be, waiting to go aboard to handle any grievances for his union. I wondered if he was still angry, and whether I should speak to him or avoid him. Then I quickly said to myself, "what would I *normally* do? I would speak to him. I'm not going to let Jack dictate my behavior." So I said to him "Hi, Jack."

His response: "Hi Bob!" He called me by my first name for the first time ever. And he called me Bob from then on. I realized that by standing up to Jack, as I had, I had won his respect and complete acceptance. He realized that I was no pushover, and was a force to be reckoned with, and I never again had to resort to sailor-ese with Jack. He got mad right away when I first said "no". :-D

Moral: (1) You have to stand up to tyranny if you want self-respect and the respect of others; and you have to speak in terms people understand.

Moral: (2) When you want to be certain you are understood, use language that you know the recipient(s) understand(s).

[Aside: There was another situation that occurred while I was working at Matson. For a very short time an executive secretary in the executive suite agreed to type up our grievance response letters for us lowly labor reps. In one letter I used the terms "knock off" work and "turn to". The secretary—one Shirley—typed the letter exactly as I had dictated it, but added a little note, suggesting that we substitute the words "terminate" and "commence" work, adding "After all, we ARE office workers." I thanked her for the suggestion, but informed her that my letter was not aimed at office

workers, but at sailors, and that the terms “turn to” and “knock off” were nautical word of art—that they had specific meaning. I told her the word “terminate” in labor-management relations meant that a person was fired, e.g., which would have been confusing. “Knocked off” meant temporarily stopping work, as at the end of a shift.

My note was pleasant and light hearted, but Shirley complained to my boss about my response. He informed her that “Bob is absolutely correct in his response to you.” And after that we chose to NOT use the executive secretaries who didn’t understand the real world and K.I.S.S.]

You’ll hear more about Jack Hatton later, and an incident when Jack tangled with Rick Meleski—the other Matson labor rep—and lost (again). We Matson labor reps were tough! That incident also involved a misunderstanding (and a fire axe), one that could have had more serious consequences.

### **Telling People What They Might Not Like to Hear: Damion Jones**

The U. S. Postal Service (USPS) has a very flat pay structure compared to most large organizations. Virtually all of the clerical positions pay “level 5” pay, regardless of whether they are simply sorting mail, or sorting it by a complicated “scheme” or working in the dead letter department, etc. Two exceptions are those clerks working on the boring Letter Sorting Machined (LSM)—where a letter is dropped before them, mechanically, and they have a second or less to key in some numbers and send it on its way—as it is instantly replaced by another letter .... and another.... all shift long. For some of the LSM jobs they get level 6 pay.

Another level 6 job—NOT boring—is a training technician position. Training techs work with new hires to teach them how to work the LSM and any other jobs to which the new hires may be assigned. There is a lot of variety and satisfaction associated with these positions.

The problem with this training position is that there is only one such position on each shift of approximately 150 employees. So naturally when these positions come up, they are highly sought after.

Also—and this is important—MOST jobs in the Postal Service are filled by the senior most bidder. Very few allow management to fill the job on the basis of “best qualified”. But a Training Tech is one of those few jobs where management can choose the best qualified in their opinion.

We had the need and opportunity to select a Training Technician one year, and the two top candidates were Damian Jones and Kerry Loche.

Damian was a very experienced clerk, with probably 10 years of experience, including expertise on the letter sorting machine. She was clearly capable of filling the position. She had even been detailed temporarily to an entry level management position at one time and had done well. But was she the best qualified? Clearly she thought so (see below). But she had allowed her attitude to be negatively affected by the boring nature of the LSM, and her attendance had not been very good in recent months.

Kerry Loche had only a little over a year of seniority, but was the sort of person a boy’s mother would like to hear their son say, “Mother, there’s someone I’d like you to meet.....” She had a wholesome, all American quality about her, was good with people. She was the daughter of veterinarian and had assisted her dad in his profession. That did not qualify her in any way for the training position, but gives

insight into her family and social situation perhaps. She, too, was skilled on the LSM and clerical duties, although substantially junior to Damian. And she was very upbeat in all of her human interactions. She had perfect attendance.

After taking all factors into consideration the job was given to Kerry Locke.

The day after that announcement was made Damion Jones entered my office unannounced and plopped herself down on my long bench alongside my desk—on the end closest to my person (we are talking about 24 inches) and said, in a clearly challenging tone of voice and stern countenance, **“I’d like to know why I didn’t get that Training Tech position!”**

Now, I could have been diplomatic and polite and gotten into a drawn out, defensive argument; but I knew I had not done anything wrong and to Damion’s surprise, I gave it to her straight:

I said, “I’ll tell you why you didn’t get the job. First, your attitude lately sucks. I can’t afford to have a training tech with a negative attitude influencing our trainees.”

Her defense was “Well, no one can have a positive attitude on the LSM—unless you are a Bob Campbell!” Bob Campbell was a lay minister on the outside, worked the LSM, and maintained a positive attitude—proving it could be done. Damion, in effect, destroyed her argument by naming Bob Campbell.

I immediately responded, “That’s what I’m looking for, a Bob Campbell—and you’re not it.”

“Second, your attendance stinks. There’s only one Training Tech, and they have to be at work every day. And you have not demonstrated in quite a while that you can be depended on to be here when needed.”

“And third, your dress is sloppy. We want someone who will be an example to our new employees in dress and that’s not you.”

She stared at me a moment, picked up her things, and without saying another word, exited my office.

The next day one of our marketing manager, Dixie Kruger, came into my office and said “Bob, I don’t know what you said to Damion Jones, but she told me you were extremely helpful to her yesterday, and I wanted to thank you for that.”

I told Dixie *verbatim* what I had said to Damion. Dixie was amazed. But I wasn’t. Damion had been sliding down hill in her attitude for a while, and my very candid assessment of where she was in her life had made her realize that her job had been changing her into something she did not want to be.

She almost immediately quit her job in the USPS—for a year— and got herself back to where she needed to be, head wise. Later she applied for reinstatement in the Springfield Post Office—which has no LSMs—and did fine. We remained good friends, and when the postmaster of Springfield started acting erratically and having some emotional problems related to a daughter, Diane Downs [jailed for for attempting to murder her children], Damion was a source of reliable information regarding what was really happening in that office.

## **Getting Bad News Out in the Open**

Once there was going to be a major refitting of all of the Letter Sorting Machines (LSM) jobs, so everyone had to go through some training. There were some major issues with the bid and it was going to be a real mess. So I rewrote the whole announcement, and I said it in four different ways, so that if they couldn't understand it one way, they could get it another. And I knew that they got it, because we had a major grievance—hundreds of grievances. And I thought, “Good. They understand what the issue is then.”

It turned out fine. Charlie Harper (my boss) came in and said, “We have a major problem here. We're getting all kinds of grievances on this bid.”

I said, “I'm responsible for that.” I told him what had happened and what I was doing, and that it would absolutely go away if we just deny the grievance (i.e., if they just told them clearly that “the answer is no.”) And, sure enough, it went away. But making it clear got it out in the open where so it wouldn't drag on.

## **Straight Talk Pays Off (Again)**

Here is a more personal story of the benefits of straight talk that involves my darling, talented (musically gifted), and very bright daughter-in-law. My daughter-in-law, Linette Bradley (now Wilson) is a wonderful example of the benefits of honesty in expressing one's feelings.

Linette was one of eleven children born to JoBeth and LaVar Bradley of Aberdeen, Idaho. As a young person she was raised on a dairy farm—which the family eventually lost after a couple bad years. Her dad thereafter supported his family by driving truckloads of those famous Idaho potatoes. It says something about the family that every one of the kids who wanted to obtain a college degree did so, and most went on missions for the LDS church—including Linette—who spent 18 months in Guatemala teaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all who were willing to listen. ALL of the kids worked to help finance these ambitious expenses, as money was no doubt perpetually in short supply. But to their credit, by pulling together, they managed.

Linette became a well-rounded person/student. She learned to play the piano beautifully. She had a lovely voice. She was a cheerleader in high school, AND...because she was intelligent and worked hard, she was her graduating class valedictorian! This is important because of whom she married.

In the summer of 1991 Linette was attending BYU in Provo, UT, and lived in a housing complex just across the street from our son, Randy, who was in another ward (congregation).

Linette and Randy met that summer by a chance encounter, you might say, but I suspect Divine intervention. It's a sweet story, and it happened like this:

It seems that Linette's family home evening group decided to have a campfire/sing-a-long in the Provo Canyon area, in the foothills of the Wasatch Mountain range not far from the BYU campus—so the ward members could to get to know each other better. One problem: There was no one in their group that played guitar and knew how to lead group singing. But someone in the group knew someone who knew

of “this fellow, Randy Wilson, in the ward across the street” who was good on the guitar, and so they contacted Randy, and he agreed to lead the sing-a-long at the campfire.

We were at that time (and still are to this day) a musical family, and singing at campfires and/or “Family Home Evenings” was a regular occurrence, and starting with a college class, Randy had developed substantial skill on the guitar. In fact, he became so fluid and skilled that I used to threaten to “break his fingers” as he surpassed his dad (me) on the guitar.

And so Randy played and led the singing at Linette’s group’s campfire/sing-a-long.

In the process, something sort of magical happened: Linette was *very* impressed with Randy—not only his obvious ability as a song leader, but his demeanor and delightful sense of humor and personality. She had been dating another fellow for four years, and had even been engaged at one point (but was not then engaged to him). But she wisely reasoned that if she felt more attracted to a virtual stranger she had just met than to her current boyfriend, she was dating the wrong person. So she went home that evening and broke up with her old boyfriend.

Then a couple of things happened in rapid sequence. Randy and his roommates had already arranged to move across a big, wide street separating their wards to the same housing complex occupied by Linette and her roommates, and joining Linette’s ward. This they did. Randy, a returned missionary to Korea and a natural leader, was called to be an assistant to his new ward’s Elders Quorum President. As such, he was assigned to set up the “home teaching” assignments in his new ward.

Randy wasn’t stupid. In fact, he scored in the 99th percentile on the ACT entrance exam for BYU, and attended BYU on a full tuition scholarship, so he and Linette were well matched in terms of intelligence. And he had noticed that Linette had a special spirit and way about her, and wisely assigned himself AND his Elder’s Quorum President as home teacher to Linette and her roommate.

Linette thought she was giving hints or clues to encourage Randy that seemed (in her words) “to go right over his head.” They went on a couple of dates (at her invitation), and then finally it happened. One Sunday evening following a “fireside” meeting, Randy walked Linette home, as usual, and visited afterward. Her roommates, conveniently, had all gone to bed. Then Linette did something that took some courage on her part (because it risked rejection). She leaned her head on Randy’s shoulder and opened her heart. She said, “Randy, I just want you to know that I think the world of you.”<sup>1</sup>

Randy told me later “Dad, all your witty one-liners were of no use in this situation, so I just kissed her.....and that seemed to be the right thing to do.” He then told Linette, “Wow, I wasn’t expecting this tonight, but I was hoping for it someday”. [“Really?” she said].....and went on to honestly express that he shared her feelings and growing admiration and hopes that their relationship would blossom.

Both kids “floated” home for Christmas, and they became formally engaged about two months later on February 14th.

But it was Linette’s honest expression of her growing love for him that did the job.....triggered that life-shaping course of events. **Hooray for honesty in personal relationships.**

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<sup>1</sup> At BYU they would call that remark a “positive sign.”

She is an amazing person, has been the perfect wife for Randy, and they are having a wonderful life together with five children blessing their lives. She is a super mom, enforcing family rules in a firm but loving fashion. I shall never forget the night that their son, Adam, then about 4 years old, came back upstairs after he and his siblings had been assigned to their bedrooms. As soon as Adam's head surfaced at the head of the stairs leading to the bedrooms Linette *immediately* got up off the couch, swooped him up in her arms, and planting a series of kisses all over his face, immediately carried him downstairs to his bedroom and placed him back in his bed. That is, she *immediately* enforced the family bedtime rule, but in a loving way. She did not yell at him or cause a ruckus. There was nothing negative happening. BUT....she enforced the rule.

That's excellent parenting.

Randy has served a variety of leadership positions, including as a member of the Stake High Council, and is currently involved with the 15-16 year old Scouts in his ward in addition to directing his ward choir. He works for the LDS church and uses his Ph.D. in computer science to design and develop the church's FamilySearch genealogical program—in which he has an important role.

Together they are a powerful force for good. I'm grateful for whatever the source was that prompted Linette to recognize Randy's potential qualities for a future mate and for her courage to express her feeling openly and honestly. I suspect the Holy Ghost was working overtime. It just proves my earlier point that "honesty is definitely the best policy."

### **The Opposite of Straight Talk (Remus Starr)**

What follows is an amusing story sent to me June, 2004, by our friend, Kent Hill, presently of Colorado Springs, Colorado, that delightfully illustrates the opposite of straight talk. It shows just how creative someone can become in hiding the truth through clever obfuscation. I include it for the readers' enjoyment, even though it's the opposite of the intent of this chapter. The "hero" of the story is one Remus Starr, a horse thief from Montana. Here is the story:

An amateur genealogical researcher discovered that his great uncle, Remus Starr, a fellow lacking in character, was hanged for horse stealing and train robbery in Montana in 1889. The only known photograph of Remus shows him standing on the gallows. On the back of the picture is this inscription:

"Remus Starr, horse thief, sent to Montana Territorial Prison 1885, escaped 1887, robbed the Montana Flyer six times. Caught by Pinkerton detectives, convicted and hanged in 1889."

In a Family History subsequently written by his descendant, Remus's picture is cropped, scanned in as an enlarged image, and edited with image processing software so that all that is seen is a head shot. The accompanying biographical sketch is as follows:

"Remus Starr was a famous cowboy in the Montana

Territory. His business empire grew to include acquisition of valuable equestrian assets and intimate dealings with the Montana railroad. Beginning in 1883, he devoted several years of his life to service at a government facility, finally taking leave to resume his dealings with the railroad. In 1887, he was a key player in a vital investigation run by the renowned Pinkerton Detective Agency. In 1889, Remus passed away during an important civic function held in his honor when the platform upon which he was standing collapsed."

Isn't that an amazing obfuscation of the facts? Creative writing at its best (worst?)—in this case to hide the facts without actually lying.

Moral: (1) As Mark Twain once said, "Never let the facts get in the way of a good story!"  
(2) Things are not always what they seem!  
(3) "Facts" can be misleading.

### **Jeannie's Reaction to an Apostle's Mandate**

Randy wasn't the only one who had received a "positive sign" (see foot #1, above) from a loved one.

Many years ago (1960) I was called to the position of a 2nd counselor to Bishop Cline Black of the University Ward while attending graduate school at U. C. Berkeley, CA. When a new bishopric is created, they are all interviewed by the next visiting "General Authority." In this case, that happened to be Apostle Delbert L. Stapley. Apostle Stapley was sort of "old school".

After interviewing Bishop Black and 1st counselor Dr. Mark Ricks, it was my turn. It was quite an experience, though brief. The interview went like this:

Apostle Stapley: How do you feel about the work, Brother Wilson?

Me: I love the work. I have not been a member of the church very long and have a lot to learn, but I love the work.

Stapley: How does Sister Wilson feel about the work?

Me: There is no sister Wilson yet.

Stapley (after staring at me for about eight of the longest seconds of my life): A man in your position should be married!!!! [He wasn't kidding.]

Me: [I assured him that I was dating a lovely young woman that I intended to marry but that she had another semester of school to finish before she graduated].

Stapley: "See that you don't put it off any longer than absolutely necessary!"

Me: [I assured him I would heed his advice]

That was the end of the brief-but-pithy interview.

After that meeting I had arranged to meet with Jean, and I rehearsed what had been said in the interview, including Apostle Stapley's admonition, verbatim.

Jean's most welcome response? "That shouldn't be a big problem"—a most encouraging response!  
Another wonderful example of honesty in personal relationships.

The upshot? We actually did marry about four months earlier than we had originally thought we would.

## 5. HUMOR

Humor can be a social lubricant that can help you achieve your goals and diffuse tense situations.

### **Hubert Brown**

Hubert Brown was the vice president of the Pacific Far East Lines, and the chief negotiator with the union. I was an assistant to Wayne [Alreth?]. I didn't actually negotiate, but I was right there. The thing that parties try to avoid in a situation like this is a strike issue, where failing to reach an agreement would lead to a strike. Then the company loses all kinds of money, the people are unemployed, and it's lose-lose. No one wins. So you really avoid strike issues.

There was one issue that the union was really fighting for, and management said no way, and it was a strike issue. It would have had tremendous expense.

There was one guy named Bill (tall, lanky and smart—a good man) who was the chief negotiator for the union and they hit us with this thing, and they were arguing for it. They got to the point where they were picking up their papers—usually one paper at a time, like they were about to quit negotiating and threaten a strike.

This went on for some time. Finally, Hubert said, “Bill, we don't mind you shoving an umbrella up our ass, but do you have to open it up and pull it out?”

That was such a hilarious illustration of what they were doing to us that everyone fell off their chairs laughing and the tension dissipated. They brought their papers back out, and Hubert said, “Let's table that issue and move on to the next one,” and it never came up again.

It was a colorful and creative thing for the guy to have said at this time, which broke down the opposition. They were laughing so hard they couldn't be mad.

### **First High Priest Lesson in Berkeley Ward**

The Berkeley ward had an August group of high priests, including Glen Harmon, Malcolm Merrill, Dave Peterson's dad (a college professor), doctors, lawyers, six or seven former bishops—a very erudite group. Berkeley ward's high priests had a bit of a reputation—well deserved—for being mavericks. They were known at church headquarters as being a bit of a tough group.

They took turns teaching the lesson. I had been in University Ward, and we had finally transferred to Berkeley Ward so that Leslie could go to Primary. After a certain amount of time, it was my turn to teach the lesson. I told Jeanie what I was going to do, and we both almost cried laughing—and with good reason.

We had one fellow who was semi-active, and to keep him active, they called him to be the master of ceremonies for the high priest group (even though there's no such position in the church). But he was the one who introduced the teacher each Sunday morning to give a little background on the person who was giving the lesson, which was nice.

So he said, “Our lesson today will be given by Robert Wilson, who is a student and Ph.D. candidate in business. He is married to our own Jean Merrill,” and so on.

I stood up and humbly faced the audience with as straight a face as I was capable of on that occasion, and I said, “I find it more than a little intimidating to present a lesson to so many former bishops and people who are a lot older and wiser than I.” The brethren nodded in appreciation of my recognition of their credentials. Then I said, “I take one consolation in the fact that while time is a great healer, it’s a lousy beautician.”

They picked up on it immediately. There wasn’t a one of them who didn’t pick up on the fact that this young guy just called them all a bunch of ugly, old men. The place exploded! There was no calmness. There was a call for a rope. Someone said, “Can we revote on bringing him into this quorum?” There was quite a commotion for 45 seconds or so. Instead of eating humble pie, I hit them in the face with one.

And of course I had prepared the heck out of the lesson. And if someone asked a hard question, I would say, “Bishop Harmon, how would you answer that?”

Before that, I was always called “Brother Wilson,” but starting that day, I was called “Bob”, so I knew that I was “in”, and had been accepted.

### **Upstaging S. Dillworth Young**

S. Dillworth Young was a well-known Seventy in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, and an excellent speaker. He came to the Oakland Stake conference, and he was teaching how to properly issue a calling (asking people to serve in a position in the church). He got some people to participate and play various parts (the bishop, an assistant, etc.), making sure they weren’t already in that calling. (He was definitely in charge.)

I happened to be near the front, so he asked me to be the husband of the lady who was being “called” as the Relief Society president. The “bishop” said, “Brother Wilson, we are calling Sister Wilson as the Relief Society president, and would like to ask for your support.”

Then I went off script and turned towards the audience and said, “Well, there go the hot meals.”

The whole place exploded in laughter, and that went on for about a minute. Here S. Dillworth was totally in control of that meeting until I made that remark, and then I completely took the meeting away from him. He laughed so hard that he couldn’t even respond right away. He had not expected that.

That was when I one-upped S. Dillworth Young, something that was almost impossible to do, because he was very funny. The laughter finally died down and then we got back on track.

### **Choices at Bott’s Ice Cream**

I used to work at Bott’s Ice Cream, and one time in the early afternoon, I had my ice cream apron on. Bill Owen, who was the son of a member of the stake presidency was serving ice cream. Suddenly, in

walks a husband and wife. The man was wearing a 3-piece business suit, and she was dressed very nicely as well. They were probably from the Piedmont area of Berkeley, which was very ritzy, and they were there to buy some ice cream.

They didn't say anything at first, so in a voice easily overheard by them, I said to Bill, "Look at this guy, Bill, he probably makes \$100,000 per year and can't make a simple decision about which ice cream to get." We got quite a reaction! They laughed and then felt comfortable—they loved being teased. I teased them and they had a good sense of humor, so it was a good use of humor to make things flow smoother.

Another time, a theater across the street let out five minutes before closing, and soon there was a group of 50 people lined up to order. I was making ice cream, so I was dressed differently in an apron. And here was Bill, and one other guy, working their rears off dishing up ice cream. Everyone could tell that they were really working hard, and I just said, "Faster, Bill! Faster!" Which was impossible—they were going as fast as humanly possible, and everybody knew it. And of course the place exploded in laughter, and Bill gave a dramatic sigh, which was a good touch. Suddenly there was all kinds of conversation going on. The humor made the wait a lot less onerous.

### **J. Ed's Parking Lot Miracle**

The block right around Berkeley Ward had been used for parking by all the ward members for years. But with the development of a shopping area about a block from the church, they lost a lot of their on-street parking, and the church needed more parking. There was an old 1905 condemned house next door, so the church bought it for space for a parking lot. (Incidentally, the house had "old growth" redwood siding, which I removed and eventually used to build the beautiful 8-foot round redwood table which we use at family gatherings).

Now, Berkeley was the universal center of people objecting to change if it involved any concrete. Here was Berkeley, the hippie capital of the world, and the church was proposing a parking lot behind the church where the house was. So this got to a city council vote. Berkeley Ward members turned out in force, but of course the hippies were also at the city meeting. One fellow wanted a park there so that his kids could play (to which Jean thought, "Well, then, you buy the property and build a park.")

The city meeting was broadcast, and I remember listening to it on the radio. Suddenly, there was an explosion of laughter and applause. Apparently, the bishop asked J. Ed Johnson to speak for the old people who needed this parking, because many of them couldn't walk a long way to get to the church.

And so J. Ed came forward and explained that there were old folks who needed this parking lot so they wouldn't have to walk so far to get to church. "Now," he continued, "to show you that I'm not one of them, let me show you something."

He proceeded to place a handkerchief on the floor, and the ward members thought, "Oh, no, he's going to disgrace us." Far from it. He absolutely destroyed the opposition. He put his head on the ground, went up into a head stand, and pumped his legs up and down three or four times.

Well, the hippies broke into applause, and gave him a roaring, standing ovation. He totally won over the opposition. Nobody was going to oppose this old 87-year-old man who was standing on his head!

So I heard this huge applause on the radio, and heard later what had happened. There was one negative vote from the city council (a token nod to the opposition), and all the rest were in favor.

That was an amazing example of what one person can do by just being super humane.

## 6. PREPARATION

### Importance of Preparation

I imagine *everyone* knows the Boy Scouts of America's official motto is "Be Prepared". It's a pretty good motto, because if we are to be successful in life, we must be prepared to be ready for what life dishes out to the maximum extent we can. We spend probably 1/4th of our life in school, learning life's lessons so we will be able to earn a living and accomplish our goals (assuming we have goals, and we'd better!).

As a Scout master for over six years I not only bought into this motto, but had a little fun with it. Here are some interesting examples:

### A Hammer for Linda

One year while I was working as the Human Resources Director for the U. S. Postal Service (USPS) in Eugene I was involved in a church play, *House Talk*, competently directed by Linda Mayer, now of Oceanside, OR. I recall that one Saturday we had a dress rehearsal at 1:00 PM at church.

I recall also that I had to work that morning to prepare for an upcoming arbitration that next week, and spent the morning at my office preparing for same.

Since I was going to be at the office I decided to take few simple tools with me in order to hang a big 3-foot x 4-foot oilcloth map of the city which showed where the zip code divisions were in the city. This was one of those old maps with two small, thin brass rings at the top, embedded in an oak dowel.

My tools consisted of a measuring tape, a small level, a small 12-oz. hammer, and two small nails. I just carried them to work in my briefcase, since they took up little room. And sometime during the morning I measured carefully down from the ceiling, drove in a nail, then carefully measured where the other nail should be—checking both the horizontal separation and the vertical distance from the ceiling—to be sure it would be level. Then I hung the picture, and it was right on.

I put the hammer, etc., back in my brief case, and, as the rehearsal time approached, headed for church, entering the building with my briefcase in hand (so I could work on the arbitration in spare moments).

When I arrived the first thing Linda said to me was "Brother Wilson, do you have a hammer in your car? We need to drive some small nails into the side of our house prop to hang signs on it, and none of the other men have a hammer in their car."

I responded "You need a hammer?"—and promptly opened my brief case (snap, snap) and handed her my hammer.

This led to the following exchange:

Linda: "Oh Brother Wilson, you're amazing!"

Me: “Well, I’m the Scoutmaster, and it’s *my job* to be prepared!”

The truth of the matter is that only on that one day in 27 years did I happen to have a hammer in my briefcase. But I shamelessly let Linda think what she wanted to think at the time.

Years later I confessed to the reality of the situation and we both had a good laugh.

### **Saving Bishop Martin’s Bacon: The Syrup Saga at Clay Creek**

Perhaps my favorite “being prepared” story occurred many years ago when our ward—then under the direction of Bishop Gary Martin—scheduled a ward overnight campout at the Clay Creek Recreational Site (CCRS), which was approximately 37 miles west (and slightly south) of Eugene on the way to Florence, OR, via highway 126, and is alongside the Siuslaw River, about half way to the Oregon Coast. The campout was on a Friday night. And the bishopric (Martin and two others) promised to provide pancake breakfast for everyone Saturday morning.

Clay Creek RS boasts 21 overnight camping sites, two large day-use shelters, picnic areas, a ball field, “vault” toilets, and potable water and covers a ten-acre site. Day use is free. Camping costs you \$10 a night. There is a two-mile Clay Creek Trail with several swimming holes.

To get to CCRS from 126 involves several miles of very curvy road, which, in addition to the 37 miles total distance to Eugene, means if you forget something you just have to do without it, as it would take 1.5 hours round trip to fetch it.

On this occasion we knew that I had to work late Friday night, and so we arranged, with good friends Shirl and Connie Hendrickson, to save us a spot at their campsite for our tent and share their cooking stove with us. Which they did.

I was at this time our ward’s Scoutmaster, and was familiar with Clay Creek, having just camped there about two weeks prior. I was particularly aware of how isolated it was and of the need to be sure you had everything you might need with you....to be prepared.

Used to being in charge of campouts, and prior to our late departure from Eugene that night, I consulted with Jean. I asked her “What could go wrong with the breakfast? They could forget the pancake mix (disaster!); or the syrup (semi-disaster); or the butter (inconvenience). So let’s take some back up supplies—just in case.”

We had a new family-sized bag of Krusty’s pancake mix and decided to take it along. We had two 2-liter bottles of syrup left over from our recent scout campout at Clay Creek. And we took along a package (four sticks) of Imperial margarine. We also took along some “Mapleine” and brown and white sugar to make more syrup if necessary. AND....we took along our Scoutmaster’s utensil roll, containing dozens of cooking and eating items.

I don’t always sleep too well on campouts, and so I got up early, and went outside, probably a few minutes before 0700. The only other person up was Bishop Martin, and he had a worried look on his face. He greeted me by saying “Brother Wilson, do you have any syrup?”

From the look on his face, I could tell (a) he had forgotten the syrup, and (b) that he really didn't expect a positive answer to his desperate question. The following conversation took place:

Me: "You forgot the syrup??"

Martin: "Yes."

Me: "Yes, I have some syrup?"

[Martin, obviously expecting me to add "back in Eugene" to my statement, asked]:

Martin: "Do you have syrup with you here in camp?"

Me: "Yes, I have syrup with me here in camp."

Martin, still unwilling to believe his good luck and not changing his worried expression:

"How much syrup do you have?"

Me: "I have two 2-liter bottles full, plus Mapleine and brown and white sugar—enough to feed everyone twice over if necessary."

Martin: [Expression changed to real hope] "YOU REALLY DO HAVE SYRUP?!!!!"

Me: "Yes, I really do have syrup. But there's one condition!"

Martin: "What's that?"

Me: "Hot syrup. I won't allow my syrup to ruin perfectly good pancakes by going on cold. You have to promise to heat the syrup."

Well, of course he was more than willing to do this, and commented that he had really picked the right man for Scoutmaster, etc. So I returned to my car and fetched the bottles of syrup, and proceeded to heat same in a pan on his stove, as more and more people began to gather at the small pavilion which served as the kitchen.

After the syrup had been heating for about 5 minutes a chagrined Bishop Martin approached me with a sheepish look on his face and said "Brother Wilson, do you happen to have a **pancake turner?**"

I looked at him with a "I can't believe this!" look and asked him in a disbelieving tone, "You forgot the pancake turner?"

He admitted that he had.

In a condescending tone of voice I asked him, “Do you want steel or nylon?” (I had both in my utensil roll). I forget his answer, but as I left to fetch a pancake turner I reminded him that the syrup had been heating for about 5 minutes, and that, unlike boiling water which just bubbles and lets off steam, boiling syrup will climb the sides of the pan and spill all over his stove, and caramelize his burners (a mess to clean up) as well as waste syrup, and that he needs to keep a constant eye on that heating syrup.

He promised he would. But before I had gone 20 feet he was turned away from the stove talking to ward members and I yelled “Bishop, you can’t turn your back on that pot. That syrup is just about ready to boil.....” He said he would watch it, so I continued on to fetch the turner.

Well, you can guess what I discovered about two minutes later when I returned. The syrup had in fact boiled over, wasting some of it and messing up the Bishop’s stove. I said in a scolding voice. “BISHOP!!!” and he bowed his head and covered his face and said in a penitent voice, “I know.....you told me!.

After breakfast I took pity on Bishop Martin and cleaned his stove for him.

And THAT is the story of the Saga of the Syrup at Clay Creek campground, one of my finest moments of “being prepared”.

### **Syrup Sequel**

There is an ironic sequel to the above story. It occurred at the same Clay Creek camp site, in the same kitchen pavilion/shelter. It occurred on another of my scout troop campouts, and my good friend, Jack McMillan, had accompanied me on the overnight event. We were having pancakes for breakfast, and because of the familiar location, I was telling Jack the above story—while I was heating the syrup for pancakes on my small, Coleman “Peak 1” backpacker’s stove. Suddenly the flame went from the hot blue flame to a yellow color—indicating insufficient air.

I bent down more closely see why the flame had changed color, and was working the intensity lever back and forth, when suddenly the syrup erupted over the edge of the container and cascaded down the sides of same and onto my stove and the countertop under it. Here I was, badmouthing Bishop Martin and then, ironically, I had the same thing happen to me!!! I guess there was a sort of “divine justice” at play here.

Jack exploded into laughter, holding his sides, at my getting caught in my own story. That’s what I get for “bad mouthing the Lord’s anointed!” He couldn’t wait to get back to town and tell Bishop Martin what had happened, so I beat him to the punch and called Gary Martin upon my return to Eugene *before* Jack could do so, confessed my goof, and we had a good laugh together.

### **You Have SALT????**

On another ward function—this time a Father-Son outing at lovely Clark Creek Campground in early Fall one year—there was another lesson on the need to be prepared. On the menu that Friday night was steak and corn-on-the-cob, both of which require salt to taste right.

I knew I would be arriving late, and they had promised to save me a steak and an ear of corn.

When I pulled into the parking lot to the east of the combination shelter and kitchen, I yelled out—to no one in particular—“Anybody need any SALT?”

This was met by a whole chorus of voices “YOU’VE GOT SALT????” Unfortunate for my fellow “brethren” my salt arrived too late to help any of them, though **MY** steak and corn were great. You guessed it. Whoever was responsible for the meal had forgotten to bring any salt along, and “Scoutmaster Bob”, who habitually thinks of such things, was late arriving.

The moral of THIS story, is, of course, to thoroughly plan any event in which you have a leading role. That is, make a detailed list of anything you might need to prepare for the event. But even when you are *not* in charge of the event, it is a good practice to ask yourself “what could possibly go wrong?—as I did for the Clay Creek campout above, and bring along critical items anyway—in case those planning the event are not as experienced as you may be. It is a nice way to serve.

To this day I carry a small, plastic 35mm film canister—with an extra perforated lid—full of salt in our van—just to have along in case it’s needed. Be prepared!!!

### **Saving Mr. Polencheck’s Bacon**

I joined the U. S. Postal Service (USPS) in January, 1971, which had just replaced the old U. S. Post Office. Under the new organization postal employees were allowed to bargain, collectively, under the jurisdiction of the Nation Labor Relations Board (NLRB), just like non-governmental employees. They were the only federal employees who came under the NLRB jurisdiction.

Following months of negotiations a new collective bargaining agreement —called the National Agreement—was hammered out. It involved “national” provisions that applied to all post offices, nation-wide; and several “local” provision, such as annual leave (vacations) details, that required negotiations at the local level.

“Big Boy,” old-time collective bargaining was a concept that was brand new to postal employees. Prior to 1971-72, wages and other benefits were set by the U. S. Congress. But no longer. From 1971 and onward, wages and benefits would be determined through collective bargaining, and NO ONE in the USPS had any experience in this process.

That is one of the reasons I was hired by the USPS as a “Labor Relations Officer. I had some excellent collective bargaining experience obtained in the maritime industry on the San Francisco waterfront. Sort of a practical “Ph.D.” in labor relations.

In 1972 there began a series of meetings to inform postal managers of the provisions of the new “National Agreement.” As the Labor Relations Officer I was responsible for conducting such meetings and had conducted several such—in the Spring of 1972 I believe—starting with line managers. I had the approved handouts which summarized the new provisions and the script to go with it (and the experience).

When I first started work for the USPS in January of 1971 I had a divided assignment. Although technically hired by the San Francisco Post Office, I spent several months mostly assigned to the San

Francisco Regional Office of the USPS. I had offices in the SFPO Personnel Office, on Mission Street, and at the Regional office about 300 yards away on Howard Street. My job at the regional office was hearing backlogged grievances under the old grievance system—to clear them out of the way for the new system.

One day, during the lunch hour, I walked into my Mission Street office where I ran into my SFPO boss and friend, Charlie Harper, the Personnel Director, who told me he was heading to the “Main Office” for a 1:00 PM training meeting with all the staff postal managers, who reported to the Director of Administrative Service, Charlie’s direct boss, Mr. Polencheck, to participate in a training program on the new National Agreement.

I asked Charlie who was giving the presentation, as that had been my responsibility at least up until that point. Charlie didn’t know. I asked if he minded if I tagged along—to make sure the training was properly conducted and he said “by all means”—or words to that effect.

So off we went—after I gathered up all my training handouts—to have along, just in case.

When we arrived at the Main Office training room at exactly 1:00 PM we discovered an amazing sight: In addition to about 40 postal manager we saw a very “relieved-looking” Mr. Polencheck..... AND TWO EMPTY CHAIRS next to him at the head table—to which he motioned us.

No sooner had we sat down than Mr. Polencheck proceeded to introduce ME to the group, as the Labor Relations Officer of the San Francisco Post Office, and informing them (and ME!) that I was there to give them required training on the new National Agreement, and turned the time over to me.

While this was happening, Charlie and I looked at each other with raised eyebrows, both knowing that neither of us had had any idea of what was about to take place before we walked into that training room.

Without batting an eye (because I was after all completely prepared) I proceeded to deliver the same training I had been providing for the past couple of weeks, complete with handouts. This took about an hour, complete with questions and answers. And the meeting was adjourned once we were finished.

As soon as Charlie and I were alone with Mr. Polencheck I told him, “Mr Polencheck, until I walked into this room an hour ago I had no idea that I was supposed to conduct this meeting today.”

He was shocked! Then he said “But I sent you a memo!” I told him I had never received it. I explained that I had two offices, and was spending 90% of my time working in the Regional office at present, and that for something as important as this—that depended entirely on me — he should have contacted me directly on the phone to make sure I was available, and *followed up* with a memo, but not depend on just a memo.

I explained that it was by sheer chance—a fluke—that I had happened to run into Charlie and learn of the meeting, but not who was conducting it, and had decided to come along to see who was usurping my function. Had I not done so, the training would not have taken place, the time of all of his supervisors wasted, etc.

We both learned something that day. Mr. Polencheck that he should contract principles directly; I that I needed to more frequently check my in basket at both offices. All's well that ends well, but that was a close call. And fortunately for all, I was well prepared!

### **Scoutmaster Bob Almost Blows It**

Sometime in the early 1990s (probably 1992) the 17-18 year old young men at church decided to have a backpacking overnight campout in the vicinity Huckleberry Mountain lookout NE of Oakridge, Oregon. It was scheduled on a Friday night, as I recall, and John and I decided to go on this trip.

There was mainly one problem: John had to work that day until 5:30 PM, so we could not leave with the main body of young men and leaders, who would start on the trip about 4:00 PM. But we had a good map of where they were going, and we're experienced backpackers, so what could possibly go wrong. Right? After all, I had six years of experience as a Scoutmaster and my Woodbadge training beads; John was an Eagle scout with several backpack trips under his belt. And the guys who started on time had tent space reserved for us. And probably a fire.

Weather in Eugene had been perfect, but as we headed east into the foothills of the Cascades more clouds became evident. Also, although the weather had been in the 80's in Eugene, as we gained altitude, it became cooler. Not cold. Just pleasant.....at first.

We found the trailhead where our companions-to-be had parked their vehicles, and got out and put on our backpacks. While we were doing this we notice a couple of random drops of rain. But we weren't worried about that, and even though we had some lightweight umbrellas, we decided to leave them in the car. This proved to be a mistake.

We started down the correct trail for probably a couple hundred yards—past a group of campers. Our goal was to reach our group where we would share the large, 3-man tents and the campfires (and some food), as prearranged.

As we proceeded, the trail grew steeper, and we became acutely aware of lightning and thunder moving toward us, accompanied by an increase in the amount of water coming out of the sky. It started to drizzle. And before very long, it started to get—well, you know—darker. And colder, especially as we got gradually wetter and higher.

We knew better than to get wet, because then you start to get cold. Not a good idea. We discovered that whenever we stopped to rest, we almost immediately started getting cold.

That's when I realized that even with all our prior experience, we had NOT been wise.

We stopped and belatedly broke out our ponchos, which, while they could not keep us dry (because we were already wet), their wind-breaking qualities would slow down the heat loss—which it did.

Get the picture? We were (a) wet, (b) cold, (c) it was now dark, and (d) we were on a mountain side with a significant slope, so that if one of us got hurt, there was no way we could pitch a tent or shelter, even if we had one. We felt pretty dumb.

Finally I told John that I thought we should stop and pray for help—to be led to some place where we could camp for the night, since it was very doubtful that we could reach our friends that night and besides, we needed to get out of the wet clothes, etc. He agreed and that’s what we did, admitting to our Heavenly Father that we had been unwise, and needed help, and asking for it.

Then we kept going up hill—and about 40 feet later, we came to the top of the initial climb. There, right in front of us, was a huge fir tree, with large, sheltering limbs. Under the tree were probably 100 years of accumulated fir needles, soft and squishy underfoot, and almost level ground, with just a slight, 5° upward slope toward the tree base.

This encouraged us and we decided to keep going, since we were now at the top of the hill, and away we went. Yet within another 100 yards the trail started to become a bit irregular, with some ups and downs, and I said to John: “John, the Lord has sent us a truck, a boat and a helicopter. I vote we go back to that fir tree and get our our tube tent and get inside it. What do you say?” He concurred, and that’s what we did.

[Aside: This was in reference to a joke about a fellow who was caught in a situation where the water was rising around his house. A National Guard truck came by and offered to evacuate him. He responded “I’m a Christian and the Lord will protect me”—and he refused the help. The water continued to rise and he ended up on the roof of his house. A rescue boat arrived and offered to evacuate him. Same response: “I’m a Christian and the Lord will protect me.” Finally, as the water forced him higher up on his roof a Coast Guard helicopter came by to pick him up, but he refused, with the same explanation. Shortly thereafter the water covered his house and swept him into the river and he drowned. In heaven he complained to the Lord for not coming to his aid, and the Lord said “What do you mean? I sent a truck, a boat and a helicopter!”]

And here’s where the “being prepared” comes in: We had brought with us an inexpensive-but-very-serviceable, lightweight tube tent—literally a plastic tube about 8 feet long and 5 feet in diameter. All you have to do is run a piece of nylon line through it, tie each end of the line to a pair of trees, and you have an instant, water-proof tent. With open ends mosquitos can still dine on you; but by tucking in the bottom of the ends a little, you can keep water out, aided by a couple of super absorbent “slurpy” rags, which I had brought along just in case. Four rocks, one in each corner, helps the tent keep its tent-like shape. Fancy it is not, but functional it is, even if a little droopy looking.

We had that tent set up in about 5 minutes, were out of our wet clothing in another 5 minutes, and into our dry down sleeping bags shortly thereafter. Fortunately I had some dry swim shorts and a dry windbreak that served as dry clothes, as my regular clothes (including underwear) were soaked, and within less than two minutes we were warm. And being as tired as we were, sleep came easily and quickly.

We had made some bad choices along the way, mostly allowing ourselves to get wet, but in packing along that tube tent, we had made a singularly good preparation decision.

We awoke refreshed to a beautiful sunny day. We dressed, cooked and ate some nutritious breakfast, set our still wet clothes out to dry, and eventually located our friends about a third of a mile further along the trail. It turned out that they, too, had hunkered down the night before. We would NOT have found a

welcoming fire, etc., had we slugged along. Plus the camp site they were supposed to inhabit had been already taken, and they were about 50 yards further along over a rise—so we might have missed them. So it was a good thing we aborted our efforts to find them when we did and took care of ourselves.

Moral: It seems there were several lessons learned here:

- (1) Don't let yourself get wet on a backpack trip in cool weather. Get your rain gear out and on at the first sign of trouble, not after you are soaked.
- (2) Always carry with you an emergency shelter—like a tube tent or a thin tarp or two—on a backpack trip. [And a change of clothes!]. No tube tent? Then carry some large, black trash bags. In a pinch they can be made into serviceable poncho, a ground cloth, and a “tarp” to shed water.
- (3) Two good flashlights are better than one. The new LED's are lighter, and use about 1/5th the current.
- (4) Don't get cocky. Experience is fine, but experience coupled with wisdom is better.
- (5) Expect the unexpected.

Summary: While our judgment wasn't the best, at least we were prepared where it counted the most.

### **Bishop's Lament**

Perhaps my finest preparation story (next to the Syrup Salvation story above) occurred during what we in the church call a Priesthood Executive Committee meeting one Sunday morning.

But first let me explain that the LDS Church has no paid ministers. Each local congregation or “ward” is headed by a bishop (unpaid), assisted by two counselors, along with a host of leaders (also unpaid) in charge of the various age groups and functions. The ward manages quite well to function via a series of coordinating meetings. There is a Ward Council Meeting in which representatives of all the major organizations meet to work jointly on needs. This includes the bishop and his two counselors, the “High Priest” Group Leader, the Elders' Quorum President, the Relief Society President, the Young Men and Young Women (youth program leaders) Presidents, the Primary President (for young children ages 3 through 11), and the Sunday School President. Together they are able to coordinate planning and the application of resources to handle just about anything.

The Priesthood Executive Committee (or PEC) meets each Sunday morning before the regular church services to bring the bishop up to speed on any current items that may need his attention. Present at THIS meeting, besides his two counselors, is the High Priest Group Leader (HPGL), and the Elders' Quorum President. During this time period the bishop and committee receive a visit from the Relief Society President and the full-time missionaries—usually two young men called “Elders”, sometimes two young women—who are assigned to the ward.

During their turn on this particular Sunday the Elders asked Bishop Dick Lowary the following question: “Bishop, do you know where we can get hold of an out-of-print tract called *The Plan of Salvation?*”

I didn't say a word, but I reached down into my briefcase/satchel and pulled out a copy of that tract which at that time I used to carry because it was a good outline of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and could be used in a pinch if called upon to speak without time to prepare. I handed the pamphlet to them casually, without a word.

Of course the bishop noticed this, rolled his eyes heavenward, and said the Elders: “**Brethren,....you don’t know what you have done! You’ve just added another notch to Brother Wilson’s gun barrel!!!!**”

You see, the Bishop was a long-time friend of mine, and had worked closely with me when I was Scoutmaster for six years—part of that time a head of my Scout Committee. And he knew ALL of my stories—like the syrup rescue story above and the hammer story with Sister Mayer (above). He knew about me predicting a bullseye at an archery range—and hitting same as predicted—and he knew that it was just luck. In summary, he knew all my “legend in my own mind” stories, and the fun I have had seeming to always be prepared—and quietly taking credit for same when, often through luck, I was prepared. And how I quietly slunk away when I was not. It’s a sort of game I’ve enjoyed playing all these years. See the story (next chapter) about Walter Biddle and the great shoot-out at Camp Melakwa. So the bishop and I had a good laugh, even if the Elders were clueless at what they had done.

### **Conclusion: Veneta Causeway Rescue**

My wife just reminded me of one other “be prepared” story that occurred one Sunday shortly after church services in Veneta, OR. I was on the stake High Council at the time, and was assigned to speak at the Veneta Ward.

Veneta is a relatively small town about 14 miles west of Eugene, and is reached via a long causeway that runs between the Fern Ridge Reservoir on the north and protected wetlands on the south. The road is long, two-lanes, and has rather narrow and sloping shoulders. There are no cross roads or turnarounds for about five miles of this stretch of road.

For some reason this particular Sunday I was in no hurry to head back home to Eugene. I recall being almost the last person to leave the church building that day, and exploring an interesting dead end side street close to the church. I was just “moseying around,” sort of “killing” time—for no particular reason it seemed.

Finally, I headed east toward Eugene, via the long straight stretch of road described above.

Half way through this long stretch I saw that a westbound Plymouth or Dodge minivan had pulled over on the narrow shoulder with a flat tire, and a young couple was just getting out of that car to survey the situation. I went by and thought, “Wow! That is a *terrible* place to have a flat tire.” But I was dressed in good clothes, not the kind you’d want to have on for changing a flat tire. And “it wasn’t my problem, right? They’d probably be o.k.” That is, I rationalized not helping them.

Then my better self took over, and I decided to go back and see if I could be of assistance. So I drove another couple of miles to the first turnaround spot, turned around, and backtracked to the stranded vehicle, and pulled to a stop in *front* of them—so they would protect my sedan.

I was acutely aware of the narrow and noticeably sloping shoulder of the road.

I discovered it was a young couple, and that they were in big trouble.

First, they were dangerously parked. In order to remove the flat front tire they had to have their body actually protruding onto the highway—and this was a 55 MPH stretch of highway. They had no orange cones to divert traffic.

And they had no tools, such as one that would lower the spare tire. The car belonged to the girl's dad, and they had borrowed it to drive to the coast for the day. (They were a courting couple, not married.)

They had no idea where the jack was located. In short, they were stranded and had no way to extricate themselves.

So, after meeting them and assessing the situation, I returned to my car and extracted three things: Three (3) bright orange cones, my bulky cell phone (one of the early ones...not tiny and slim like the current ones, but serviceable), and a crescent wrench needed to lower the spare tire.

We were able to call the girl's father, who told us where the jack resided (under the front hood), jack up the car, get the spare tire lowered and out of its carrier, and eventually get the flat and spare tire exchanged.

Meanwhile the girls stood behind their minivan and waved cars toward the left side of the 10-foot-wide lane. East bound cars in the other lane helped by hugging the right side of *their* lane.

And since it had started to rain (while the sun was shining!) I held my colorful huge golf umbrella over her boyfriend while he tightened lugs, before handing it to his girl friend for its added attention-getting ability.

I called their attention to the fact that the spare tire was a disaster waiting to happen—that you could see wires showing through the worn thread, and the chances of them making it to the coast and back with that tire—and no spare—was a risk they should not take, I advised them to turn around at the first chance and head back home. They completely agreed with me and promised to do so.

So here was another situation where preparation saved the day—not for me, but for a nice, clean-cut young couple who were definitely NOT prepared and were in a real pickle. No tools. No telephone. No traffic cones. And I had them all, in our car. I even had a big tube of hand cleaner and rags so that the young man was able to clean his hands after changing the tire. All because a stranger (that's I) had followed the Scout Motto and taken measures—in advance—to have the above items in his own car.....and been willing to go to a little extra trouble that made a huge difference in the life of that couple, at least *that* day. I still feel good about having been able to help them.

Be Prepared!

## 7. CHANCES TAKEN

### Background

Years ago I learned that it could be fun to pretend that you were good at something and that doing so could have two effects, both of which could be positive if you had the right attitude. (1) You could carry off the boast, and have a good chuckle to yourself; or (2) you could goof, and NOT carry it off (blow it) and—if your attitude is right—decide to have a good laugh at yourself while others are laughing at you, i.e., laugh along with them.

With the right attitude, you can't lose!

### An Important Lesson, Learned the Hard Way

There was something else I learned that was to forever change my *modus operandi* in these “take a chance” situations. It happened in my back yard at 1522 Pine Street in New Orleans, Louisiana, and involved our next-door-neighbor's cute 13-year-old daughter, Carolyn Carter.

Houses in New Orleans are typically built much closer together than in much of the United States, because land is more valuable. And the Carter and Wilson homes were about 12 feet apart, separated mostly by a driveway, and a narrow sidewalk and maybe a couple feet of shrubbery. Carolyn was coming down her back steps of her house. From there she could easily see into our back yard.

There was the 8-to-10-foot-high trunk of an old camphor tree that I had been using as a target for an old hunting knife. The knife was NOT a throwing knife. Throwing knives have a light weight, smaller handle and a larger-than-normal, front-loaded blade. This particular hunting knife had a thin, light-weight blade and a heavy handle made of multiple leather rings. Heavy handles tend to want to keep on spinning and wrench a knife out of the target. Throwing knives tend to stay stuck if given half a chance by an accurate throw.

Nevertheless, I had thrown my hunting knife at the tree just as Carolyn came out of her back door and it stuck straight and deep into the tree, as if it had been thrown by Daniel Boone or some old-time mountain man. I figured I had impressed this “older woman” (I was then 12-years-old).

And then I made a mistake that changed the way I did things like that forever: I retraced my steps (to throw from the same spot and better my chances of it sticking into the tree again) and threw the knife at the tree. But THIS time the knife hit the tree sideways, and bounced off to the side with a sort of rattling sound.....and Carolyn laughed! I had proven what she probably suspected: That my earlier cast of the knife—the one that stuck—was a fluke. It was just luck. I had proven it by taking that second shot.

And so I learned this important Lesson: Moral: If, when bluffing and taking a chance, you at first succeed, **STOP!!** It is much better to leave them wondering if you are really that good than to try a 2nd time and prove their suspicion (that you are not that good).

I've still had fun taking chances; and if I could not carry it off I've just laughed along with everyone else. But IF I carried it off, I learned to always STOP! (And enjoy having pulled off the bluff.)

### **Father-Son Outing, Berkeley, California**

A case in point occurred in the early 1970s at a ward "Fathers and Sons" outing. The outing was at a nice campground near Berkeley, and consisted of a number of events, including softball and archery.

One of the families I was assigned to visit once a month as "Home Teacher" had a boy of cub scout age, but his dad had to work that particular Saturday and could not take his son to the fun event, so I offered to take him and my offer was accepted. I was the only adult there that was not with his own son.

While the boys were playing softball, three of us busied ourselves setting up the archery range—hanging up a big, traditional bulls eye target about 3 feet in diameter, and a picture of a deer about four (4) feet long and a couple of feet high. One was Bishop Grant Chamberlain. I was the second person. I don't recall who the third person was and it doesn't matter.

Once these targets were in place—and before attaching some balloons to the targets—the three of us took a few practice shots at the targets. None of us were regular archers, but I had always had access to a bow and arrows from elementary school age on. I remember that my brother, CBus, and I had a simple pair of Ben Pearson longbows, so I was at least familiar with what you are supposed to do, including such things as making sure the arrow is notched so the odd-colored feather is sticking straight out to the left (with a right hand bow) so it is less likely to be damaged or ripped off when zipping past the bow when fired. And having your body 90° to the target—so you can pull the bow string full draw (without running into your chest, e.g.). So I knew some basics.

[I had discovered in my early college years that as a right hander, I had been incorrectly holding my bow in my **right** hand for many years, rather than my left. My good friend (and at the time sweetheart), Pat Hester (now Crabtree), had taught me to correctly hold my bow in my **left** hand when I was about 19 years of age].

And during our practice shots, it quickly became obvious that my shots were consistently closer to the center of the target than Grant's or the other man's, so they unanimously decided that I would instruct the cubs for the archery event. Then we finished up our preparation by attaching a number of small balloons — in the center of the bullseye, in the four corners of the main

target, on the doe's (deer's) head, over her heart, and on her rump. Altogether there were about a dozen balloons scattered around on the target and hay bales.

Well, the boys arrived and we discussed safety rules (always point down range; don't fire until told, don't try to retrieve spent arrows until given the "all clear" signal, etc.) and shooting tips.

I explained how to hold the bow properly, which way the odd-colored vein was to be facing and why, which way your body should be facing, etc.

AND THEN I TOOK A CHANCE. I ended my lesson by saying: "And if you do everything right, this is what will happen."

This, of course, was an outrageous thing to say and attempt, but I did it anyway.

And then I took a shot at the target—**and burst the balloon in the center of the bullseye!** It was a perfect shot—one I had NOT made during our practice shooting. Fighting hard to not burst out laughing I immediately said, "Commence Firing!" and hastily headed behind the firing line so they could not seem me laugh. I did NOT attempt a 2nd shot.

As I walked back to where the other adults were standing I saw Bishop Chamberlain, grinning ruefully at me, and shaking his head, and silently mouthing "shame on you!"

And of course he was right! He knew I had been bluffing. It was 90% pure (or impure?) luck. But how sweet it was. And in the eyes of the boys, I was 10-feet-tall and not to be messed with!

But the story gets better!

### **[Old Sure Shot Strikes Again]**

We had along with us a Daisy BB gun—the kind you cock by pumping a handle under the barrel. It takes a little work for a boy to pump it, but it's easy for an adult. And after the boys had all had a turn with the bow and arrows there were still several balloons remain to be popped.....in fact, almost all of them.

So we let the boys have at it with the BB gun.

None of them hit a single balloon. This was surprising, because I knew some of the boys were pretty competent athletically. What was going on here? Then I noticed the hay bales were moving with every shot, but about four (4) inches below the balloon, and I correctly realized that the sights were off by about four inches (low). So I positioned myself close to the last boy to shoot, and after he had had his turn, I took hold of the BB gun, aimed 4-inches ABOVE the first balloon and fired.

The balloon popped—and so did every other balloon, in rapid succession, without a single missed shot. This gave the impression to all present that not only was Bob Wilson deadly with a bow and arrow, he was equally deadly with a rifle! What a man! Right?

Well, not quite. But you get the picture. I just knew where to aim, that's all. But again, how sweet it was.

Ironically, as I said, I was the only guy that did not have his own kid along. Shame on me for being the top He Coon. But what fun. I still laugh at that event, and the Bishop's well-deserved visual chastisement.

Moral? I think “nothing ventured, nothing gained” applies here.

### **Dick Walker's Crossbow**

Dick Walker was one of my “home teachees”—head of one of the families I was assigned to visit at least once a month—and help in any way I can at any time.

One day Dick bought a small crossbow, but needed some help in assembling it and asked if he could bring it over. Dick was a plenty smart guy, but he wasn't athletic and wasn't so good with things mechanical. So he brought it over, and before long I was able to get his new toy working properly.

Then I took it out of the garage and aimed at an object about 10 feet away along the banked side of our driveway, and pulled the trigger. I hit the very small object I aimed at right on the button and I immediately said: “Hey, Dick, this thing is amazingly accurate.” Dick didn't say anything, but just took his new toy and went home. He didn't want to compete with me, apparently.

### **“Stop” if you succeed example**

I recall one time at summer camp at Camp Melakwa in the Cascades when I was walking past a scene in which some of our boys were throwing a well-balanced throwing knife at a dead tree. The trail I was on was about 15 feet from the tree, so reasonably safe to walk past. But on this occasion someone threw the knife and it hit sideways and bounced to left and landed within five (5) feet of me.

I picked up the knife, took aim at the tree, and buried the point deep into the tree, a perfect cast. Sam Ellsworth, one of the older scouts—and one with whom I had shared my “if at first you succeed, STOP” philosophy—shouted out “Let's see you do it again!” I just waved the idea off and kept going. Sam was pretty certain I couldn't do it again, but the rest weren't so sure.

This is just one of many occasions where I put what I had learned at age 12 into action.

I suppose this is a form of gambling—taking a chance on some outcome—but there is no financial downside, just the risk of being laughed at. But that’s all right with me. If people laugh when my bragging or showing off backfires, I just laugh right along with them and we all have a good time anyway. The world is a happier place.

But the upside is wonderful. If I am successful at carrying off my outrageous braggadocio, well, again, “how sweet it is...”

### **Biddle’s Bitter Bite**

A case in point is the wonderful event that occurred one summer at Camp Melakwa in the high Cascades. It’s my favorite “taking a chance” story.

Camp Melakwa is a somewhat primitive Scout camp located on beautiful Lake Melakwa. It is reached via Scott Creek Road off of highway 126 several miles east of highway 242 that goes to Sisters. It takes a couple or three miles of uphill travel on a gravel road to get there, and our old van has transversed this road on several occasions over the years.

The campsites have no facilities as far as I recall, except a fire ring and a couple of picnic tables. I believe there are some pit toilets here and there. And frequently lots of mosquitos. Melakwa is supposed to be a Native American word that means “mosquito,” and I believe it. Some years it is not so bad, but if the timing is right (wrong?), they can be very bad.

The camp schedule runs a week, from Sunday through about noon the following Saturday. For LDS scout troops in runs from Monday morning through the following Saturday noon. There is swimming, canoeing, hiking to the Three Sisters mountains, numerous merit badge stations, other hiking trails, an archery range, etc. Never a dull moment.

On Wednesday evening, after supper, there is a vespers services of sorts, and it was immediately following this service that this wonderful (to me) story begins. Walter Biddle, an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) who served as the camp’s “doctor,” was conversing with David Wardell, scout master of one of the Santa Clara ward troops. Dave’s wife is a state champion archer; Dave is not shabby with a bow either; and Walter had a reputation for being very accurate with his compound bow. He and Walter Biddle were “talking archery” when I approached them that Wednesday night, following vespers.

After listening for a couple of minutes I made one of my a bold, boastful statement. I said “I don’t know much about ‘rounds’ and ‘fletchings’ and all that technical archery stuff; I just know that when I aim at a target I have a hard time keeping my arrow out of the bullseye.”

This got their instant attention, and Walter said “All right, Mr. Wise guy, we will meet you tomorrow at 1 o’clock on the ‘field of honor’ for a round of archery golf, and see how good you are.” I replied “O.K., as long as you don’t mind eating humble pie!” By “field of honor” Walt was talking about the camp’s “nine-hole” archery golf course which was laid out in an old dried-

up lake bed that measured about 250 yards by 100 yards—or roughly a little larger than a football field. Archery golf is played with rubber blunt-tipped arrows (instead of golf balls) and bows (for clubs) and upside down milk jugs or other targets as holes. The object is to finish the course with as few shots as possible, just like regular golf.

No sooner had Walt and Dave walked away than an 18-year-old Eagle scout named Dennis Sucamele (sue-kuh-MEL-ee), who was in charge of the archery range that week, and who had overheard my immodest challenge, said to me: “What are you doing right now? I’d like to take you down a peg!” I said “Sure,” and we started toward the archery range and archery golf course.

As soon as we were out of earshot of Dave Wardell and Walter Biddle I confided the truth to Dennis Sucamele. I said, “Dennis, I don’t need you to take me down a peg. I desperately need your help. I have used a bow and arrow maybe twice in the last 30 years and they are going to kill me tomorrow unless you can give me some helpful pointers and maybe a miracle.”

Well, that changed everything. He then understood that I had been bluffing, and had said what I said just to tease Walt and Dave and to have some fun, and suddenly his mission changed from disciplinarian to coach.

Dennis knew his stuff. He held the record (10 shots) for this 9-hole course. He walked me through every hole (consisting of nine plywood cut outs of various animals—a fish, a frog, a turtle, a bird, etc.)—making helpful suggestions. He taught me to aim at the first hole (the longest shot by far) by aiming straight at it like it was 10 feet away, and then raising the bow straight up to 45° before letting go.....rather than raising the bow and trying to aim at the target with the bow in an elevated position.

He explained that the 2nd hole—which was some distance away and on a knoll—should be “laid up to” (soft shot) for a sure 2nd shot, because if you missed the target, the second shot would be even further than the first. Similarly, the 3rd target had a natural backstop, so I should go for it because even if I missed it, the second shot would be a close easy follow up. Etc.

Ironically, we both ended up with scores of 15 shots. Dennis was disgusted with himself, because this was way more shots than his record. I was secretly pleased, because Dennis had NOT “taken me down a peg.” We had tied!

Then next day at 1:00 PM Walt and Dave were taking warm-up shots on the archery range. So I joined them. On my first shot I noticed a slight pain in my right arm when I pulled the string back, resulting from my practice of the day before, and commented on it. Walt said “You making your excuses already?” “No,” I said. I did not want them to know I had been practicing the day before.

Then we started off. They went first. As I said, it was by far the longest hole of the course—at least 100 yards. My shot was the straightest and traveled the farthest of the three (thanks to Dennis Sucamele’s suggestion), and Walt magnanimously said, “Good shot!” We all nailed it on the 2nd shot.

Well, we all laid up for the 2nd hole, and were tied at four shots each. On the third shot we all went for it, and all of us got a hole in one. Only, Dave and Walt both hit in front of the target and bounced into it. I hit it dead on.....and Walt gave me a strange look, a sort of “what have we got here????” look. We were all tied at 5 shots each, and I suspect he was thinking he should have been pulling away from me by that time, and it was starting to worry him.

And so it went for the next hole. Still tied. Then we got to the 5th hole, in the middle of the course, which consisted of a plywood turtle about 18 inches high and 2 feet long, and about one-third of it was hidden behind a large, round rock. If you hit the rock you could break your arrow. It was obvious by the set of his lantern jaw that Walt had decided THIS was the time to break the tie, and he went for it.

It was a long shot—I’m guessing it was something like 35 yards—and Walt was good with his accurate compound bow. He could not have come any closer without hitting the turtle, but miss it he did—by about half an Inch I would guess, Lucky for him his arrow did NOT bounce way off, but stopped close enough for a sure 2nd shot.

Dave Wardell decided to go for it too, only his shot—also close—hit some hard pan and ricocheted off into the wild blue yonder. It cost him three shots to nail the turtle.

With nothing to lose, and with a calm, peaceful feeling, I aimed at the turtle and was rewarded with a resounding “THUNK.” The target was sufficiently far away that we could not see whether it struck the turtle or not, but the position of the arrow—it had bounced back about three feet and was lying between the turtle and the rock—and the sound verified I had made a hole-in-one. I asked Walt, “Well, did I get it?” In a disgusted tone Walt said, “Yeah, you got it!”

To make a long story a bit shorter, that’s the way the game ended four shots later: I had a score of 12, Walt had 13, and Dave Wardell had 14.

Walt immediately said, “How about another round?” I explained that I really needed to get back to my boys (true) who were without adult supervision thanks to our contest, and suggested we might have a go at it “tomorrow.” But both of us knew that Thursday’s schedule was jam-packed with much to do and no time for golf.

Upon arriving back at our camp at Pine Point I was surprised at being met by all my boys, all asking in excited voices what had happened in the archery golf shoot out. When I told them I had won most of them exploded out of camp and went to hunt Walt Biddle—to needle him. They reported back that Walt had responded, “You can’t beat dumb luck.”

And of course he was right. I am not without some natural skill with a bow, but beating two superior archers was not only a real achievement, but took a substantial amount of luck besides. Be that as it may, it was indeed a sweet experience.

Moral: Again, “nothing ventured, nothing gained.” And as long as you don’t really believe it and are not serious, a little bragging can lead to a lot of fun—even when you have to eat a little crow at times. **Properly seasoned, crow can taste pretty good.....**

### **Full Circle?**

On September 5, 2011, Jean and I celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary. We actually celebrated it a couple of months early, because everyone could come in July, but not everyone could come in September. So we had our celebration in July.

We spent most of a week together, with trips to the coast, barbecues, sing-a-longs, singing in church (our own choir), etc.

One of the things almost everyone enjoyed doing was archery. We had 14 recurve bows and plenty of arrows, and folks of all ages took turns shooting at a styrofoam-backed target set up in our back yard.

Some of them did very well. Daughter Sharon (Kartchner) perhaps did the best of anyone..... except ME. She had a lovely, tight cluster of arrows during one of her turns.

When I finally took my turn—with my favorite Bear bow—I hit a dead center of the four-inch yellow bullseye on the very first shot—from about 20 feet. And that was my first—and last—shot of the day/week. I remembered the lesson that day in New Orleans (in 1945)—when you are ahead, STOP!

And stop I did! Everyone laughed, because they all knew my secret.

Bob Wilson: A legend in his own mind.....:-D

### **Taking a Chance of a Different Nature: The Bottom of the Barrel**

Once in a while I took what some folks would think was a real risk—job wise. Sometimes I would even surprise myself.

Case in point: I recall that at one point while serving as the Human Resources Director in the Eugene “Management Sectional Center” or MSC (which covered all 112 post offices in the southern one-third of the State of Oregon) we were operating under a “hiring freeze.” This meant that we could not hire anyone without getting permission from our superiors, namely the Portland District—which had final say over all the post offices in Oregon.

The District Manager was one Ben Lusher, a dynamic, outspoken, assertive individual that could be rather intimidating. I, for one, was not especially intimidated because I perceived that he was basically fair, rational, and because I knew that he had respect for me as an individual. I will tell you later how I knew this.

But for purposes of this story you only need to know that we had to get permission from the District Director of Human Relations —my functional boss—because of the hiring freeze.

We found ourselves in a desperate situation in one of our subordinate offices, Myrtle Creek, near the Pacific Ocean. What had happened was this: The U. S. Postal Inspectors—the Post Office’s internal police force—had discovered a pile of discarded 3rd class mail in a ravine. The mail was all from one route, and it was obvious that the letter carrier assigned to that route had “figured out a way to finish his route earlier each day!” He was arrested by the Postal Inspectors and later fired. But we immediately needed someone to carry his route.

As luck would have it, one of three letter carriers was on annual leave and could not be located. The clerk that normally covers for vacationing carriers was already doing so. So there was no one trained to cover for the just-fired carrier. We had someone on our hiring register who was available to carry the route, but we could not hire him without permission because of the hiring freeze.

We attempted to contact Hube Nukes, the District HR Directors, only to be told he was in a quarterly scheduled Labor-Management meeting. Meanwhile the Myrtle Point Postmaster was calling hourly for permission to hire the fellow on their hiring register. We told them to send him for a physical—to get that out of the way.

The Labor-Management droned on for what seemed ages. Finally I called the Portland office one more time, and told them—not asked but told them—to interrupt the meeting because we had an emergency and to get Hube Nukes on the phone. As luck would have it, they told me that the Labor-Management was just breaking up and handed the phone to someone who was NOT Hube Nukes, who said “Hello” in a strong, confident voice.

Not recognizing the voice I said “Who is this?” The strongly stated response was “This is Ben Lusher, the District Manager!” —spoken in a sort of cocky, designed-to-intimidate sort of voice. I’m not sure what made me respond as I did.....maybe it was the cocky, intimidating and slightly arrogant nature of Ben’s voice, but I responded “**The bottom of the barrel.**”

There was dead silence on the other end of the line, while Ben processed what he probably heard in disbelief, and before he could respond I blurted out “We need permission to hire a carrier in Myrtle Point or we don’t carry mail tomorrow on one of the routes there.”

Ben's response: "Well, you've got it!" I thanked him and quickly hung up before he could say anything else—especially about my impertinent earlier remark.

I DID indeed take a chance, but as I said I also knew that Ben respected me and my experience and knowledge about union-management matters. I knew that he had told my boss, Ethan Newman, Postmaster of Eugene, that "Bob Wilson is best Labor Relations guy we have in the District." Mr. Newman has shared that quote with me on one occasion.

Also, I think Ben respected me for not being afraid to speak my mind and give him good counsel.

On a former occasion, as local negotiations were getting ready to start, he had received a proposal from the local chapter off the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) concerning the dates and hours for the upcoming local negotiations, complete with places to sign the agreement to the union's proposed schedule.

Now, the only thing we were required to sign was the agreement we reached at the conclusion of local negotiations. We were NOT required to sign anything else, such as preliminary meeting schedules.

I was in Portland, in Ben's office, along with four of Ben's top people: Ed Upham (former District Manager and a heavy weight), Paul Urban (head personnel manager and direct report to Hube Nukes), HR Director Hube Nukes, and one other high ranking manager. Ben Lusher asked each of us, one at a time, whether we thought he should sign what was in effect a separate agreement with regard to our negotiating schedule.

One at a time Ed, Paul, Hube and the 4th person said they guessed it was o.k. to sign this preliminary document (what the heck, we were going to have to meet with them *sometime or later* during this time frame, right?).

Then he asked me. I responded that we definitely should NOT sign the proposed meeting schedule document. First, we are not required to do so. More importantly, it would be unwise to do so, because "What if you were required to fly down for a meeting in the regional office on one of the dates and could not make the meeting? They could file an unfair labor practice complaint or grievance. You could also set a precedent that could haunt you later. Don't do it. Tell them NO!"

Ben's response: "I agree with Bob Wilson!" i.e., he took my advice! This was personally gratifying, but you should have seen the funny looks it got from the other four men! I think they were embarrassed, and they should have been. And in case you wondered, I was able to work well with these men afterward. I think they respected me for speaking up, especially since I had a lot more labor relations experience and knowledge that they had.

I think this earlier conversation in Ben's office was one reason I "took a chance" on that later phone call about Myrtle Point.

[Aside: Ben never mentioned the "bottom of the barrel" comment; but he did "pay me back"—sorta—a few weeks later during the dinner meeting closing an Equal Employment (EEO) training conference. I was telling those at my table a story toward the end of dinner when Ben was about to make some opening remarks. He said something like "If Mr. Wilson will be so kind as to yield the floor to me we'll get this show on the road..." or something harmless like that. Our relationship remained intact. We always got along fine, and I always liked Ben].

### **Most Days**

There was one other experience I enjoy recalling involving Ben Lusher, our District Manager. It took place in an adjoining office at the Eugene Main Post Office in 1975, I believe, in my first year at Eugene.

I had a grievance meeting with the president of the American Postal Workers Union (APWU), Charlie Berg, to resolve two or three issues. I was meeting in Ozzie Smith's office, next door to mine, for some reasons. In addition to office doors leading to the main upstairs hallway, all of our offices also had inter-connecting doorways.

Well, on this occasion we had just finished discussing and settling the grievances, and were both in a good mood, and I decided to do something unusual. I asked Charlie if he had a couple of minutes—I wanted to play a song for him. I kept an extra narrow-bodied Bruno guitar laying on two struts under a bench in my office.

He said "yes," so I fetched the guitar and played a well-known, pro-union song, *Talkin' Union*, by Woodie Guthrie. He was greatly surprised. Here was Management's top labor relations guy in the office of his chief opponent—singing a pro-union song!! His reaction was a huge grin. My thinking? I thought it might be a good idea if he knew that he had to negotiate grievances with a management rep who understood the reasons for unions and was not inherently anti-union.

Right after I finished, we said goodbye, and I opened the door back into my office—and almost ran into **Ben Lusher, the District Manager** (from Portland). Ben took a look at the guitar in my hand and said, in an implied disapproving voice, "For Pete's sake Wilson, is this what you do every day?"—expecting me to quake a little at being caught in an "unusual" (to say the least) situation.

My immediate, nonchalant response: "Most days!"—and I just walked into my office as if nothing had happened and put the guitar away beneath the bench. All Ben did was shake his head, and keep walking. He never asked me what I was doing. But I also knew (a) that Ben's bark was worse than his bite, (b) that he knew I was a hard worker and (c) that he respected me

and my labor-relations expertise—he had said as much to Mr. Newman, my boss, on one occasion. So I had a little fun with my response to him catching me red-handed, so to speak.

### **Elijah Wilson and the Triple Bolts of Lightning**

This amazing incident occurred late one afternoon as we were approaching Salt Lake City from the north during a major thunderstorm. We could see really DARK clouds touching the ground about three miles distance on the other (south) side of the valley. We found out later that golf ball sized hail was falling in this dark mass of clouds. And dramatically, bolts of lightning were occurring at regular intervals—at least one a minute. It was a spectacular light show we were heading into.

The kids were oo-ing and aw-ing at each dramatic flash of lightning—all except one, little Joe, then about 6 years old. He was busy reading a MAD comic book, and as a result he would miss the flash of lightning. Then he would look up to see the lightning, but too late. Then he'd look down at the comic book again—and miss the next flash.

This went on for several flashes, Joe always missing these impressive bolts. Finally he said “Daddy, I want to see the lightning!” I told him to close his comic book and stare straight ahead for one minute, and he would see the lightning. So he started to do so. Watching the LCD clock on the rear view mirror change from one minute to the next (less than a minute had transpired) Joe said “It’s been a minute, and no lightning!”

It had not been a full minute yet, actually, but I said, “My son wants lightning, my son gets lightning!” and I cocked my right hand and arm and flipped it forward vigorously; and THE INSTANT my hand stopped, the sky lit up with not ONE, but THREE BOLTS OF LIGHTNING!

It was a spectacular display, and the car exploded with laughter and comments that lasted the better part of a minute. When he could talk, Randy revealed that he was preparing to say “The lightning must have happened on the other side of the mountain....”

The five older kids were really laughing at the sheer luck involved in my prediction (actually, my “order”). Joe, on the other hand, did not get the joke. After all, his dad was a pretty special guy, held the “priesthood” of God, and so he wasn’t surprised that I could call lightning down out of the sky. In his eyes I was just super dad.

I think I ended the laughter and kibitzing by cocking my hand again and saying “When I say it’s bedtime from now on there’d better be some quick compliance on your part....” (more laughter).

Yes, Super Dad—Elijah Wilson —brought triple bolts of lightning down out of the sky over Salt Lake City UT one rainy afternoon.....

## **Yellow Fix**

We were having Family Home Evening in the living room in Eugene, Oregon, and we passed around a box of lemon drops so everyone could have one. At one point, I said, “I need a yellow fix,” and immediately—I mean instantly!—Bobby threw Joe’s yellow blanket in my face. This was a good example of how my kids were predisposed to have a quick wit.

## **Second Best Boss? [Wilson’s Revenge!]**

One of funniest and most rewarding events while working in the Eugene Management Sectional Center or MSC occurred just after the huge pre-Christmas rush during the winter of 1977, when Al Williams came to Eugene from Medford to be our new Director of Mail Processing.

An “MSC” is an organization comprised of the scores of small post office under the leadership of one large post office. The Eugene MSC was composed of the 120 post offices in the southern one-third of Oregon, and headed by the Eugene Post Office, the largest in that area.

Here’s what happened. I had been in Eugene since July of 1975. But neither I nor Al Williams had ever been to most of the smaller offices in the MSC, and our mutual boss, Ethan Newman, the Postmaster of Eugene who doubled as the MSC Manager, decided that Al and I should spend a day or so touring much of the MSC to actually see as many of the small post offices as we could—and personally meet the small-town postmasters and crews. Since the Christmas mail crush had already occurred it was a perfect time for such an orientation trip—the only time Al could dare be away from his distribution operation. And since there are virtually no grievances in December (everybody’s working too hard to gripe) it was a good time for me, too.

So off we went, the two of us. It was an enjoyable trip, not only because Oregon is a beautiful state to explore and not only because we got acquainted with some wonderful people, but it was also a chance for Al and me to get better acquainted with each other. We covered a lot of ground, conversation-wise, and I honestly cannot recall what we talked about—it was too long ago. But I do recall one subject we did discuss.

I recall clearly that we discussed our boss. Mr. Newman had some “interesting”—and frustrating—management practices. On major, serious problems he was fine—always made good decisions. But he also had some funny quirks. Like his habit of delaying minor but important decisions that you needed resolved. He would sit on them several days until your request and recommendation became HIS decision. Etc. Etc. I was complaining about one frustrating situation when Al offered this assessment: He said, “Bob, Mr. Newman can be frustrating, but I will say that he’s the second best boss I ever had.”

When I asked him why he said that, he said, “Think about it. When it comes to really important decisions, he always does the right thing.....always makes the right decision.”

As I thought about this I had to agree with him. With the big issues and decisions, he always took our advice and made the right decision.

Well, we completed our trip and, as Newman planned, had a better understanding of the smaller post offices in the western part of our MSC and their situations. We knew where Powers was, and appreciated the twisty road into it and the lovely custom interior the postmaster had created. We visited Elktin and Scottsburg and Reedsport and Northbend/Coos Bay and Coquille, and tiny Norway, OR. And Myrtle Point and Tenmile and Camas Valley. It was quite a trip.

Some time later—probably a couple years after the above trip—we managers were all due for our annual evaluation. It was probably around September of 1979. I knew that Postmaster Newman **hated** this one-on-one process, but he had to do it. Since I was the Human Resources director our shop prepared all the yellow forms for him ahead of time, and he would spend most of a whole day meeting with each of his top officers and give us our evaluations.

Because Al Williams by this time worked in our new Mail Processing Facility on Gateway Street in Springfield, he was the last person Mr. Newman had to evaluate. I saw Al go into Newman's office for his evaluation, and about 20 minutes later the door opened and I saw Al standing near the door, finishing up his meeting with the boss with small talk. I could see the yellow forms on the desk, so I knew I was correct in assuming Al and the boss had been having Al's evaluation talk. I also knew that the boss would be relieved that this dreaded chore had been completed.

I walked in the open door and Al started to use my entrance as a chance or excuse to leave. But I put my hand on Al's shoulder and stopped him in his tracks, saying "Mr. Newman, Al and I were talking during our trip through the MSC before Christmas '77 about all the bosses we had had during our careers in the Postal Service, and we decided that you were the **second best boss we'd ever had**".....the sick look on Al's face was amazing, as this was a direct quote. I think for a moment he could see his career fading before his eyes. After all he could not honestly deny what he had said...then I quickly added "**Everyone else tied for 1st place!**" Meaning of course that Newman was the worst boss.

Mr. Newman's facial expression at the first part of my statement was—"interesting." But when I delivered the punch line he realized that it was a joke and burst out laughing. It helped that my timing was perfect (he was already in a good mood).

Al's reaction was different. First he gave me a "how-could-you-reveal-a-statement-(remember, it was direct quote) made-to you-in-strict-confidence...how-could-you betray-my-trust?" He was stunned. Then when he heard the 2nd part of my statement and realized I was making a joke, he responded [greatly relieved] "You liar!" He was right about that on the 2nd part of my statement, **but not the first part**. And by saying "everyone tied for 1st place!" he was no longer in a position of having to explain anything. I put him ON the hook, but immediately took him OFF. But for a brief moment there he could see his life passing before his eyes.

Now, before you fault me for giving Al a hard time for a couple of seconds, you should know that I had taken a lot of flack from Al over the years, and he had it coming. But my intention was not malicious, but a good-natured, game-playing, gentle reminder that it just might be smart to stay on my good side!!! :D

It was a fun experience—well, for me and Mr. Newman anyway. :)

[Aside: I first heard this joke applied to myself by Kay Martin of Eugene 3rd Ward of my church. She caught me in the hall at church one day, and said: “Bob, we just had a meeting in Relief Society—to pick who was the number one, best overall male member of the ward. You know, most spiritual, best looking, etc. And YOU came in second place! ...Everyone else tied for first!” They are still looking for her body.....][So Al can blame Sister Martin for the momentary horror he endured]

## 8. INTEGRITY

Perhaps this is the single most important chapter in this book and the single most important lesson of life—the importance of honesty in all aspects of your life and in all relationships, whether business, social, or personal, and especially marriage.

I have been blessed to associate with many people during my lifetime who were great examples of integrity to me, including especially my—and Jean’s—parents. Here are some examples of such people and some personal situations where integrity paid off.

### **Wayne Horvitz**

Wayne Horvitz was my first boss after leaving graduate school. He was the Vice President of Labor Relations for Matson Navigation Company, a huge steamship company that pioneered the use of container ships in the mainland-to-Hawaii transportation industry. I will never forget what Wayne said when he hired me as his assistant—to help him by handling grievance with the union representatives to the five major seagoing unions—including two that represented the licensed officers (deck and engine room), but mostly the three unlicensed unions—the Sailors Union of the Pacific (SUP); the Marine Firemen, Oilers and Wipers (MFOW); and the Marine Cooks and Stewards (MCS). When a contractual grievance occurred on board one of the Matson ships, the officers would usually take care of it. But if they could not reach agreement, it was my job to meet with the shoreside union rep and handle the grievance.

What Wayne said was: “Bob, **never lie to these guys**. Once you do they will never believe you again. You will lose their good will, and you will be totally ineffective after that.” Or words to that effect.

I really appreciated that directive and advice, because it dovetailed with my own training and value system. I was glad to see that Wayne Horvitz, a Jew, had the same values as far as honesty was concerned, as any good Mormon boy (or man).

And during those three or four years I worked for Matson I never lied to any of the union reps. They would sometime get hopping mad at me for denying their grievances when, in my judgement, their grievances were unfounded (did not violate the collective bargaining agreement). But they respected me for always dealing with them “from the top of the deck.”

There were times when I/we needed a favor from the union—like when one of our ships was temporarily “out of compliance” with the contract. What did that mean? We had a “no strike” clause for the duration of the contract, but in order that the union could ensure that management fulfilled its obligation to have things like working televisions and radios, and agreed-upon good food items (like steaks), it was not an illegal “strike” for the union to refuse to sail on a Matson ship IF that ship was “out of compliance” with these management obligations.

On more than one occasion a ship would arrive in San Francisco from Hawaii with the T.V. not working, and on a weekend when the repair shops were closed. If we had a working T.V. in our Los Angeles terminal, the Union would generally let us sail the ship provided we met the ship with a new TV upon

arrival down south—with the warning that it would not sail from L.A. if we did not make good on our promise. We always did.

By contrast, Pacific Far East Line ships would remain in port in San Francisco until the T.V. was fixed or replaced—at great expense to the company—because an idle ship = lost revenue it *could* be making if sailing. And this happened because that company's main representative, a pleasant guy named Frank Dwinelle as I recall, had a reputation for promising things to the unions and then failing to deliver on those promises—which caused big political problems to the union shoreside reps, who, after all, were elected and could be booted out of their stay-at-home position.

That is, by always treating the union shoreside reps with respect and always following through to keep our promises and settlements, the unions reciprocated and gave us some slack when we needed it. Not so those companies that failed to do so. A good lesson to me.

### **An Early Lesson that Truth Pays Off (Truthful Teen)**

I shall never forget an experience that occurred when I was probably 14 or 15 years old. There was a movie being shown in town—I forget the name—about sexually transmitted diseases. It was pretty explicit. And of course ALL the kids in town were anxious to see it.

But the dilemma was: How to do so? Our folks would probably say no, we surmised. So one night I agreed to meet some friends and attend the second or “late” showing of this film (girls only got to see the earlier showing, boys only the later showing).

So I disappeared from the house as far as my parents were concerned and did not get back home until well after midnight. From my present perspective I understand why my folks would have been worried sick by my absence, and speculating all sorts of things.....was I consorting with prostitutes, and risking venereal diseases that could affect my ability to have children later, etc.

The next morning my mom gave me the “3rd degree”—demanding to know where I had been the night before. She was relentless, and my hangdog expression and monosyllabic answers only increased her persistence in demanding an answer.....which I of course understand. Finally I said: “We went to a movie called [John and Sue?] about sexually transmitted diseases.” That is, I told Mom the truth.

IMMEDIATELY the inquisition ceased. Mom was her pleasant self, all was well between us, and she fixed me a good breakfast. She knew that I was NOT in need of a medical examination or treatment. I had NOT been cavorting with shady ladies, etc.

Again, there is nothing like the truth to set things right.

### **Senator Gallio**

One of my favorite quotes about the importance of truth occurred in Lloyd Douglas' book, *The Robe*. This is perhaps my all-time favorite book, and I have read it at least six times over my lifetime and highly recommend it to everyone.

In the story, Senator Gallio lived in Rome about 2000 years ago during the reign of Emperor Tiberius—during the time that Jesus Christ was on earth. His son, Marcellus, was in charge of the Roman legion assigned to crucify Christ, and suffered debilitating remorse as a result. Ordered to command the emperor's bodyguards, but in no mental condition to do so, his father, Senator Gallio, was contemplating what to tell the emperor. Someone suggested a weak excuse, and the Senator said **“No, when there is some serious explaining to be done, there is no contraption so serviceable as the truth.”**

I love that quote, and totally agree with it.

### **Mr. Jack Botts**

Jack Botts was my employer for about a year while I was a graduate student at the University of California in Berkley, CA. He was the owner of *Botts Ice Cream*, a small store on College Avenue about a dozen blocks from the U.C. campus and about 100 feet from Ashby Avenue, a main east-west artery in Berkeley.

Botts produced a very high quality ice cream product, which used a 16 percent butterfat ice cream mix. In California, if you want to call your product “ice cream,” by law it must have at least at 10% butterfat base. But Botts' ice cream was 60% richer than that!!! Botts had started his store in the middle of the Great Depression and by very careful planning and quality control and taking no profits from the store during the first year, he had built his business from nothing into a thriving business. People came to his store from far and wide—and gladly paid the premium prices he had to charge—because it was simply the best ice cream available anywhere—period.

Mr. Botts hired me to be one of his two ice cream makers, and during my interview he told me how important—vital—it was that the ice cream I made was perfect (with a capital P). He told me of other ice cream manufacturers he had known of that had cut corners and cheapened their product and had gone out of business when that fact had become rapidly known. And he said “Bob, I want you to promise me that if you ever make a mistake—and you will—that you will tell me....so I can decide whether it is correctable or not. But it is vital that no ice cream leaves this place that isn't perfect.”

I promised him. And twice I made a mistake....added too much water to some pineapple sherbet, and left the food coloring out of some pumpkin ice cream. And I told Mr. Botts, as promised, and he had me pour both 5-gallon cans down the drain—which included a whole #10 can of crushed pineapple in the one case—and he *thanked me* for telling him the truth. No chewing out. Just “thank you.” He knew I felt badly about the errors. And he appreciated my honesty and keeping my word to tell him when I had made a mistake.

### **Susanne Henry**

Susanne Henry was the Postmaster of Eugene, OR, and the Sectional Center Manager indirectly in charge of all of the offices in the southern one-third of Oregon between early July, 1987 and October, 1992. That is, the roughly 120 post offices in southern Oregon reported to her administratively. This was in addition to her duties as head (Postmaster) of the largest post office in southern Oregon (Eugene). In effect she wore two hats, so to speak. And she wore them jauntily.

And she was the best boss I ever had.

I will never forget how she started off her stint in Eugene. Following a week of orientation by the Portland OR honchos (which she did not need...she was way ahead of them) she started her first solo week in Eugene by calling a staff meeting of all available officers and managers, down to first-line supervisors. In that meeting she let us know that she was divorced, had two children (by name), and that she liked to be called by her first name, Suzanne, as being called Mrs. Henry made her feel old; and she hoped that we would not mind if she used our first names as well.

Then she stated that she felt it would help relationships if we all knew how she liked to operate—so we would better know what to expect and what she expected. For example, she said, she liked correspondence she was to sign delivered in a certain format which she showed us.

Then she continued by telling us what was important to her. **One of the first things she cited was integrity; and by that she explained she meant basic honesty in all that we did; doing the right thing; always telling the truth—to her, to each other, to the unions, to our employees, etc. She said that “This is sacred to me.”**

She also talked about looking and acting professional, and giving her the benefit of our honest counsel—including arguing with her if we disagreed with a decision she was about to make or had made. She said “I don’t have room in my organization for ‘yes’ men. Don’t let me go down the primrose path without the benefit of your counsel. I will never resent you disagreeing with me. If my gut instinct is that you are wrong or your advice is less valuable, I may choose to ignore it. But don’t hold it from me.” In summary, she was candid, down to earth, and gracious. We were all impressed.

And she was true to her word in this in every regard. We could challenge her decisions to our hearts’ content and she never was offended, but considered it the highest form of loyalty, I think. That is, she had enough confidence in her own ability that she was not threatened by disagreement. Happily, she was very bright and astute and seldom needed our corrective advice; but when she did, she got it, and if it was the right thing to do, she took that advice.

I can recall one occasion when a supervisor (who will remain unnamed) did something deliberately counterproductive, and she wanted to take an action that was probably justified but unwise, and we told her that we understood, but counseled her to take a more prudent course of action. She reconsidered, and agreed to take the more appropriate action while admitting to us that “in her gut” she still preferred the more drastic (less wise) course.

But the thing I probably most appreciated was her commitment to integrity in all our dealings. That really shined like a bright light in my mind, and earned my loyalty to her. She was a superb boss and a role model. Not perfect, but darn near. And she always told the truth to us.

I’ll be saying more about Suzanne Henry later in this book. Especially the effect this value had on our relationship with our craft unions (very positive), and a brilliant tactic she used to earn their trust.

### **Dr. Brown (on his deathbed)**

One of my favorite stories concerns that of a Dr. Brown, who spent his life in competent, devoted service to the citizens of his semi-rural community somewhere in the midwest. Not only was he knowledgeable

about medical treatments, etc., but he had such a positive, uplifting personality that people said his presence alone seemed to get many an ailing person on the road to speedy recovery.

But time catches up with all of us, and Dr. Brown was no exception. And one day the word got around that Dr. Brown, now an old man, was on his “death bed.” Neighbors and friends from all over the area came by his home to “pay their last respects.”

When they knocked on Dr. Brown’s door they were greeted by Mrs. Brown, who invited them to go down the hall to the bedroom where—to their surprise—they found the object of their concern holding court (so to speak), cracking jokes with a group of similar friends, even though he was obviously frail and fading. Those present could not help but laugh at the good doctor’s wise cracks. It was obvious that although his body was just about used up, his sense of humor and wit were unimpaired.

Everyone was laughing and chuckling—except one good sister, Sister Smith, whose stern, unsmiling countenance alone reflected the true gravity of the situation. Finally she spoke up and said: “Dr. Brown, don’t you think it’s time you made your peace with God!?”

The good doctor smiled sweetly at the well-meaning-but-cheerless author of this comment and said: **“Why, Sister Smith.....we never had a falling out!”**

There is a wonderful lesson here. We should never plan on deathbed repentance, but should, like Dr. Brown, live our lives in harmony with God’s commandments, including forgiving those who use us badly, so that we can enjoy the peace that comes only from such compliance. We should be on friendly terms with Him and His son throughout our lives. Can you think of better Friends? I can’t.

My goal is to live in such a way that when I am in Dr. Browns’ situation I can truthfully say I “never had a fallin’ out” with God and His son, Jesus, Christ.

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### **Exceptions?**

Are there situations when telling the absolute truth may be inappropriate? I think there are *some* such situations, or at least one that my wife and I have chuckled about:

Suppose you are in the company of a new mother holding her baby. She obviously is on cloud nine and proud of what she, with some heavenly help, has created. However, in all truth, you believe the baby is one of the **homeliest** babies you have ever seen. You are expected to comment. What do you do? Lie?

Well, no. What you do in such cases is say something tactfully noncommittal, like “Now there’s a baby!”— which is a true statement. The mother will interpret that as she pleases—probably assuming that you mean her baby is a role model for all other babies. She’s happy, and you are relieved—a win-win. And you still have your integrity. And no one is hurt.

Or comment on some nice feature....“What a beautiful, full head of hair he has!” (never mind that it’s on an ugly head! :-D)

Or there is always the benefit of just simply smiling and keeping your mouth shut!

### **Sharon Wilson (Cutting Class?)**

Jean and I have been blessed with some very squared away (and very bright) children. One of them is our #2 daughter and #4 child, Sharon Louise Wilson. She is not only attractive, but she has a strong sense of right and wrong, and is also very competitive (see the story about archery golf later in this book).

Sharon and a friend were both members of the Dorians jazz choir at South Eugene High School (SEHS) under the direction of Jim Steinberger. Sharon was a senior that year. The Dorians met during the first lunch period.

One day Jim's wife gave birth and Sharon and friend found a note pinned to the door of their rehearsal room door attesting to that fact and notifying them that class was cancelled for that day.

So they went to the cafeteria to spend the time socializing with some of their friends that they usually never got to see during the first lunch period. As they approached a group of such friends one of them, aware they had a class during first lunch period, asked the pair, "What are you doing here?"

Sharon's friend answered immediately "Oh, we cut class!"

The person who asked the question processed this information for a couple of seconds and then responded. "No you didn't!.....Sharon wouldn't cut class!!"

That is, Sharon's reputation for always doing the right thing was so strong and well-known that the questioner knew the friend was making it up. She knew that Sharon—an "A" student and righteous person—would never stoop to cutting a class.

This true story has always been gratifying to Jean and me....that we had raised a daughter to always do what is right, and she had internalized this important lesson to such an extent that all her friends recognize her integrity. What a gal!

### **Mike Fitzgerald**

Mike Fitzgerald was the president of the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) in the Klamath Falls (Oregon) Post Office. Physically he was tall—about 5'10"—slender, and with a healthy head of hair and well-developed beard, looked like a cross between a lumberjack and a hippy. His significant other was a gracious lady named Teresa as I recall.

My reason for citing Mike as an example of integrity is because of a significant happening in the Klamath Falls Post Office.

There was an employee—I'll call him Tom Forest (not his name)—that was something of a cancer at the Klamath Falls Post Office and at the USPS. Tom could be an excellent employee when he chose to be, as he generally did; but he was a flawed human being, whose arrogance and vindictiveness—and need to prevail in any confrontation—was his undoing.

Although we were never able to prove it, people who displeased Tom for any reason were likely to have their cars “keyed” (scratched with a key), ruining their finish and requiring expensive repairs. A supervisor with whom Tom was angry had a needed check intercepted and diverted and delayed 24 hours, screwing up the supervisor’s planned vacation. The check—which was from out of town—was discovered in the collection box in front of the main post office the following day—one day too late to finance the vacation. SOMEONE had found the letter, and had hidden it on his or her person, and deposited it outside in the collection box on the way home—guaranteeing a 24-hour delay. Everyone knew vindictive Tom had struck again, although no one could prove he had done it.

Tom was also a union steward, and caused major headaches filing nuisance grievances—those with little substance, especially against an honest-but-socially-stiff supervisor, Dan Murphy.

I received a call from Mr. Murphy, detailing something bad Tom had done, and Murphy asked “Can I justify giving him a 5-day suspension for that?” I surprised him by telling him “Yes, but do you really want to do that?” I could tell he really, definitely wanted to do that. Dan said: “What do you mean?” I then suggested an alternative, using a concept called “Positive Discipline.” I explained that taking away a week’s earning would definitely punish Tom, but that it was not likely to correct his negative behavior. Rather, it would build resentment and lead him to simply devise new ways at getting back at management in the Klamath Falls Post Office.

I proposed that instead of the traditional discipline—which is to progressively punish the employee—to treat them worse and worse until they behave better and better (which actually seldom works, and in worst case scenarios results in them coming in with a handgun and shooting the supervisor and/or fellow employee)—that Dan instead give him a three-day mandatory leave of absence—at the end of which he was to return and tell him—in writing—whether he wanted to be a faithful, good postal employee, and follow ALL the rules — or not. It was his decision to make. And to show him that we hoped he would choose to stay with the USPS and *be* a good employee, we were going to *pay* him during his tree-day absence.

Seem like too nice a thing.....to reward a trouble-making employee with a paid “vacation?”

It’s not. Just imagine Tom’s wife: “What do you MEAN you can’t go to work today?” Etc. She sees future “no shoes for the kids,” etc. And to be told you are not to set foot at your work place, and that you need to make a decision that basically determines whether you will have a job or not—that’s heavy stuff.

Tom came back with a note promising to do better, and in part of his written statement ended by saying “I’d like to thank my supervisor, Dan Murphy, for his consideration in my behalf.”

That is, it worked! For about six months, Tom was close to a model employee. His behavior improved dramatically...at first. Sadly, after about six months, he regressed to his old, destructive, vindictive behavior.

At one point Tom Forrest went out of his way to walk past Postmaster Dan Sterns and literally ran into—“shouldered” the postmaster—with his right shoulder. Not accidentally or gently, but forcefully. It was a physical assault.

For this Tom received a 7-day suspension, without pay, the traditional disciplinary action for something as serious as a physical assault.

While on his suspension, Mike Fitzgerald (remember him?) got a phone call at work from Tom, who, Mike could tell, had obviously been drinking. Tom was talking excitedly and making threatening remarks about what he was going to do to the postmaster, including that he was going to “cut off the postmaster’s legs.” This was a phrase he and Mike had used in a prior conversation, and the translation was that Tom was going to physically harm the postmaster.

Mike tried to calm Tom down, and thought he had done so, until Tom said “F--- it, I’m gonna do it!” And hung up the phone.

Mike returned to his letter case, not knowing exactly what to do—this had never happened before—and probably seeking her advice, told Teresa (his significant other) what Tom had said. Teresa told Mike, “Mike, you have to warn Dan!” (the postmaster).

So Mike, who worked tour 3 (the evening tour) called Dan at home, told him he’d “better watch his backsides” because of Tom, and Dan, surprised by this call, just said “OK” at first and hung up. Seconds later he called Mike back at the Post Office and asked him to explain what he meant, and Mike, no doubt reluctantly, told Dan the details of his (Mike’s) conversation with Tom, including the remark of “cutting off his legs.” (= shooting).

Dan did two things: He called the U. S. Postal Inspector—the Post Office’s internal police force—and he bundled up his family and moved them all over to his wife’s parents home for the night.

Following an investigation by the Inspectors and the PM’s own investigation, Tom was fired for threatening bodily harm to the Postmaster Sterns.

Because Tom was a veteran, he was entitled to appeal his conviction to the Civil Service Commission, rather than the union appeal process. The CSC has a clear, well-established list of criteria (called the “Douglas Factors” after a famous case by that name) that must be met in order to sustain a removal action. Federal employees have some pretty impressive protections.

A Civil Service Commission hearing took place in Klamath Falls a couple months after the removal. The case was not going well for the postal service initially. Postmaster Sterns was not the best witness for the Service, and besides his testimony was hearsay. The hearing officer from the CSC even went so far as to “strongly suggest” the parties reach a compromise before dismissing us for a lunch break. After some consultation we decided to go on with the case.

But things changed dramatically after lunch, thanks to the testimony of the “deciding official,” Al Williams, who had actually made the removal decision, and had testified that he had applied all of the decision criteria under the earlier, precedent-setting Douglas case; but mostly thanks to the testimony of Mike Fitzgerald, **who was the principle witness against Tom, and who repeated exactly what had happened.** He did not allow what would have been misplaced loyalty because of Tom’s union steward relationship to in any way affect the truth of his testimony.

This took personal and political courage on the part of Mike Fitzgerald—and won my total respect for him. When faced with this vital decision—as to whether to tell it like it happened or be vague and “iffy”—**Mike chose to do what is right and tell the full truth.** It was clear to all at the hearing that Mike was being totally candid. And, as a result, the hearing officer found in behalf of management and sustained the removal. Hooray for people like Mike Fitzgerald.

### **Roy Lisi**

Roy Lisi was an APWU (American Postal Workers Union) steward on tour 3 at the General Mail Facility in Eugene, OR. He wore his hair long, and had a full beard. Roy sometimes had some strange ideas and strong feelings about what was right and wrong; but he was always sincere. Time has erased the specific issue involved, but his strongly adhering to some cockeyed personal principle of his resulted in his ultimate removal from the Postal Service. But it had nothing to do with lack of character, but to misplaced loyalty to his then distorted view of the world.

I recall at one point in time the local APWU was taking a position on an issue that was actually a violation of the National Labor Relations Act. Roy was the only APWU steward, locally, who understood that his local union was wrong, and he took the unpopular (but correct) stand against his union leadership. Again, I wish I could remember the issue, but I cannot. But I remember that it took courage on his part go against the tide of opinion of his peers, and I admired him for seeking to get his local union on the right track even when he was getting a lot of criticism at the time.

Because I respected Roy, I attended his wedding. And still, today, I receive an occasional e-mail, and have a pleasant conversation when I see Roy—a dedicated singer—at local musical events.

### **Robert E. Wilson**

Henry McMahan took over the direct oversight of the smaller, so-called “associate offices” in our old Management Sectional Center (MSC) following Al Williams’ retirement. I still handled all of the step 2 grievance procedure write ups for all 122 of these offices.

On one occasion we had a grievance sustained at step 3 that should clearly have been denied. Henry called me to ask what had happened. The explanation was simple: I had failed to get our side of the story sent to our step 3 representatives on time. I had screwed up. The fact that my workload at the time was burdensome was not an acceptable excuse and I did not make any excuses. I told Henry the truth—that I had simply lost track of the time remaining to get our side of the story to our higher ups, and was completely at fault. I told Henry what I had done to make sure that never happened again, and also told him I would never lie to him if I had done something wrong.

The result? He wasn’t happy, but our relationship became even stronger. When later on a weak-kneed Postmaster in Junction City gave way too mild a disciplinary action in a serious infraction case (against my advice) and tried to blame me, Mr. MaMahon knew who was telling the truth.

### **Suzanne Henry, revisited**

When Suzanne Henry scheduled a Value Statement seminar, with six main issues to discuss, she and my five director peers selected me to head up the integrity section of the seminar—which pleased me

personally. The seminar was for all managers and local union heads. My presentation stressed how integrity was directly or indirectly a key element in just about everything else we did in the Postal Service. Suzanne picked up on what I had outlined and expanded on the subject at the meeting—because it was one of her pet themes.

She had proven to be so honest and up front with the various unions (clerks, carriers, mail handlers) that she had completely gained their respect and trust.

How did this happen? Well, for instance, she invited the union presidents from all three unions from all the major office in our MSC to attend our monthly management planning meetings—where all our goals and higher-level pressures—and plans to attack and solve them—were discussed openly. There was nothing withheld from the union leaders present.

The result? As one union president stated “Now I understand why you guys do what you do!” With understanding came a greater willingness to cooperate. Trust levels soared. And as a result of *that*, the grievance rate decreased dramatically in the Eugene Post Office. For instance, our grievances with the local Letter Carrier’s union (National Association of Letter Carriers or the NALC for short) decreased 33 percent the year following Suzanne’s reign and inviting the union to management’s planning, and another 30 percent decrease from *that* the following year.....primarily because of Suzanne’s inspired leadership and openness with the unions.

I recall that on one occasion Suzanne fired the local union president for lying about an important event. You would expect the acting union president and other union officers would raise hell about the discharge. They did file a grievance, but did not treat her action as anti-union or vindictive. They understood Suzanne’s action was a result of her sincere belief that the union president deserved to be fired. When I asked the replacement (newly elected) president how he knew Suzanne’s motive was not vindictive, he responded “Because you guys wouldn’t do that” (wouldn’t stoop to being vindictive or unfair). That’s how solid Suzanne’s reputation was with the craft unions—based on her consistent integrity in all dealings.

As I said, Suzanne Henry was the best boss I every had, and a major contributor to her success—and a major factor for my respect for her—was her integrity and candidness—in all matters at all times.

In summary, integrity is a vital ingredient in all healthy human relationships, and absolutely essential in marriage and family relationships.

## 9. OOPS-ES

In Chapter 2 we discussed a couple of “oops-es” involving the perils of prejudging. But we only scratched the surface of misadventures that I’ve experienced or heard of in my lifetime. Here are several more, starting with my favorite “oops” of all time: Marvin Moss’ Miscalculation. I call it *Winnemucca and the Abandoned Bride*, and it is a lesson on the perils of impetuosity and pride and.....frankly.....a little stupidity (failure to use your brain).

### **Marvin Moss’s Mistake**

I met Marvin Moss and his wife, Betty, when I was attending the Bay Ward (congregation) of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in the Spring of 1957, while my ship, the U. S. Point Defiance (LSD 31), was dry-docked in the Hunter’s Point Naval facility (South San Francisco). I had one date with Betty, and the first piece of cheesecake I ever had was one she made for a ward dinner party. [A revelation.....I didn’t know anything could taste so good!!] Sometime after I left the area, Betty and Marvin began seriously courting and eventually became engaged.

Their wedding plans involved a trip from San Francisco, California to Salt Lake City, Utah—which was the nearest LDS temple at that time. Because of limited leave time, their plan was to start driving to Salt Lake immediately after work on a Thursday, and drive all night Thursday, taking turns at the wheel. They had even made a sort of flat sleeping area on the rear seat of their Volkswagen.

Being the macho male partner, Marvin magnanimously volunteered to take the first driving shift, while Betty—no doubt exhausted from all the whirlwind preparations—took the first nap. She apparently went to sleep quickly. And soundly.

They reached Sacramento, and Betty slept on. Marvin was still doing fine as that was only about 1.5 hours at the wheel. But by the time they reached Reno, NV, he was starting to get really tired and started wishing Betty would wake up and take a turn at the wheel. Then he chastised himself, saying (to himself), “No, she’s my sweetheart and needs her rest”.....and continued on.....through Wadsworth....Lovelock.....and Humbolt.....and yet Betty slept on.

The further Marvin drove, the more upset he became with Betty for not waking up to relieve him at the wheel. Apparently it never occurred to him that he could have stopped at any time and awakened Betty.

By the time they reached Winnemucca and stopped there for gasoline, he was so ticked at Betty that he got out of the car without even condescending to look at his free-loading bride-to-be, told the attendant to “fill it up,” and headed for the men’s room.

Upon returning to the car and paying the bill, he climbed into the drivers seat and without a backward glance at the parasite in the rear seat, briskly drove off toward Salt Lake. Apparently it never occurred to him that his passenger might need a restroom, too, by this point in their trip. Oops!

Seconds after he drove off Betty emerged from the ladies rest room, and was of course alarmed by the absence of Marvin and the VW. “Where’s my fiancé!?”

Meanwhile Marvin, still unreasonably angry at Betty, was high-tailing it toward Stateline, NV. There he pulled into one of the all-night stations and the attendant surprised him by saying, “Are you Marvin Moss?”

Stunned he quickly (finally!) glanced around and discovered his now empty back seat.....

“Smooth move, Buddy, you left your fiancée in Winnemucca!”

Then the attendant related the facts and the plan. His fiancée was on her way toward Stateline in a highway patrol car with the lights flashing but without the siren on. Marvin was to return toward Winnemucca and when he saw the highway patrol lights flashing, he was to flash his high beams off and on and the patrol car would stop and deliver his human cargo (Betty).

And that’s what happened about 30 or 40 miles later.

The good news is that Betty still married him in the Salt Lake Temple in spite of his excess pride that caused him to be too proud to even look in the back seat as he left Winnemucca and his lack of common sense in not waking Betty sooner or realizing she would be as much in need of a restroom as he had been. And to my knowledge it has been a good marriage. But when you ask Marvin what happened on his wedding trip he is prone to mutter under his breath in a disgusted tone...“Winnemucca!!!”

Moral? I guess the moral is that you should use the brain God has given you to think things through and avoid impulsive, irrational thought and actions....such as stopping and waking up Betty earlier... and avoiding unwarranted pride that prevented him from checking on his fiancée before he drove off.

### **Water in the Well (City Boy in the Country)**

Every summer while I was growing up Dad had only two weeks of vacation, and we always went to the same two places. For Christmas, we would drive from Little Rock, Arkansas (later New Orleans, LA via Little Rock) to my Grandma and Grandpa Gray’s home in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. Usually we encountered some snow, and we got to know our relatives on my mom’s side well as the years went by.

Bartlesville was a sizable town, and the headquarters of Phillips Petroleum Company (“Phillips 66”).

And every summer we would drive from Little Rock or, later, from New Orleans, to Maysville, Georgia, a tiny little town (“This is Maysville, wasn’t it?” as you drove by it) with a population of 600. I recall one local telling me the population never changes. He said “Every time a baby is born a man leaves town!”

In Maysville we encountered things like outhouses (Grandma Wilson had a three-holer!), milk cows, horses, big food gardens with vine-ripened tomatoes, delicious corn-on-the-cob and other delicious foods.

And wells. We got our water from wells. Grandma Wilson’s well was reached from the elevated back porch, and had a trough beside it with a pipe that ran from the back porch about 50 yards to a tub—an old bathtub—that watered the cows. We used to like to pour water into the trough and run like crazy and try to beat the water before it came out of the other end of the pipe in the cow tub or trough.

My grandma's delightful sister, Dad's Aunt Woodie Gailey, who lived a couple of miles east of the old homestead, had a well very near her back door. One day I raised up a bucket of water to get a drink, and, being taught not to waste things, dutifully poured the water I did not drink (most of it) back into the well. It just seemed the proper, conservational thing to do, right?

Wrong! Pouring the water back into the well usually hits the sides of the well on the way down, and makes the water muddy for several hours. **Oops!**

Every country kid knows this, but I was a city kid. And I literally never heard the end of my folly. To this day those relatives remaining—like my cousin Bill Davidson or Bobby Davidson—remind me of my ignorance in that act of “conservation”. Since then I realized why there was a separate trough next to the well into which to pour excess water.

Moral: 1. One kid can't know everything! 2. Every group of folks has unique wisdom, unique to their situation. Respect it!

### **Rotten Egg in Pocket**

My great uncle Lorenzo Dow Speaks owned a small farm on the outskirts of Bartlesville, on the south side of town. He was one of thousands of babies named after Lorenzo Dow, an eccentric, famous itinerant American evangelist (October 16, 1777 – February 2, 1834). On Uncle Dow's farm he had a goodly number of chickens that kept him well supplied with eggs.

One day, when I was about 5 years old, I discovered an egg in one of the chicken nests, and unwisely put it in my pocket. It should come as no surprise that the egg broke.

But the bigger surprise was that the egg was rotten, and in addition to the huge mess it made, it stunk! I recall mom had to strip me of my short pants and underwear and this of course was most humiliating to me and no doubt unpleasant for my mother, too, due to the smell. I was informed that Uncle Dow kept some eggs in the nests to encourage the hens to lay....that this was a “decoy” egg for that purpose. But, again, being a city boy, I did not know about such things.

I was clearly out of my element (again). Oops!

### **Poison Oak and Mr. Newman**

Mr. Newman was my boss at the post office in Eugene, Oregon. When he was a boy, he and another kid went on a church picnic in the fall, and they were very impressed with the beautiful red plants (i.e., poison oak), and they gathered armfuls of it. Of course, the adults were shocked to see what they were doing. They ended up going to the hospital. Ignorance is not always bliss—or at least not for long.

### **Life Lesson in Humility**

Sam Emerson was one of the older members of the  $\Sigma$ AE fraternity, and was more mature. One day we were on the front porch of the  $\Sigma$ AE house with some guys, talking about drinking. I said, “Well, I don't need to carry my personality around in a bottle.”

Sam said, “That is one of the most smug things I’ve ever heard you say,” and boy, he just chewed me out for bragging about my righteousness. I apologized to him, because he was right—I was basically saying that those who drank had no personality, slandering all my fraternity brothers. He chastised me for being smug, and I thanked him for telling me that. I learned a lesson in humility.

### **Another lesson in humility: Learning to tie my shoes (at age 31)**

I belonged to the Naval Reserve after I got out of the Navy, and I decided to take a 2-week Naval Reserves course on instructor training. As part of that course, we were each required to present a skill, and we would teach the skill using a lesson plan and so on.

One young guy gave a presentation that I particularly enjoyed. He said, “Here’s the scenario. You’re a new recruit in the Navy, and you don’t know diddle, and I’m going to teach you how to tie shoes with a navy square knot. The reason we use that is because if you use one that is a granny knot, your shoes will come undone 5 or 6 times a day, and if you’re in general quarters and the plane is coming in to attack the ship, you don’t have time to tie your shoes, so you need them to stay tied. Square knots don’t slip, and the grannies do.”

He said that you can tell if you’ve tied a granny, because the bows will tend to go up and down instead of side to side. So I looked down at my shoes, and saw that the bows went up and down. I recalled that my shoes did come untied several times a day, and I realized—at age 31—that I didn’t know how to tie my shoes! That was a humbling experience for me, and since then I’ve been a bit more patient with others.

### **Making Points Attempt Backfires**

William J. Sullivan was the Regional Postmaster General for the USPS in the 11 western states from 1973 to 1976. He was a tall, handsome man with prematurely white hair. One Saturday morning RPMG Sullivan was shopping in a supermarket in Palo Alto, CA. He was carrying **his young son** with him at the time. The son had never had his first haircut, so his hair was long—like a girl’s might be.

One of Palo Alto’s letter carriers—perhaps seeking to make some points—recognized Sullivan and approached, saying, “Hi Mr. Sullivan, I’m [gave his name], one of your carriers here in Palo Alto. That sure is a beautiful little grand-daughter you have there!”

Oops!

Moral: Never assume!

Mr. Sullivan told this story at a management meeting not long after the event and got a big laugh.

### **Dumping the Queen**

I attended Lusher Jr. High School in New Orleans, LA. One day a group of friends got together to practice ballroom dancing. I think the girls probably initiated the event so that some of us male clods could improve our dancing skills—which was to the benefit of both sexes.

I recall that during this practice session I was paired part time with one Anne Hebert. In New Orleans, with its rich French background, Hebert is pronounced “A-bear” (silent “H” and silent “T”). Anne was a beautiful girl, and the unofficial “queen bee” in our junior high school. She appeared older than she was. Later, as a high school freshman, she had a date with a college senior, who though she was a college freshman. That’s how grown-up she appeared. She thought he was a high school senior. They discovered this on their first (and last) date.

She was also very nice. Proof of that occurred as we were practicing a “dip” while dancing. It was my first attempt at this corny dance move, and I did not know to turn my left foot 90° to the left—to support my partner—and naturally I lost my balance and ended up dumping Anne on her butt on the concrete floor of our basement “dance studio” and straddling her.

Ooops! Here I was dropping the most desirable girl in our school on her rear end. I was mortified.

Her reaction? “What did we do wrong?” she asked. I told her what I thought I had done wrong. Her next utterance: “Let’s try it again and get it right”—which we did. No scolding. No indignity. She just put me at ease, helped me get it right, and helped me improve my dancing skills.

Moral: All’s well that ends well. And it was a good lesson in how nice some people can be. Anne was not stuck up. She was considerate of others. No wonder she was so popular.

### **Bad Move**

I recall an acquaintance of mine revealing a mistake he made on a date. He was dating a rather lovely young lady who had a beautiful figure, and in the act of kissing this young lady he momentarily put his hand on one of her breasts. Ooops! He had NOT intended to do this and IMMEDIATELY removed his hand. Remorseful, he sat back in his seat, and with a hand over his eyes and shaking his head, made an immediate and obviously (to the young lady) sincere apology.

“I’m so sorry……” he said, and she could tell from his body language that he genuinely felt remorse and shame for his act, and in an effort to ease his obvious chagrin tried to console him by saying: “That’s all right Jimmy (not his name)……girls like it too.”

I’ve always thought that was a very sweet, nice thing for the young woman to say, whether exactly true or not.

If this story has a moral it is, first, to avoid getting into situations where your judgment could become clouded to the point that you would EVER think of such an inappropriate gesture toward a member of the opposite sex to whom you were not married; but, second, if you DID, follow Jimmy’s example and render an *immediate*, sincere apology, maybe followed later by an apologetic, non-specific note, with flowers?

### **Stay Focused! [Sacrament Fiasco]**

I got my first opportunity to direct music during the opening exercise of the Berkeley Ward Sunday School program. In those days this included directing the sacrament hymn. I had been doing this for

several months by the time of this incident, so there was no excuse for what happened that particular Sunday morning...but there was a reason.

All the scout-aged male youth of our ward were on a “warm-up” campout at Yosemite National Park—in preparation for a “50 miler” hike later that summer in the Wind River mountain range in Wyoming, as I recall. They had received special permission to hold worship services in the lovely Yosemite valley that Sunday, and because of the absence of the entire Aaronic Priesthood, the sacrament was being administered by the ward’s “High Priests” that particular day—something they had probably not done in the last 50 years.

I guess I was curious as to how these older brethren would do in uncovering the sacrament trays, etc., and instead of standing during the introduction of the sacrament hymn as I should have done, I was transfixed on these older men—who I noticed right away were “blowing it”. Instead of folding the sheet over the sacrament trays in the same direction, one started to twist it one way, and the other twisted it the opposite direction. Then, both realizing they were not working together, simultaneously corrected their error—which meant they still got it wrong, but in the opposite direction. It was a comedy of errors. They were “messing up”. And I was their fascinated witness.

Meanwhile I heard some soft singing, and whipping my head around, saw the entire congregation grinning from ear-to-ear, looking at their chorister, who should have been directing them, still sitting in his chair! OOOPS!!

I quickly stood, waited for a couple of moments and began to direct, smiling apologetically, while shaking my head in sort of disbelief, that I had allowed myself to be distracted by the ineptness of these older brethren who were a bit rusty in performing their unaccustomed duties.....and in the process, being inept in MY duties.

Moral: Stay focused on your own assignment(s). Don’t let yourself be distracted from essentials by wool-gathering or judging others’ performance.

### **Be sure of your audience**

The following story is one of my favorite “oops-es.” It was told to us by Roy Clovis, whose wife, Helen, was one of my all-time favorite piano accompanists and good friend. You’ll meet Helen later.

Roy’s friend and the friend’s wife were scheduled to pick up and attend a musical event with another couple. These two couples had known each other for several years and were really good friends.

Since they had not had a chance to have a good visit in many weeks, and would not be able to converse during the musical event, Roy’s friend and wife decided to arrive well ahead of their agreed-upon leaving time—almost an hour early—which is what they did.

When they rang the doorbell the husband of the home opened the door. Pleasantly surprised, he invited the couple into the house and ushered them into his living room. He explained that his wife was still upstairs, taking a shower, and that they were not yet ready to go.....which our couple explained was just fine, and explained that they had come earlier than agreed just so they could have more time to visit.

I should explain the layout of the house. Couple #1 had been ushered into the far end of the living room. The husband of the house was sitting in a chair that could be seen from the balcony upstairs; the visiting couple could NOT be seen from the balcony upstairs.

The wife finished her shower, oblivious to the fact that anyone besides her husband was in her house, and, wrapped in a towel, saw her husband and said from the balcony, "Honey, would you like a 'quickie' before I put on my girdle?" Clearly this couple had a warm, loving relationship.

Then she heard a masculine voice—not her blushing husband's voice—say, "Go ahead, Harry. We can come back in 45 minutes." Only then did the chagrined wife realize there were others in the house—who had overheard her very personal invitation.

She fled to her bedroom, and refused to come out. Not even for the concert.

Now, the moral of THIS story is clearly to be careful that deeply personal, intimate expressions are only heard by those for whom they were intended, though in this case, the doorbell noise had drowned out the shower noise, so the wife had reason to think that she and husband were alone. But you can't be too careful!

Personally, I think this is a cute story. Clearly this couple had a lot going for them, including a good sex life. I just wonder how long it was before she could gather the courage to face the other couple. Hopefully not too long. But it's a super oops story.

[Aside about Roy Clovis: Roy was man of relatively small stature, standing about five-foot-seven-inches, with a balding head, and an infectious grin. He was an accomplished performer, always willing to share his beautiful tenor voice when requested. With his wife Helen (more about her later), he always had a superb accompanist on hand to call upon. Roy was also a ventriloquist, and a pretty good one. His dummy's name was "Jerry." I will never forget this double-punch-line in one of his routines which went as follow:

Jerry: My girl friend is cross-eyed.

Roy: Your girlfriend is cross-eyed?

Jerry: Yeah.

Roy: Well, just how cross-eyed is she?

Jerry: She's so cross-eyed that when she cries the tears run down her back.

(Laughter).....(pause until the laughter fades....then he hit you with).....

.....**That was the beginning of "Back-tear-i-ah."** (even more laughter at this terrible play-on-words.)]

## **Construction Goof**

You have all heard the expression "Measure twice, cut once." But you have to measure correctly. And more....

When we first moved into our present home at 860 E 43rd Avenue in Eugene, OR, it became obvious that we needed more storage capacity in our garage. Since the height of the garage varied from 10.5 feet

to 12 feet, the obvious solution was to build a sort of attic in the garage, above the two sectional garage doors.

With dad's help and my engineering, we built a framework of 2-by-6s over the sliding garage doors, covered with half-inch plywood, starting on one side of the garage, and proceeded to load much of the excess supplies onto same before starting on the second side. I had measured the space between the rollers and the front of the garage door so it would clear the new attic structure—or so I thought.

But once finished, I tried to open the garage doors and discovered to my horror that the door would not open. It turns out in measuring the distance I had used a runner from the middle of the door, instead of the TOP wheel—which had a longer roller support than the rest.

My dad was almost beside himself, since we had expended a lot of energy loading a lot of stuff into the new loft already. But I told him to relax about that—that we would build the second half of the loft the necessary two inches higher, and just laterally move the stuff horizontally to the second half of the loft—which we did.

Then, with my trusty nail puller and a lot of work, we dismantled the first half of the loft and rebuilt it two inches higher, so that the garage doors—both of them—had clearance to open. Then we stocked the rebuilt loft with more stuff and except for wasted energy and time, all was well.

Almost. There was just one problem. One of the items we stored was a LARGE box containing a beautiful chandelier. The box is approximately 3' x 3' x 14." We had transported it to Eugene from the Bay Area in our U-Haul, but had no immediate use for it in our new home, as it was designed for a home that had a high ceiling entryway. It had gone up to the first loft from the open side, and had been faithfully shuttled sideways to the second half of the loft.

And now that all was happily in place, it occurred to me that the 2-foot by 2.5-foot access holes in both sides of the loft are smaller than the size of the large box housing the assembled chandelier.

And there it sits today, 42 years later, inaccessible. I will have to either move a lot of stuff and remove some of the flooring to increase the size of the access hole; or disassemble the light fixture and lower it—in pieces—through existing holes. Neither option is desirable, especially in the limited quarters of the loft.

Ooops!

Moral: Measuring twice is fine, but so is measuring correctly—and planning ahead.

### **Ernest Miramon to the Rescue**

My high school sweetheart (senior year) was a lovely young lady named Joan Helen Miramon. How lovely was she? Well, the fact that she was chosen and named the Sweetheart of her all-girl's high school (McMain HS) gives you a pretty good clue. She was just a lovely lady in all respects. It was a privilege to date and know her.

One date night I was in her living room just before leaving on our date when her father, Ernest, said “Bob, I want to show you something,” and led me outside to the front porch and pointed to some imaginary something across the street and quietly said “Your fly is unzipped!” Oops!

I quickly remedied THAT situation, and thanked him. I was embarrassed, but grateful for the face-saving way he handled the situation. The girls, still in the living room, were thankfully clueless of what had just transpired.

### **A Missile for Mr. Andry’s.**

As a teenager I delivered *The Item* newspaper, one of two afternoon newspapers then being published in New Orleans. The rival paper was called the *New Orleans States*.

My route covered an area of about four blocks square, bordered by Hickory Street on the north, Willow Street on the south, Lowerline Street on the west and ritzy Audubon Boulevard on the East, right next to the Tulane University campus.

I might add that accuracy in throwing a 2-inch, rolled up newspaper was important, because it rained a lot in New Orleans in the afternoon, and if you could throw your rolled-up papers accurately, you did not have to waste time dismounting to deliver your papers and your work went much faster. Many of the houses in New Orleans are elevated, with full above-ground basements, and screened front porches, set back only 15 - 18 feet from the sidewalk, and many thoughtful customers would hold the screen doors open (bless them!) so a paperboy could toss the rolled paper from the sidewalk to front porch without having to dismount. After doing this for four or five years I could do this from a speeding bike with 100 percent accuracy, almost with my eyes shut.

I had a friend, Steven Andry (pronounced Ahn-dray), who lived with his family in a duplex on Jeanette Street, about two houses west of the 1500 block of Pine Street (where we lived), on the south side of the street.

Like many duplexes, with open front porches, there was a dividing wall between the front porch area so that each side would have some privacy from their neighbors. The distance from the street to Andry’s porch was approximately 25 feet. Duck soup easy to hit the unscreened porch.

One afternoon I was delivering the Andry’s rolled up *Item* as usual. I had just released the paper from my hand, and as I continued eastward on my bike I spotted Mr. Andry sitting in an easy chair on his front porch, reading the competitor’s *States* newspaper. The newspaper was fully spread out, one hand on each side of the double page. And to my horror, here was the paper I had thrown spinning end over end irretrievably heading directly toward Mr. A’s newspaper.

I probably missed Mr. A’s head by four inches, but hit my competitor’s double-spread paper dead center, ripping it into two halves, one in each hand. That is, I completely destroyed my competitor’s newspaper. In hindsight it was a masterful stroke, and I am having difficulty writing this as the tears stream down my face. But at the time I was not laughing.

The second my paper ripped through his paper Mr. Andry let out a huge **HEY!!!!** He had a reputation as being something of a tough cookie and as I circled my bike to come to him and face the music, I was

more that dreading what was going to happen. Naturally I apologized profusely. He countered with a short-lived admonition to “be more careful.” To my great relief, that was all.

In retrospect, I suspect that he could see the irony of the situation—the battle of the papers. Tomorrow’s headlines: “ITEM PAPER ASSASSINATES RIVAL STATES PAPER.....” and the humor of it.....and maybe he could appreciate the extreme remorseful and worried look on his carrier’s face (mine). Plus the years of faithful service, and the fact that he had never been sitting there—ever—in past years when I delivered his paper.

So I lived to tell the story. It was a major “oops” at the time. But I had to stop writing a moment ago because I was laughing so hard I was crying and could not see the page, as I relived the situation of Mr. Andry looking so ridiculous holding his split-down-the-middle *States* paper, half of it in each hand.

## 10. CONSTRUCT SYSTEMS

Some years ago virtually our entire management team at the Eugene Post Office hired a Dr. Darrell Beck, a well-known management consultant, to present a series of lectures on interpersonal relationships. I believe there were eight lectures in all.

Dr. Beck got his undergraduate degree (B.A.) at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, TX, his M.A. at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, OK., and his Ph.D. at Washington State University, in Pullman, WA. He is president of Darrell Beck and Associates, Inc., and has advised over 20 of the Fortune 500 firms, over 50 federal, state, county and city governments, and numerous mid-sized businesses. You can Google him for more information.

I recall that Dr. Beck's lectures were stimulating and mind-stretching, and much appreciated by all of us. I particularly remember his lecture on "construct systems," which he defined as the way people see the world.....the way they make sense out of the very complex world.

He pointed out that everyone has a construct system, and that everyone's construct system is different.

And of course this presents problems when we communicate with each other, even when we speak the same nominal language. Because the same word or happening can mean entirely different things to two people.

### **GeorgiaTech Graduate & the Sunset**

A perfect illustration of Dr. Beck's point occurred during our honeymoon trip.

We were heading home from Logan, Utah, where we had been married, and from Lake Tahoe, CA, where we had spent a couple of delightful days with the Wilson and Merrill families, on a sort of "family honeymoon." We were in the Wilson's big Buick automobile along with my father, mother and sister (Collie, Gladys and Anita, respectively).

It was late afternoon and we were traveling about halfway between Sacramento, CA, and Berkeley, CA, and the sun had just set. Just afterward, the sky turned a bright, beautiful golden/orange afterglow.

At that moment we passed a huge electrical relay station, with scores of wires forming a myriad of the most interesting geometric patterns, silhouetted against the golden sky. It was impressive in an artistic sense, and I said, out loud, to all, "Look at that!" Three out of the other four people in the car knew exactly what I meant; but Dad, a graduate engineer from Georgia Tech, responded: "Yep....there's a lot of money there!"

He saw only the mechanical, physical, expensive hardware, not the artistic beauty.

Everyone else immediately burst into laughter, and I had to explain to my very practical, ex-farm-boy and engineering-oriented dad, why we were laughing, what I had meant by my comment, and what he was missing. He simply had a different construct system—a different way of viewing the world.

Moral: Don't assume people fully understand what you mean when you are speaking to them. They may seriously be missing your point. So to be sure you are understood, take a leaf from Jefferson Wilson (see immediately below).

### **Jefferson Wilson, Master of Communications**

Jefferson Wilson was the manager of the Mail Processing Facility (AMF) at the San Francisco Airport. He had several hundred people working for him. Jeff was a tall, relatively slender, charismatic black man of high integrity and intelligence. He was an excellent manager, and I did not mind when people used to refer to him as my "brother"—which in a theological sense he was indeed. And also in a "kindred spirits" sort of way. We were both honest and decent people. I genuinely liked and admired Jeff. He eventually ended up as the Postmaster of the 8,000-person San Francisco Post Office, so I'm obviously not the only person that thought highly of Jeff Wilson.

Over the years I had many opportunities to see him handle grievances and other problems that inevitably arose in the course of managing his responsibilities. With my history of grievance handling on the San Francisco waterfront and in the Postal Service, I am very familiar with the process. And Jeff was one of the best people I ever worked with when it came to handling grievances. He was excellent at handling grievance, resolving most of them without having to go to arbitration—and without "giving away the shop."

His technique? Simple. He went to unusual lengths to get the facts behind the grievance. He would ask lots of questions up front to make sure he fully understood what a grievance was really about.....not just the stated complaint, but any underlying factors that had given rise to the articulated grievance.

Instead of a knee-jerk decision to the stated grievance, his series of questions, designed to really understand the union's position—BY ITSELF—demonstrated a desire to resolve the problem if it could be resolved. It showed sincere respect for the union official presenting the grievance as well as a genuine concern for the people he or she represented.

He would typically ask half a dozen who-what-where-when-how questions to make absolutely sure he truly understood the problem, and only then would he render a by-then well-considered decision. And because he was basically fair-minded, and responding to the actual, real problem, the union was much more likely to accept the decision—even when they did not necessarily like the answer. That is, it helped greatly that he had a well-deserved reputation for consistently being fair minded.

How simple—and refreshing.

In this regard Jeff was something of a mentor and a partner, and he made my life as the Labor Relations Manager in the S. F. Post Office much easier (we had few grievances from AMF).

### **The Handwriting On The Wall**

One of my favorite stories about getting all the facts before passing judgment—synchronizing your construct systems—I discovered in a poem entitled *The Handwriting on the Wall*, by Valerie Cox. It goes like this:

## *The Handwriting on the Wall*

A weary young mother returned from the store,  
Lugging the groceries through the kitchen door.  
Awaiting her arrival was her 8 year old son,  
Anxious to relate what his younger brother had done.

"While I was out playing and Dad was on a call,  
T.J. took his crayons and wrote on the wall!  
It's on the new paper you just hung in the den.  
I told him you'd be mad at having to do it again."

She let out a moan and furrowed her brow,  
"Where is your little brother right now?"  
She emptied her arms, and with a purposeful stride,  
And marched to his closet where he'd gone to hide.

She called his full name as she entered his room.  
He trembled with fear—he knew that meant doom!  
For the next ten minutes, she ranted and raved  
About the expensive wallpaper and how she had saved.

Lamenting all the work it would take to repair,  
She condemned his actions and complete lack of care.  
The more she scolded, the angrier she got,  
Then stomped from his room, disgusted, distraught!

She went toward the den to confirm her worst fears.  
What she saw on the wall made her eyes flood with tears.  
The message, so sweet, pierced her soul like a dart. It said:

### **I love Mommy**

. . . . .surrounded by a heart.

Well, the wallpaper remained, just as she found it,  
With an empty picture frame hung to surround it.  
A reminder to her, and indeed to us all,  
Take time to read the handwriting on the wall

Moral: Avoid snap judgments. Get all the facts first if possible.

Once this mom's construct system got altered—to realize what she thought was destructive vandalism was in fact a profound expression of love—THEN she knew what her reaction **should** have been—and became. What she thought was all negative was, upon further fact-finding, a totally beautiful thing.

## 11. CONTROLLING YOUR EMOTIONS

[Losing Your Temper Is Bad But “Finding It” May Not Be]

I’m sure most of us would agree that as a general rule “losing your temper” (or, more accurately, losing self control of your emotions) is not a good thing—for at least two reasons. You are more likely to have regrets for one thing. And things are likely to accelerate and make things worse.

Over the years I have learned that except in unusual situations involving some form of genuine mental illness, losing control of one’s emotions **is a choice**. Proof of this? An abusive, irate husband may be raging at his wife and blaming her for causing him to become violent and out-of-control, but let the phone ring and find that his boss is on the line or some one else he esteems, and he will suddenly—instantly—take on a normal, very-much-in-control tone of voice and carry on a rational conversation with the party on other end of the line—proving beyond a doubt that he can and could (and should) be controlling his temper—IF he really chose to do so. So given the likely negative outcomes, why would any sane, caring person choose to lose control?

And normally those who are wise realize that in the normal give-and-take of the inevitable conflict that occur in life, beneficial resolutions are much more likely if voices remain calm, and emotions are kept in tight check. That’s the way civilized people behave.

Usually.

But sometimes a situation evolves where diplomatic, calm expression is NOT the best solution. I’d like to share one such situation where seeming to “lose” my temper was the ideal solution to a problem. However, I was in complete control of my emotions. I was upset, and emotions were real, but I knew exactly what I was doing—and it resolved a deadlocked situation in less than five minutes!

Here is the story, where I didn’t “lose my temper”, but “found” it—and used it to justified advantage. I hope the reader will find it instructive.

The situation was this: Every three or four years at the national level, Postal Management negotiates with various Postal Unions and arrives at a collective bargaining agreement, referred to as the “National Agreement.” These “National Agreements” cover big items like what the various union wages will be, etc. Once these national agreements are finalized, the parties at the local, individual post office level, conduct local negotiations on non-monetary issues, like when the guaranteed “choice” vacations will occur, and for what duration.

Naturally management would love to have this guaranteed vacation period spread out as long as possible—with as few employees gone as possible—because it makes planning to cover work needs easier and cuts down on the need for overtime. Naturally the union employees want to take their scheduled annual leave primarily during the relatively short summer months when their kids are out of school. So there is some give and take involved.

We had concluded some serious negotiation with the Mail Handlers’ Union one year, and after some give and take, had reached agreement on the period of guaranteed annual leave (leave they were guaranteed in

advance they could have off) and on the number of mail handlers that could be off each week (we were able to reduce the number off each week from 10 to 9).

The normal process upon reaching agreement is to “initial off” on two copies of the language agreed to (one copy for each party), and when all is done, to type up a final, smooth draft containing all the language agreed to during the negotiation. Then the parties “sign off” on the smooth, final copy. In fact, they are required **by law** (the National Labor Relations Act) to put into writing what they have agreed to in negotiations.

My job that year was to type up the final, smooth draft, which was a *verbatim* copy of these individual, initialed-off pages.

This I did. What happened afterward had never happened in my experience before. When the union received their copy of the final draft they refused to sign it. Why? Well, we found out that the union president, one Ron Scott, had caught a lot of flack from his constituents because we had been able to reduce the number of mail handlers off in a given week from 10 under the old agreement to 9 under the new, and several of his members were upset by this reduction of the number allowed off. We had also added several improvements elsewhere in the local agreement in order to obtain that concession, so it wasn't like we were pulling a fast one.

But in summary, Scott was catching heat from his members, and instead of doing the right thing and pointing out the other advantages, and telling them to suck it up, he took the cowards way out. Worse, he lied. He claimed we HAD pulled a fast one—that I had changed the wording slightly when I typed the final draft.

This was not so. I had faithfully copied down every word from the original initialed copies.

We reported this (illegal) impasse to higher authorities at the Regional Level, and I got a call or two asking what was going on...and why couldn't we just go with the old contract and language, etc. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Our own people were acting like we should just let the union get out of their obligation to put into writing what they had agreed to.

I recall chewing out at least one of the regional management officials, pointing out that we had negotiated new language which was better for management than the old, in good faith, and that the union was committing an “unfair labor practice” and violating the law by refusing to sign the contract, that the local president was a coward and falsely trying to shift the blame for the final form the contract took, and that I expected them to support our position fully. They ceased trying to put pressure on us in Eugene because they knew I was right.

In the long run, the National Vice President of the Mail Handlers' Union, one Harmon Brown (of African American descent), flew up to Eugene in an effort to settle the impasse created by the local union president, Ron Scott, and we met in the main office conference room with him, Scott, and several managers, including Postmaster Ethan Newman, me, the Director of Mail Processing, Al Williams, and one or two others.

And the talk began. And went on for some time—probably half an hour, with us getting nowhere. Part of the reason it dragged on was because National VP Harmon Brown realized he had a “mission impossible”. As an elected official, he could not afford to alienate the local president, Scott. Yet he knew enough about the National Labor Relation (the “Taft-Hartley”) Act to know that his union was in the wrong.

But then something happened which completely changed the dynamics of the situation. Local president Ron Scott made a huge mistake. He said (lying): “Well, all I know is that what I signed and what Bob Wilson typed up are different.”

I had photo copies of both the original initialed document AND the final draft I had typed, and I immediately SLAMMED first the initialed drafts into the table just in front of Scott so that they bounced into his chest, followed by the final draft I had typed, similarly delivered. Scott visibly flinched.

Simultaneously, in a loud, angry voice I said **“THERE’S WHAT YOU SIGNED, AND THERE’S WHAT I TYPED.....NOW YOU SHOW ME ONE WORD DIFFERENT OR YOU SHUT UP!”**

That completely changed the situation. Things *immediately* got tense, as I intended. Ron Scott had lied, and I had called his bluff. His lie had been exposed. As of that moment, all Scott wanted was to be off the “hot seat”, to get out of the room and the very embarrassing situation he had created for himself (with my help!). And suddenly his national VP’s mission changed from “mission impossible” to “mission simple”—to help get his local president out of the room.

Harmon Brown, a gentleman, said “Now Bob, you don’t need to get upset.....” I cut him off with “I have every right to be upset. This man has been imputing my integrity. I’ve gotten calls from my peers in the region questioning what I’ve done wrong. I’ve done nothing wrong. You know good and well, Harmon, that if your integrity is damaged you’re through in labor relations. THIS MAN is threatening my ability to feed my wife and children with his lies.” [And the whole time I was looking daggers at Scott, adding to his discomfort.]

At that time Al Williams, with impeccable timing (bless him!), spoke and added a small compromise. “Harmon, the agreement says 9 people can be off at a time. What if we agreed, informally, that we will let 10 off the first year, and then go to the new language (9) as written for the last two years of the contract?”

Ron Scott *immediately* nodded is agreement, and the new contract was signed within 60 seconds. Remember, all he wanted was out of the room. And the meeting adjourned less than five (5) minutes later.

An Interesting Revelation. As we were preparing to leave I asked Harmon Brown if I could speak to him in my office, and he readily agreed. In my office I explained to him that Ron Scott, his local president, was not to be trusted (which by now he already knew....Ron had put Brown in an awkward position by his cowardice and untruthfulness).

Then I learned something surprising. Harmon Brown told me: “Bob, I knew you would never have done anything underhanded. I remember how you and Charlie O’Donnell (Mail Processing Director in the San Francisco Post Office) had given the Mail Handlers (in San Francisco) a sweetheart deal in that first local agreement in 1972.”

What Harmon Brown was referring to is this: Charlie O’Donnell and I had negotiated with the Clerks union (American Postal Workers Union or APWU) that year before we met with the Mail Handlers. The APWU, a feisty bunch, had presented us with 132 demands, and after a lot of tough bargaining, we ended up agreeing to a total of 65 items, though the language had been changed a lot in the process. The APWU officers were fairly sophisticated and knew what they were doing.

By contrast, the San Francisco Mail Handlers union leaders were NOT sophisticated at all. And this was the first set of such negotiations under the new Postal Reorganization Act, so they were inexperienced in the negotiation process. They had initially submitted a measly twelve (12) poorly-worded, “Micky Mouse” proposals that were, frankly, rather a pitiful effort. It never occurred to me that Harmon Brown had seen those initial proposals.

I should add that the APWU were, on the whole, hard to deal with. They made life harder for management than it needed to be. The Mail Handlers, by contrast, were cooperative and reasonable to deal with—always.

Charlie O’Donnell and I made a decision to counter propose to the Mail Handlers the exact same provisions—word for word—that the APWU had had to fight tooth and nail for. We didn’t have to. We could have limited negotiations — and benefits—to the 12 piddling items submitted by these obviously unsophisticated local reps. But instead we gave the Mail Handlers a really great package. That is, we could have taken advantage of the Mail Handlers but we did not. And Harmon Brown was completely aware of what we could have done and chose not to do, but I didn’t know this.

I might add that the Mail Handlers’ union was 90 percent African Americans, and the effects of past discrimination on their educational—and other—opportunities showed in their lack of sophistication in labor relations and negotiations and even in their command of the English language. The clerks union leaders were predominantly Caucasian, and had a big advantage in education and sophistication. So this was also our chance to even the odds a little.... to “level the playing field”. And to reward—to thank—the Mail Handlers for their past and continuing cooperation. And that day I discovered (revelation!) that Harmon Brown was fully aware of what Charlie O. and I had done, and knew I would never have stooped to pull a fast one on the Eugene local union. This is a case of good works coming back to bless you.

Moral? There are at least two. First, sometimes it is O.K. to “find” (not lose, but find [and use]) your temper when someone is lying and wasting everyone’s time—as long as you are not irrationally out of control but know what you are doing and are justified in expressing your displeasure. Second, doing what is right is always the best policy.

One final note: From the look on his face I could tell that my boss, Postmaster Newman, was greatly surprised at the highly charged outburst from his hithertofore always mild-mannered Human Resources Director. He never ever mentioned it, but he learned that even his highly civilized subordinate had limits

which it is best not to venture beyond. Especially never question Bob's integrity! It didn't hurt my relationship with Mr. Newman. It was probably good that he knew what I was capable of becoming if unreasonably pressed.

### **Bulldog Drummond and the Civil Service Hearing Officer**

One of the major challenges I had when I took over the job of Director of Employee and Labor Relations in Eugene was having to deal with a very bright-but-arrogant union steward I'll call Jim Rockhead. Jim went by my house with a rifle one night, intent on killing me—based on some false information he had been given about an action I had taken. He had been drinking and an acquaintance of mine and a friend of his talked him out of it. It is a long story, and maybe I'll add it somewhere in this book. For purposes of this chapter I will mostly just say that Jim was eventually fired for being AWOL and discuss the aftermath of THAT action.

As a veteran, Jim was entitled to file an appeal either via the Union agreement, or with the Civil Service Commission of CCC. The CCC has a somewhat involved process with lots of "i's" to dot and "t's" to cross. But we were pretty experienced and good at following all the requirements—which are designed to see that a veteran was indeed fired for "just cause".

These things are usually scheduled a few months after the vet is fired, and that was so in this case.

I don't recall the exact procedural problem that caused the Hearing Officer from the CCC to suggest interrupting the hearing in about the middle of same, but he was about to do so—when our lawyer from the Western Regional legal staff, Dan somebody, came unglued. He basically chastised the hearing officer, showed big holes in his reason for wanting to postpone the hearing, argued persuasively why we should proceed with the case, and threatened to file a formal complaint with the CCC because of the unnecessary costs that would be associated with this unnecessary delay. He was brilliant and VERY persuasive. And the Hearing Officer blinked—and continued the hearing.

**Basically Dan called nonsense nonsense!** We were able to conclude the case in one sitting (which was all that was needed to establish all relevant facts), and ultimately received a favorable decision (the removal was sustained).

Dan later left the Postal Service and went into private practice, where his impressive abilities could be better compensated, but it was a pleasure to know him and learn from his example of tenacity and insistence in fighting for what you know is the right thing to do. What a wonderful role model—and a hero to me on that occasion.

## 12. ZERO DEFECTS

[Why We Drive Toyotas]

My wife, Jean, and I own two vehicles, both Toyotas—one a 1995 four-door Camry sedan, the other a 2011 Sienna XLE mini van. The Camry has 265,000 miles and still uses no oil between changes; the Sienna has 119,000 miles as of this writing and is basically like new.

There is a good reason we drive Toyotas. And it started with a talk I heard from then Regional Postmaster General (RPMG) Joseph Joe Caraveo, who was in charge of the 11 western states of the United States Postal Service (USPS) in the late 1980s to early 1990s.

In this talk Mr. Caraveo noted that he was required to meet with the Postmaster General (PMG) and other RPMGs every 4 weeks in Washington DC, and as an “officer of the company,” he was entitled and expected to travel back to Washington in First Class seating, as he was expected to perform useful work en route and would need the extra space the 1st class seating provided.

While traveling 1st class he often found himself sitting next to CEOs or other leaders of corporations who could afford 1st class and who were often interesting traveling companions.

On one occasion he found himself sitting next to the CEO of the world’s largest radiator production company in the world. This leader’s company produced ALL of the radiators for General Motors Corporation. That’s millions of radiators a year.

This man—we’ll call him Jim—and Joe discussed various things but eventually got onto the subject of quality control. Joe undoubtedly discuss the goal of 95 percent delivery accuracy in the Postal Service, and Joe discovered that Jim’s company’s contract with General Motors was similarly 95 percent (95%) flawless radiators.

That is, their contract with GM permitted up to five percent (5%) defective radiators, and that was the standard or “norm” for all radiators produced in America at the time (!).

Then “Jim” told him of something that occurred about four years earlier (circa. 1988) when Toyota was in the process of building their huge assembly plant in Georgetown, Kentucky. Toyota had put out bids for various components of their automobiles, including radiators, and “Jim’s” company—interested in the additional business—had submitted a bid.

He said that Toyota had requested them to fly to Kentucky to discuss their bid, and he and his top management team did so. They discovered immediately two things: (1) their bid was the lowest, and Toyota would like to accept it; but (2) Toyota could not accept it.

Why? Jim wanted to know. Because of the provision in the bid that allowed Jim’s company to produce up to five percent (5%) defective radiators. Jim’s team explained that that was standard or typical of all radiator contracts in the United States. The Japanese negotiators for Toyota explained that that was an unacceptably high defective rate for Toyota.

What did they expect? Jim asked. The answer: **zero defects**. Jim's team explained that no radiator company in America produced zero defects. They were told that in Japan, ALL radiator suppliers provided 100 percent perfect radiators (zero defects) "or no contract!"

Jim told Joe they asked for a chance to huddle in a vacant room (granted) and once alone, asked themselves the big question, "Can we do it?" They discussed the consequences back and forth. They would have to build a multi-million-dollar plant, on the Kentucky site, with an endless chain taking their radiators directly into the Toyota plant. Every one of their employees would, in effect, have to be an inspector, with the authority to halt the production line if they spotted a single imperfection in any radiator. They would all lose their jobs—from the top down—if a single defective radiator was inadvertently shipped out of their plant. Etc.

In the end, they came back into the negotiations and agreed to Toyota's terms: ZERO DEFECTS.

Toyota's negotiators reiterated: "You understand, one defective radiator and the contract is cancelled!?" Jim said yes, they understood that.

Joe Caraveo asked "How is it going?" Jim's response: "Great. We've been building their radiators for four years now, and not a single defective radiator has left our plant." Then Joe asked "What about General Motors?"

Jim's answer: "**Oh, they still get 5% defective radiators. That's what they expect and that's what they get!**"

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This true story is astounding to me. It has several instructive point. First, it illustrated the power of setting high expectations. If you want top performance—zero defects—you have to insist on it. And see that it is delivered.

Secondly, top management and all the employees in that plant engaged in producing top quality products and feel justifiably proud of what they are doing; and that tends to make them all the more inclined to want to do the best job they can. When tired and possibly tempted to take a short cut, they are far less likely to do so.

Third, when a company has a goal of zero defects in a product they produce, it gives me (or any other consumer) much greater confidence in the quality of that product. I am not surprised that the Toyota Camry is THE top-selling automobile in America. Here, 37 ± years later Toyotas consistently win top honors for high quality. Our personal experience with our Toyota's (we have owned three) has been favorable.

It is just good business sense to shoot for zero defects. It's a win-win-win.

### **Magnifying Your Callings**

Our church does not have a paid clergy—from the top down. There are numerous "callings" or assignments—literally hundreds in each of thousands of wards in the church. Amazingly this vast army of amateurs somehow manages to carry out their assignments with a high degree of efficiency and skill.

How do they do it? Well, our leader frequently remind us to “magnify our calling(s)”..... and then checks on us to see that we do.

For example, I am assigned to be a “Home Teacher” to five (5) individuals—two widows, and three other single seniors. I am supposed to visit them at least once each month, give them a spiritual or inspiring message, and check on their welfare.....and be their friend. Serious problems I should report to the bishop, who has resources to lean on in such cases. Routine problems I try to resolve on my own—to make sure my “charges” are safe and comfortable.

I *could* do a half-baked, perfunctory job, but each month I am required to give a report on how each person assigned (to me) is doing and what took place during our monthly visit(s). And even if I could make a slipshod effort that fools my supervisor, I can not fool God. So I do a good job watching over them.

In fact, I have installed iron railings on dangerous steps (at my expense); changed faucets in bathrooms; climbed onto roofs for leak repairs; cut, transported, and stacked firewood; worked literally weeks helping settle an estate and holding an estate garage sale to help raise over a thousand dollars for property taxes for one elderly widow; replaced a wind-blown-over fence; etc. In other words, I have magnified my calling—have done what I was supposed to do and then some. For years. This isn’t exactly “zero defects,” but it’s similar. It’s doing your best—one of the cherished traditions of the Boy Scouts of America in which I have served as a leader much of my adult life.

Similarly, as Webelos cubs den leaders, Jean and I have spent literally hundreds of hours over the last three years (starting in 2014) helping numerous 10-year-old boys achieve their scouting goals and achieve their Arrow of Light badges, the highest award in cubing.

Our efforts have not gone unrecognized. Parents know we put our hearts and souls into planning and carrying out our den leader assignments, and one of them wrote us an e-mail, asking us to please not relinquish our calling as Webelos Den Leaders until her son, Lukas, turned 11. That is, until he had been a year under our leadership. Now, the bishop of a ward determines how long we will be in a particular calling, but we wrote back and said “Dear Sister G\_\_\_\_\_, we hereby promise we will not relinquish our position as Webelos Den Leaders until Lukas turns 11..... carbon copy to Bishop MacArthur!”

That is, we put the bishop on notice not to release us from our assignment until Lukas turns 11. Later, during tithing settlement, I checked with the bishop to see if he had received our cc and he grinned and said he had! Actually, finding good, well-trained scout leaders is a lot harder than filling almost any other position, so I knew the bishop would be *happy* to know he doesn’t have to worry about the Webelos leader position for at least another year.

Why do we do this? Well, I think it has something to do with the word *love*. We have a deep regard for our “home teachees.” We really care about these people. So while we are performing our “duties” so to speak, our acts are really based on our love for our charges.

### **Jeff Gates: A Role Model**

Our son-in-law, Jeff Gates, is another person I admire for always doing his best. He is extremely talented with his hands. I can nail 2-by-4s together to build something, but he can build fine, inlaid

jewelry boxes. When he builds something it is done perfectly. Corners are rounded, sanded smooth, etc. Zero defects!

It's the only way he knows how to fly!

### **Admiral Hyman Rickover**

John Kennedy was once interviewed by Admiral Hyman G. Rickover, the crusty and outspoken naval officer who became the father of the nuclear Navy. He was seeking a position on Rickover's staff, I believe. Rickover was a demanding leader. His subordinates followed his example of working long hours and weekends. During his interview of John F. Kennedy, Rickover ask Kennedy his (Kennedy's) standing at the U. S. Naval Academy upon graduation. Kennedy somewhat proudly stated that he had ranked 26 out of a class of approximately 300. Rickover was not impressed, as this exchange made clear, to Kennedy's dismay.

Rickover: "Did you always do your best?"

Kennedy (honestly): "No sir, not always."

Rickover (sternly): "Why not!?"

Rickover served in the U. S. Navy until the age of 82, or about two decades longer than any other admiral (it took an act of Congress for this to happen, but such was his value to the Navy that Congress approved his continued active duty). He always did his best. I think he would be a strong advocate of "**zero defects.**"

## 13. STANDING UP TO NONSENSE OR WRONG

### Alice in Wonderland

I must admit that I have never read all of Lewis Carol's famous novel, *Alice in Wonderland*. I have tried to do so. But I found it just too tedious. But I have read parts of it which I found amusing and instructive.

One of my favorite parts involved an exchange between Alice and the headstrong, bullying Queen of Hearts, who was always uttering "Off with (his or her) head!" at the drop of a hat at anyone who crossed or displeased her for any reason, usually seconded by the milquetoast King of Hearts (KH).

On one such occasion the following discourse took place, when the Queen of Hearts (QH) was unhappy with Alice:

QH: "Off with her head!" said the Queen.

KH: "Off with her head!" echoed the milquetoast, toady King of Hearts.

Alice: "NONSENSE!" said Alice.

QH: "Oh!" said the Queen

KH: "Oh!" said the King.

And nothing more became of the Queen's ridiculous command.

I love this story because it illustrates that often all that is necessary to overcome stupidity and nonsense is to call it what it is—i.e., call nonsense nonsense. At least that's a good place to start.

### Smart Teacher

A good example of standing up to nonsense occurred in one of my favorite stories of a school teacher who was at a dinner party with an egotistical CEO who made the mistake of belittling the teacher because of the differences in their level of income....of "what they made." Here is the story.

The dinner guests were sitting around the table discussing life. One man, a CEO, decided to explain the problem with education. He argued, "What's a kid going to learn from someone who decided his best option in life was to become a teacher?"

He reminded the other dinner guests what they say about teachers: "Those who can, do. Those who can't, teach."

To stress his point he said to another guest; "You're a teacher, Bonnie. Be honest. What do you make?"

Bonnie, who had a reputation for honesty and frankness replied, "You want to know what I make? (She paused for a second, then began...)

"Well, I make kids work harder than they ever thought they could. I make a C+ feel like the Congressional Medal of Honor. I make kids sit through 40 minutes of class time when their parents can't make them sit for 5 minutes without an iPod, Game Cube or movie rental... You want to know what I make?" (She paused again and looked at each and every person at the table.)

"I make kids wonder. I make them question. I make them criticize. I make them apologize and mean it. I make them have respect and take responsibility for their actions. I teach them to write and then I make them write. I make them read, read, read. I make them show all their work in math. I make my students from other countries learn everything they need to know in English while preserving their unique cultural identity. I make my classroom a place where all my students feel safe. I make my students stand to say the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag, because we live in the United States of America.

Finally, I make them understand that if they use the gifts they were given, work hard, and follow their hearts, they can succeed in life."

Bonnie paused one last time and then continued: "Then, when people try to judge me by what I make, I can hold my head up high and pay no attention because they are ignorant... "

"You want to know what I make? I MAKE A DIFFERENCE. What do you make?"

I hope you are I standing and applauding The moral here is clear: Monetary compensation is only one measure of worth or social contribution, and often an inferior one. The CEO in this story clearly got himself a well-deserved new rear end. Hopefully, he learned something.

### **Carol's Detail into Human Resources**

There were periods of time while I was heading the Human Resources Department in the Eugene Post Office when we were woefully understaffed. At times my very conscientious and dedicated staff were actually reduced to tears in frustration, because they *knew* as the professionals they were what *needed* to be done but working as hard as they could, they could not get all of the work done.

Some of our important functions, such as handling the suggestion program (responding to employee suggestions), were simply not done at all, as there was no one with time to evaluate and respond to them. Even when my boss was sympathetic to our needs, a hiring freeze or other obstacle would occur.

During one such critical period I needed someone—anyone—who could simply type—to get necessary busy work done. We had a hiring freeze and could not hire anyone from outside the Postal Service. And the main source of good typists *internally* was in the Central Markup Unit—composed of about 25 people who handle letters for people who have moved and left forwarding addresses.

The only problem is the the Central Markup Unit was also critically short handed at this time period, so the man in charge of this operation, Wayne Dean, I believe it was, simply could not help me without further hurting his own operation.

But an interesting thing happened. One of his relatively new employees—a Carol someone—served two weeks notice of resignation. I recall having been tremendously impressed with Carol when we interviewed her for employment. She had been an executive secretary for another Federal Government agency and had transferred to the Postal Service to work in our Central Markup unit because we paid

substantially more per hour than her previous position. And I was quite surprised when I learned she was resigning.

I called her to ask her why. She said “Mr. Wilson, I had no idea that the Central Markup position would be so boring and mind-numbing. I just *have* to have more job satisfaction that I’m getting here. So I’m looking to transfer to another Federal agency where I can more fully utilize my abilities—even if the pay is lower. The problem is, they are so short-handed in Central Markup that they can’t (won’t) let me take time off to interview for possible other alternatives. So I have to quit in order to find time to search for another job.”

I asked Carol “would you be willing to work for us, here in personnel, temporarily, if we would allow you time off to pursue interviews for other positions?” She said she would love that, and we had her report to work shortly thereafter. Wayne Dean could not say no because she had served notice and was leaving her assignment in Central Markup one way or the other. It was a “win-win” (for us and Carol) and a “no loss” for Wayne because he was losing her anyway. She understood it was temporary, until she landed a new job outside the Postal Service.

Carol came to work for us and was *immediately* useful in our unit. She was a hard worker and efficient. As a plus, she was also quite attractive, and very pleasant to work with and very professional. That is, she had it all, and we could see why she would want to find a job that would better suit her abilities and goals.

A few days after Carol reported to Personnel I got a call from my good friend, Linda Jacobson, who was the manager or supervisor in charge of Central Markup who told me that one of her employees was upset about Carol’s “detail” to personnel. All her employees would love a detail out of Central Markup, and here was Carol, the most junior employee, getting what was considered a “Plum” assignment (even though the pay was the same). AND, Jacobson said that one of the employees was saying that Carol was a “Mormon” and went to my church (i.e., was a member of my congregation). In other words, this one employee, who we will call Bluebird, was claiming discrimination (favoritism) based on religion. (Linda told me who it was).

Sure enough, a few days later—a few days after Carol came to personnel—our big boss, Postmaster Al Bradford—received a letter signed by almost the whole Central Markup crew, asking why Carol, the junior employee, had received a preferential assignment to Personnel.

Postmaster Bradford, a wonderful, kind and fair man, brought this letter into my office and showed it to me. I explained what Linda Jacobson had reported, and the real reason we had hired Carol temporarily (she was the only person available to us), and also that I had determined that Carol was not a member of my church, and suggested to him to let me handle it with a personal meeting with the Central Markup crew. He gladly handed the letter and matter to me, trusting me to handle it appropriately.

So I made arrangements through Linda Jacobsen to meet with her crew toward the end of the afternoon shift. It was an *interesting* meeting. I first introduced why I was there, and opened myself to any questions. To the obvious one, why Carol, I explained our desperate situation and need for someone—anyone—and the fact that their managers would not give me *anyone*, and that the only reason I was able to get Carol is that she was in the process of resigning, and was available to us only for that reason, and

that we only had her temporarily until she was successful at interviewing elsewhere. When someone said “So the only way we can get a detail out of here is to resign?” I suggested that I wouldn’t recommend that course of action.

After I had explained the events as outlined above and they ran out of questions I then said “There is one more thing I wish to say to set the record straight. It has been brought to my attention that SOMEONE in this unit has said that the reason Carol got the job is that she’s a “Mormon,” and “goes to my church.” Well, she ISN’T and she DOESN’T.

“I have worked hard to prevent any hint of such impropriety in running Human Resources. The only Mormon I ever hired here was Shirl Hendrickson, our talented Training Manager, who was by far the best qualified candidate for that position. I even had Colin Hendren (a non-Mormon director) sit in the interview for that opening so as to independently confirm that Shirl was by far the best candidate. And if there had been another candidate just a good, we would have flipped a coin. I don’t work the way someone in this unit suggests, and I resent the suggestion that I would show such prejudice.

“Any other questions?” There was a moment of silence, then someone said “Thank you. Mr. Wilson, for taking the time to meet with us.” And that was the end of the matter. Almost.

I found out from Linda that the employees jumped all over the party that had spread the false rumor about me selecting Carol based on her supposed religion. I recall Bluebird looking at me resentfully for several months thereafter. I did not ever do or say anything to Bluebird to let her know I knew who had spread the false rumor, and actually went out of my way to work with her and be pleasant when she later got a job as a secretary to the mail processing manager, Steve Boydston. Frankly, I felt a little sorry for her because some of the other employees apparently gave her a hard time for embarrassing *them*.

But then, I could remember when I had accepted an untruth once that I had passed on without checking, as Bluebird had done, and I had been embarrassed when my error was exposed. So I could hardly hold a grudge against Bluebird, who had many fine qualities. Eventually we became, if not friends, at least people who treated each other with mutual respect.

The moral to this story, is, of course, when you feel inclined to accuse someone of anything negative, you owe it to that person—and yourself—be as sure of your facts as possible. If not sure, keep mouth closed.

**The Sequel.** Mrs. Jacobsen later discovered the source of Bluebird’s false information, and the source was surprising. It turned out to be an APWU union steward named Jim Kubli. He had heard some of the employees grousing about Carol getting this preferential “detail” (postalese for a temporary assignment) and had jokingly said “Oh, she’s probably Mormon and a member of Bob’s church.” I had a very good relationship with Jim and asked him if he had, in fact, said what was reported he said, and he readily admitted he was guilty. He said that he had made the statement in an offhanded way, not intending that it be taken seriously.

I was not angry with Jim, because he did not mean what he said, but I suggested he might want to be a bit more careful in the future, and related the whole chain of events due to someone believing what he said. He was, of course, greatly surprised at the effect his words had had.

There is a good lesson here for us all. Make sure if you are being facetious or joking that everyone understands you are joking and that they are “in on the joke” or you could cause a lot of damage.

### **Death by Carbon Copy**

This story really happened, though the *particulars* (time, place, names, etc.) have slipped from my mind with the passage of time. It involved the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), the law that states that federal construction projects must be manned/staffed with workers proportional to the composition of the population of the community in which the project takes place. So if you had a local population of 20% Mexican, and 30% blacks, and 50% white, the work force on the project must reflect these same percentages.

In one case, a higher level representative from the FLSA approached the project manager in a major city and threatened to cause major problems, such as extra time-consuming inspections and labor turmoil and work stoppages—even though this particular construction project was staffed in full compliance with the law—if the project manager did not hire a disproportionately higher percentage of men the same race as this FLSA representative (non white).

The project manager wrote a memorandum (letter) to the FLSA official who was seeking unfair preferential treatment for members of his minority race. The letter went something like this:

Mr. \_\_\_\_\_  
Compliance Inspector  
Fair Labor Standards Office  
Etc.

This is in response to your demand that I hire a disproportionate number of people of \_\_\_\_\_ race, even though you acknowledge that we are presently in full compliance with the hiring ratios dictated by the Fair Labor Standards Act.

It is also my understanding that if I do not heed your demand to give an unfair advantage to member of the \_\_\_\_\_ race in the community that you will use your influence in the community and other job actions to punish our company for failing to comply with your request for unfair advantage, contrary to the law.

Please advise if my understanding of your demand is correct.

Sincerely,

I. B. Right.  
XYZ Construction Company  
Seattle, WA

cc: Senator Morse  
Congressman Peter DeFazio  
Chairman, Fair Labor Standards Board  
Federal Bureau of Investigation  
Equal Employment Commission, Wash. D.C.  
Editor, Seattle Times Newspaper  
Etc., etc. etc.

In less than three days the Project Manager received a letter from the FLSA headquarters

advising him that as he was in full compliance with the law no further action would be required of him or his company, and that the FLSA representative who had demanded unfair advantage and had threatened to cause his company grief had been demoted and reassigned to the FLSA equivalent of Siberia.

I have given this sort of action or defense against injustice the name of “death by carbon copy,” and it can be a very effective tool when someone is seeking to abuse their authority as they suppose. It may take courage to drag wrong doing out into the light, but it’s a great way to expose corruption.....as this FLSA petty bureaucrat discovered.

[Aside: FLSA Story #2]. I heard this story somewhere along the way in which a NAACP representative who had undoubtedly witnessed many cases of unfair discrimination against Americans of African descent visited a government construction site but did not do his homework. He demanded that the project manager hire blacks in proportion to their percentage the local population. The project manager immediately called his personnel manager and instructed him to “fire 10 blacks.” The NAACP official was immediately driven out of town by those he though he was serving. He had not done his homework in this case.

Or so went the story. I cannot verify it. But its lesson is valid: Again, when accusing someone of malfeasance, you should never assume the facts. Research the facts, and make sure you have them right! Check our my experience elsewhere in this book when I received the most valuable part of my college education in seven words (see Chapter 14).

### **Ivan Gohn Education**

In my early days as a manager in the Eugene Post Office I became well acquainted with a first-line supervisor in the mail processing unit named Ivan Gohn. Ivan was a somewhat rigid, inflexible person, with a strong sense of right and wrong and how things ought to be done. Eventually he achieved his goal of becoming a Postmaster in Bandon, OR, a 1st class post office on the Oregon Coast.

There his rather impulsive, rigid management style got him in trouble. Specifically, he sternly corrected—yet again it seems—some minor errors committed by a customer using the USPS’s non-profit discount system. The rules were somewhat complex, and Ivan apparently embarrassed this customer over the counter in the presence of other customers by lecturing her loudly and tactlessly.

Understandably she complained to Ivan’s boss (and mine), Suzanne Henry, the Postmaster of Eugene Post Office, who was also the Management Sectional Manager, who was the administrative manager or head of all 122 post offices in the southern 1/3rd of Oregon, including Bandon.

She “requested” Ivan to meet with her in her office in Eugene (it was in effect an order). Ivan showed up as ordered, and Suzanne discussed the situation with him. He attempted to justify his actions, based on the repeated attempts he had made to get the customer to do things right, and

somewhere in his attempts at self justification said “I’m too old and set in my way to do things differently.” He was mistaking Suzanne’s tactful explanation of the event as negotiable, and his arguments justifiable. This was nonsense, of course.

And a mistake on Ivan’s part. Suzanne—who has zero tolerance for nonsense—calmly said “Ivan, I don’t break pencils or throw erasers, but if you can’t change the way you treat customers there will be a new postmaster in Bandon!”

THAT was pretty clear, and just what Ivan needed to hear. It shocked him into realizing the seriousness of the situation in his boss’s eyes and that he absolutely needed to change.

He immediately got the message, apologized, admitted he needed to change, and promised to do so, and left her office vigorously promising to correct the situation. Later, Susanne asked us direct reports if she had been “too soft” by giving him a chance to correct his unacceptable behavior rather than fire Ivan. (We said no, she had done right in giving him a chance). We never got another report of mistreatment of customers in Bandon after Suzanne meeting with Ivan. She was very professional and considerate, but very tough beneath her genteel surface.

Moral: Don’t make the mistake of equating polite, professional behavior with weakness!

## 14. COLLEGE EDUCATION

### An important lesson in 5 seconds and 7 words

In the last chapter I referred to a situation when I received the most important lesson in my college education in five seconds in seven words. Here is the story.

I think it occurred during either my sophomore or junior year at Tulane University in New Orleans. It occurred in a class of Labor Economics (I *think* that is the name of the course). I wish I could recall the name of the professor, because he did me a huge favor. But I can't. It has been too long.

The situation was this: The professor, knowing he was speaking to a lot of kids who had grown up in homes with college-educated parents, probably figured (correctly in my case) that we were predisposed to be pro-management and anti-union in our general outlook.

He proceeded to recount a number of disturbing incidents of anti-union actions taken by management, such as the infamous account of the murders of union strikers at Ford Motor Company's "Gate 4", shot in the back by the notorious Pinkerton Detective company security guards as the strikers were attempting to flee the scene. Or the famous case of the Ludlow massacre in which hired thugs, under management direction, decimated a striker's tent city, killing men, women and children (1914). This was a Rockefeller-owned mine, the Colorado Fuel & Iron Company.

These were just two of several vicious attacks against strikers who were trying to get the right to buy goods from stores not owned by the coal companies or address other egregious conditions under which they lived.

Finally, after listening to these anti-management stories I had had enough. I blurted out something my dad had told me: "What about the unions using machine guns to organize unions in the oil fields of Oklahoma?"

My professor's seven-word response: "**What union? What oil field? When? Where?**"

I had absolutely no facts to back up my claim. None! The professor hung me out to dry with just seven words. I was humiliated in front of my classmates...as I deserved to be.

The professor taught me a great lesson which I have never forgotten, namely: If you hope to be taken seriously when taking a position on any issue, you had better do your homework and gather the accurate facts to back your case before you open your mouth. I could not—and did not—do that in the above case of alleged union organizer in the Oklahoma oil fields. A painful but instructive lesson. A valuable college education in seven words.

### Señora Gordon

In either my sophomore or junior year at Tulane University I took a Spanish class of some sort from a Señora Gordon, a mature, not unattractive lady in her late 40s. She was a fine instructor and I enjoyed her class.

Toward the end of the semester I happened to tell her that I knew about half a dozen Spanish songs that I played with baritone ukulele accompaniment and wondered if she would mind if I brought my “eucalyptus” to class one day and have her listen to see if I have the words and pronunciations right.

She surprised me by suggesting that I bring my baritone uke to the final exam, which was scheduled for up to two hours, but would probably only take a little over one, and she would plan a break in the exam part way through, and I could sing my songs for the whole class!!

Well, everyone liked the idea, so I brought my “blue book” (standard exam book to write in) and my ukulele, and, about half way through, I was on!

I played three numbers, as best I recall: *El Manesero* (the Peanut Vender—a lively Cuban song), *La Paloma* (the Dove...from the Basque region of Spain), and *La Cucaracha* (the Cockroach, from Mexico). I can still visualize her smiling face as I went through all three songs.

She offered no corrections at all. Either she just decided to enjoy the songs the way I sang them or I did fine—I’m not sure. But I think we all had fun with the musical break.

And it did NOT hurt my grade for the course. I had a 90% going into the final (an A-). I didn’t feel I did especially well on the final itself. But I ended up with an A- for the course, and I’m almost certain that my obvious “extracurricular interest” in Spanish songs and my performance during the finals break is what caused Mrs. Gordon to give me the benefit of the doubt—and included my rendition as part of my grade for the course.

Wasn’t that nice of her? And smart of me? :D

Moral: Maybe playing the uke can be an important part of a College Education! :)

### **Developing Writing Skills at Zion**

During my time at Zion National Park, I was having so much fun that I was writing a letter home almost every day. I was dating, leading singing, going on hayrides—doing all these things. I was just really having a summer! So I started being more careful in my use of vocabulary, because I was entertaining Anita and Mom and Dad.

The result of this was that I got better at writing letters. I had been getting Cs in college in my English classes. As a direct result of having to write more and make them more entertaining, my skill level rose. Answering quizzes at college got easier, because my ability to express myself had increased that summer for that reason—because I was writing Mom and Dad. And I learned how to spell “spaghetti” when my Mom wrote back to correct me.

### **Growth of Maturity**

I also observed growth in others during my time at Zion National Park. There was a fellow there, whose name I can’t remember, who was kind of a wiseacre, though bright and precocious. He was a janitor, but was promoted to be in charge of the soda fountain.

That was a surprise to all of us, because he didn't really seem like manager material. He was kind of a clown. But, in fact, he took his job very seriously and did an excellent job. I was very impressed to see that. He showed a lot of growth.

That was quite an accomplishment to take this guy who was kind of a goof-off and joker, and give him responsibility, and have him really take it and run with it. He ran a tight shop, and the guys gave professional service, followed his instructions, and looked up to him. It was a good example of someone rising to the occasion.

## 15. CHOICES

### Happiness vs. Misery

Our good friend, Richard Walker, a life-long member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, calls the basic tenants of the church (collectively referred to as “the Gospel”) Heavenly Father’s “Plan of Happiness.” The Church’s basic principles are summarized in what members call The Articles of Faith—which were published by the founder of the church, Joseph Smith, in answer to a newspaper reporter’s question about what his church believed.

There are 13 points summarized in this document which I will list at the end of this chapter. The 13 points are not all inclusive. For instance they do not talk about vicarious baptism for the dead, nor do they mention the church’s Word of Wisdom, a revelation involving health rules (avoidance of harmful products like alcohol and tobacco and “hot drinks” like coffee and tea) for which the church is nonetheless well known. Members of the church are encouraged to live their lives consistent with the beliefs summarized in the Articles of Faith, and the Word of Wisdom, which is considered to be a commandment, and are promised blessings if they do.

Life is full of choices. In a free society, we will make hundreds of thousands of them in our lifetime. And to a great extent, the choices we make will contribute to our happiness or unhappiness. It’s a pretty simple formula, isn’t it? Good choices (GC) lead to happiness; poor choices (PC) lead to unhappiness.

GC → Happiness (:D)

PC → Unhappiness (:())

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints believe that God is a real person, with a tangible body, and that he loves us and has our best interests at heart. We also believe that Satan is a real person and is (pardon the play on words) “hell bent” on thwarting God’s plan of happiness for us. Several examples come to mind from my own experience (you can easily think of dozens yourself) of some of the tools Satan uses to sidetrack us from God’s plan of happiness for us.

### Smoking

This is a classic one. No one ever starts smoking because it has any intrinsic benefits. It make them choke and cough initially, as their bodies try to warn them of the harmful effects of what they are doing. So what good reason(s) do they have for starting this habit? And why do they persist in smoking?

Well, in fact, none. Almost always they are caving in to peer pressure—to gain social acceptance or to appear to be more mature. Or to kick against the traces (parental rules) or to exert their “independence,” when in fact they become rapidly DEpendent on the drug contained therein. All of these are terrible reasons for doing anything, and show a *lack* of maturity and judgement as well as moral weakness, and result in a loss of independence.

Just consider: They are trading their health and longevity for poorer health, and all too often, for premature terminal illness.

And as a friend, Bill Allegro, discovered, in addition to the medical detriments, smokers stink. Once, after quitting smoking (it CAN be done!), Bill came in close contact with a smoker, noticed they stunk, and asked his wife Susan or someone else “Did I used to stink like that?” When advised that, yes, he did give off offensive odors of stale tobacco, he was very surprised.

Summary: There are NO benefits to smoking. None.

But there are some major drawback, which are pretty well known. I’d like to mention a couple besides the above obvious ones to stimulate thinking.

I recently had occasion to ask Howard Barnes, my old U. S. Navy shipmate on the USS Point Defiance (LSD 31), if his old friend and contemporary from Harvard University, one Joe Buckley, was still alive. I had met this vital, very bright young naval officer in Tokyo, Japan, in 1957, and have collected some of the very interesting stories about his exploits (hopefully some will appear later in this book). I knew he had gone on to a career in financial management following his time in the navy, and had done well enough to endow a 300-person Catholic girls’ high school, and that he had a personal posterity of several children.

Howard’s (sad) answer was instructive. He said no, Joe had died; and then added this telling comment: **“All of my smoking friends are dead.”**

Isn’t that a telling comment!?! Here are Howard and I in our 80’s, still getting to know our grandchildren, seeing them graduate from high school and college, and seeing them get married, etc. But neither Joe Buckley—nor any of Howard’s other smoking friends—ever had that chance. They unthinkingly chose not to have those experiences when they made that choice to have their first cigarette. What a shame.

Cost. One other point that should be obvious. I understand that a pack of cigarettes today costs ten dollars (\$10). That makes the math easy. A pack a day means \$300 a month, and \$3,600 a year. In ten years that would be \$36,000, enough to buy a new Toyota minivan or pay for a major part of a house.....or college education for your kids.

In effect, you might as well collect a pile of 3,600 100-dollar bills, rake them into a pile, and set fire to them. Because that’s what you are doing, only one cigarette at a time. Only that would be smarter (healthier) than smoking them, wouldn’t it?

Also, people would be more willing to help you out in a financial pinch if you weren’t literally wasting money by setting some of your hard earned dollars on fire, and then asking lenders to, in effect, subsidize your past and present poor choices. In effect, replacing those dollars they have figuratively and literally been burning.

The sad part is that you watch people you love being caught in this addictive trap—and even though it is of their own making, your heart goes out to them—and those who also love and/or depend on them.

Moral: Don't ingest, shoot, or otherwise engage in any behavior that results in harmful, addictive substances getting into your body. Follow the Word of Wisdom of the LDS Church, because it is accurately named and avoids a host of problems.

Side Affects. One side affect of smoking or other such unwise behavior is loss of respect. The most potentially damaging is loss of self respect. This is particularly true in the case of Latter-day Saints, because the *know* they are being unwise. They can also lose the respect of others, such as children, spouse or family at large, but loss of self respect is potentially the more serious side affect.

Why? Because loss of self respect is often associated with depression, and that can lead to other problem behaviors—such as alcohol consumption to mask the depression—and *that* can often be the opening of Pandora's box. If you believe in Satan, it is one of his favorite tools for increasing individual and collective misery.

It generally leads to various degrees of behavioral changes, none of them for the better. In addition to effects on our bodies, such as eventual destruction of our livers, etc., it harms our relationship with those we love the most, and can eventually wreck our careers and marriages.

### **Case in Point: Seaman Charlie Green**

I met Charlie Green in October, 1955, when I reported aboard the USS Point Defiance, (LSD 31), in San Pedro, California, upon graduating from the US Naval Supply School at Athens, GA.

Charles Green was at that time a seaman, E2 I think—one rank above a seaman recruit. But not long before that he had been a Petty Officer 1st Class—one rank below a “Chief Petty Officer (CPO),” the top of the enlisted food chain, and had passed his written exams for CPO. What happened? Stay tuned.

It is hard to describe Charlie in one word, but “amazing” comes close. So does “competent.” He was clearly the most talented enlisted man I had at my disposal in the supply department of the USS Point Defiance.

There wasn't anything that Charlie could not do. When we had consistent problems efficiently running the vital ship's laundry—which, in addition to other problems, was prone to mechanical failure—we put Charlie in charge of that major assignment and, almost miraculously, the ill-fated laundry started functioning beautifully. When our ship's big soda fountain kept having problems, Charlie took over and suddenly everything worked like it should.

How the Navy Really Works. How did this happen? Charlie, a natural leader, had long ago learned how things work aboard a naval ship. I call it the *Law or Power of Reciprocity*. Here's how he did it:

He requested that in addition to his other duties—whatever they were—that he also be put in charge of the tiny, one-man ship's tailor shop. Then he was in a unique position to sew on badges, and press the dress blue uniforms of the top mechanics in the ship's machine shop, particularly the Petty Office 1st Class, so they always looked spiffy in periodic uniform inspections.

**In return**, whenever Charlie's laundry or soda fountain developed a problem, someone from the machine shop was immediately on the scene to take care of it. The ship might go dead in the water from

an engine failure (just kidding), but Charlie got virtually instant service and HIS machines got top repair priority.

It was a beautiful system, and Charlie worked it perfectly. I learned from Charlie Green how the navy really functions.

Back up Skill. Charlie had another skill that added to his ability to make everything he was in charge of work well. In a nutshell, he was one of the two best fighters on the ship. The other was the 1st Class Petty Officer in the repair department—the guy who kept Charlie’s machines running (laundry, soda fountain). They had total respect for each other, and were smart enough to always treat each other with respect and never fight each other (which would have been a lose-lose)

The navy’s an interesting place, and it was not unusual for some matters to be resolved ashore (with fists).

Again case in point was Charlie Green and the ship’s laundry.

Charlie’s reputation as a fighter was at this time well known. When Charlie was ashore and had had a few drinks, he could be an irresistible force. He seemed not to feel any pain, and was unbeatable.

One day there was an ordered change in the personnel aboard ship. There was a guy in the deck gang, I believe, who was traded for one of my men in the laundry. I was not consulted in this matter. The guy from the deck gang looked like a fugitive from Westside story, a New York gang type.

After a few days I asked Charlie how he was working out and Charlie tacitly said “I’m working on it!” This told me the guy wasn’t fully measuring up.

Then, about three weeks after the new man—let’s call him Tony—was assigned to the laundry, he came to quarters with massive bruises to his face. I mean, he was a mess. The unofficial answer to my question of what had happened was that he “fell down a ladder, Mr. Wilson.” I did not pursue the matter, though I was pretty certain the “ladder” had two fists and ran a tailor shop.

Things went more smoothly for a while in the laundry. The guys who worked in the laundry—who had gotten it running so well—enjoyed an extra perk. They got to knock off work (be done for the day) whenever they finished. So if they worked hard, they got to go ashore early when we were in port. If someone did not carry his fair share of workload they did not get off as early as they could have.

About a month later Tony showed up at morning quarters with a black and blue face again. Some people have to learn the hard way. But after “falling down two ladders” he learned his lesson and became a productive employee. Thanks to Charlie Green’s special leadership style.

Tragedy Strikes. The story of this talented individual ends on a distinctly sad note. Charlie’s Achilles Heel was alcohol. Remember how I told you that Charlie had completed all requirements for promotion to Chief Petty Office shortly before I reported aboard and then was busted to the seaman rank? The cause of that was alcohol. He was a binge drinker, and something happened—I never heard the details—that caused him to be busted in rank all the way down to Seaman.

And it was alcohol that led to his dismissal with a bad conduct discharge from the U. S. Navy.

It happened this way.

On occasion Charlie did not show up for morning quarters. Roberts, my 1st Class, would make excuses for him, indicating he was already turned-to (navy for starting work) at some duty. This occurred several times over the course of a couple of months. I perhaps should have pursued the matter, but I let it slide—as long as my 1st Class PO was willing to cover for him.

Then one day my CPO1 said “he’s in his bunk, Mr. Wilson.” That’s when I knew I had to do something. I figured, correctly I think, that if the men were unwilling to cover for him any more, as much as they respected his ability, it was time for action. I had my 1st Class follow me to the crews quarters, where we found Charlie asleep, and hung over, and woke him up, with the instruction that he was to report to my office as soon as he was dressed—which he did.

I put him on official report which resulted in his being scheduled for “Captain’s Mast,” the lowest form of formal discipline. And at that hearing before LT. Dobbs, a “mustang” (= a man who came up through the ranks from enlisted to an officer), I was asked “Mr. Wilson, what do you have to say about this man?” I truthfully responded: “Mr. Dobbs, he is the finest man in my department—when he’s sober.”

Mr. Dobbs told Charlie that what I had probably intended as a compliment was also an indictment, because what it meant was that the Navy could not depend upon Charlie Green, and he ended by recommending Charlie’s case be remanded to a Court Martial. The results of *that* subsequent hearing was that Charlie was discharged from the Navy. His career was over. He left not only the ship, but the only job and way of life he had known his entire adult life.

And all because of his choice to consume alcohol—and his inability to control his addiction to it.

Historically, alcohol has been the cause of much suffering. Charlie’s case proves that ANY-THING that reduces your ability to be in full control of your life should simply be avoided, especially alcohol. I had learned in college that I had just as much fun as my fraternity brothers who used to get drunk at parties, and felt a whole lot better the next morning. And I remembered everything. And no DUI tickets, or worse yet, the bad, life-changing, often deadly things that can happen when you drive under the influence. Moral: Don’t drink! It’s not worth it.

Countering Peer Pressure. Howard W. Hunter, former President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint, once made a suggestion of how he taught his kids to respond to peer pressure when their friends or acquaintances called them “*chicken*” for not trying a cigarette or taking a drink or other drug. He said “Just tell them that smoking (or drinking, etc.) is “**stuuupid, and that you’d rather be “chicken” than stuuupid**”—and say it with a long, drawn out ‘uuuu’ sound so that stupid sounds a lot worse than chicken.

I love that suggestion by Pres. Hunter.

## Sex

One of the most important choices young people face is whether to have sex outside of marriage or not. Young men are overloaded with testosterone. Their bodies are ready for sex, physically, long before their social and financial maturity. Young women are less driven to experiment, but are nonetheless vulnerable for many other reasons, as outlined in Grant Harrison's excellent youth conference talk in 1968 in Oakland, CA.

Every young person should have the opportunity to hear "Brother Harrison's" talk, entitled *How Much License in Love?* In that talk Grant Harrison points out how young men, much younger than 21, are incapable of adult mature love. (Young women are capable of adult mature love maybe as early as 19). He talks about the role curiosity and peer pressure play in early sexual experimentation in what he calls "promiscuous love making," which he defines as "anything that stimulates you sexually outside the bonds of marriage," a broad definition. Naturally he counsels for sex to be reserved for—and go hand in hand with—marriage.

I recall one year when we belonged to the Berkeley Ward of our church that we enjoyed the services of a lovely, vivacious, lovely young high school girl from the Miller family (I cannot recall her first name). And our kids liked her as well.

But I had noticed a—"difference"—in her behavior recently.....a sort of "reserved," less positive, less self-assured attitude. I wondered if she was being pressured, sexually, by some young clod, and after Sunday School one Sunday morning I approached her with a copy—a cassette tape—of Bro. Harrison's youth conference talk, briefly told her what it was, and told her I thought she might like to hear it.

That night, before Sacramento meeting, she returned the tape to me, thanked me for it, and told me it had given her a lot of "food for thought."

It turned out that some young so-called man had been pressuring her to "go all the way" (have sex) with him. After listening to the Harrison tape, she immediately stopped dating him. Later that school year he got some other girl pregnant. The Miller girl ended up marrying in the Oakland Temple a few years later. She had definitely made the right decision, the one leading to lasting happiness (temple marriage).

## Eyes Front and Center. Elson Nash Is Surprised

I'm not perfect, by any means, but once in a while I do something right. This true story is a case in point. It concerns my choice regarding where to rest my eyes.

It occurred at a restaurant in a huge hotel building on Market Street in San Francisco, CA, on the occasion of a small, intimate retirement luncheon for Taylor White, the head of the SF Post Office's personnel manager (#2 man). Taylor was retiring, and Elson Nash was taking his place. The other two people at the occasion were Charlie Harper, Personnel Director (#1 man) and I, the labor relations function (guy who dealt with the unions). Charlie Harper and I were Caucasian. Taylor White and Elson were black (why I mention this will become relevant in a minute).

We were all good friends and worked well together, and had lots of respect for each other, so it was a fun event.

The restaurant was on a balcony facing the huge atrium in the center of this hotel. The waitress serving our table was stunning. A beautiful brunette, in a form-fitting white outfit of sacks and a bolero type of top, covering the shoulders and back, with just about two inches of skin at the bottom, but tied in a single knot at the bottom in the front, revealing a significant amount of the waitress's bosom—lovely bosom I should add.

As I said, she was just a beautiful woman.

I arrived a few minutes late as I had told them I would, and Taylor, Elson and Charlie had already ordered. Of course I spotted the lovely waitress—who obviously knew her stuff and quickly came over to our table to take MY order so she could get it right to the kitchen so our entrees would arrive at about the same time.

It was noisy, and she bent down rather close so we could hear each other better. Her bosom could not have been more than 15 inches away from my face; but my eyes focused back and forth between the menu she had provided and her eyes. I never once glanced inappropriately at her bosom. I'm sure she was aware of what was NOT going on, and she was smiling broadly. She was used to being ogled, and it wasn't happening.

When she completed my order and left, Elson Nash **slapped** his knee, and said “**Damn, Wilson, I have never seen such control in my life!**” It was then I realized Elson was watching my eyes ..... perhaps to see what a “Mormon” elder would do in this obviously tempting situation. I was being tested, and I obviously passed inspection.

The results? On our way back to the office Elson opened up and asked me several questions about the Mormon church. He was particularly interested in why the LDS church denied the priesthood to members of the church who were of African descent, and I explained our church position on that issue as best I could—that it was a question of lineage, not color (blacks in Fiji Islanders DID receive the priesthood, for example) and that the priesthood had gradually been expanded historically—first to individual prophets, like Moses, then to just the tribe of Judah, then it included Greek and other converts, etc. I told him I was not comfortable with the present policy and hoped it would soon change (which it did in June, 1978).

**It was quite a discussion, and NEVER would have happened if I had let my eyes stray to the waitress's obvious assets for even a second.**

After relating the incident and the subsequent conversation to Jean that night, I said “If I ever did anything right in my life, today was it!”

Ironically, about five years ago (maybe 2012 or 2013) I received a telephone call from Elson—whom I had not seen or spoken to in at least 35 years. As I recall he was telling us he was moving somewhere back east to be near his children (as old folks tend to do). I was pleased to hear from him and learn that he must still harbor some respect and friendship towards me. His wife's name is Thelma, the same as mine (Thelma Jean Wilson....named after her mother, Thelma Mryl Holdaway) .

Sadly, according to a Google obituary, we lost Elson February 13, 2014, at the age of 89. He was survived by two of his three children, his wife, Thelma, a sister and sister-in-law, six grandchildren, six great-grandchildren and numerous nieces, nephews and cousins and friends!

In summary I was glad for my choices at the restaurant during the above encounter.

### **Dr. Malcolm Hendricks Merrill (“Grandpa”)**

Jean’s dad, Malcolm Merrill, is one of the most impressive persons I have ever met and has been a role model for me in many ways, and a prime example of the results of consistently making good choices. He was born and raised in Richmond, Cache County, UT, the fifth of nine children born to Clara and Edgar Merrill.<sup>2</sup>

Growing up in a rural environment, he learned early on that he did *not* wish to spend his life behind a plow, and that education was the way out of such a life. He applied himself and ended up being the valedictorian of his 8th grade class, valedictorian of Richmond High School, and eventually valedictorian of Utah State University in Logan, UT. [Wow!]. He went on to St. Louis University Medical School—on a scholarship, I believe. He did some major medical research at Princeton, University, doing some pioneer research proving that equine encephalomyelitis was transmitted by mosquitoes, before returning to California to complete his residency and obtain his MD for U.C., San Francisco.

He chose the path of research and administration rather than typical medical practice and excelled in everything he did, eventually being appointed to the Director of the California Department of Public Health, headquartered in Berkeley, CA, the top job in the nation’s largest public health department. He was first appointed to this prestigious position by Republican Governor Goodwin Knight (1953 - 1959), then reappointed by Democratic Gov. Edmund G. “Pat” Brown (1959 - 1967).

Much in demand after retirement, he also worked for the U. S. Agency for International Development, then later worked as the President of the American Public Health Association, and later acted as chief consultant for at least two massive public health studies/reorganization. I recall that his widow, “grandma Merrill,” was receiving retirement checks for five separate organization totaling \$5,000 a month—pretty good money in those days and more than most folks were making working full time (including me)!

He and Thelma Holdaway Merrill traveled extensively in his various assignments, many of them international.

They had a great life together.

Yet Malcolm never lost his common touch. He never forgot that he started out in humble circumstances. To us and our children he was always just “Grandpa.”

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<sup>2</sup> In this order: Edgar Lionel, Orval Hendricks, Norma, Audene, Malcolm Hendricks, Vernor Hendricks (twin), Virgil (twin), Thais Abia and Clara Theola. The twins, Vernor and Virgil, only lived a few weeks.

And he was generous to a fault. For instance, whenever the family went out together to dinner during a family gathering of any kind he *always* grabbed the check. *Always*. This went on for many years. I think he would tell the waiter or waitress ahead of time so we could never pick up the tab.

Finally, after many years in the Bay Area, we moved to Oregon, and on one occasion Malcolm and Thelma were following us from the Bay Area to Oregon in separate cars, when we happened to approach the Carquinez bridge which spans the Carquinez Strait near Vallejo, CA. I was directly in front of Malcolm's car and made sure to stay there, so that we both were in the same toll line. Then I knew I had him.

I paid our toll, and told the toll taker, "here's the toll for the car behind me." He was surprised, but took it, and as we drove away we closely watched in the rear view mirror. There appeared to be a bit of delay and conversation taking place, and then Malcolm's car finally started forward with his high beams flashing on and off and his horn honking. I had FINALLY been able to out-draw Malcolm and pick up the tab!

I mentioned that Malcolm was a role model—but in many ways. I'll mention only a few. First, he had extraordinary judgment, a Ph.D. in common sense. When I have a moral problem I always ask "What would Jesus do?" But when I have a practical problem I still ask myself "What would Malcolm do?" Then I do that.

Case in point: Malcolm always carried AAA Roadside Emergency Insurance. So if his car broke down on the road, he or his wife if she was alone, could get help. So WE also carry "triple-A" roadside emergency insurance—which we have used several times over the years.

Malcolm was always kind and considerate to his wife and children. So I have tried to emulate him in this regard too.

It's hard to match Malcolm in generosity, but I have tried to be generous in my dealings with others.

When Malcolm had to drive to Sacramento on government business to meet with one of the Governors or for other reasons that required two cars, all of his subordinates always wanted to go in the car carrying Malcolm—not to make "brownie points," but because he was such a pleasant, cheerful person to be with. I can't claim to match him in this regard, but I try to be pleasant and fun to be with. At least Larry Smith the great story-teller from Mt. Home, Idaho, enjoyed my company! [See Larry Smith, story teller, elsewhere herein]

Like Malcolm, I have avoided wasting money, or trying to "keep up with the Joneses," to impress others. He was thrifty. Malcolm lived for *years* in the same house he first bought in Berkeley. He drove an old, straight-eight, 1954 Pontiac sedan (named Kimosabe) for many years, even after he was appointed Director of the California Public Health Department and could have afforded more prestigious "wheels"—like many of his subordinates drove. But he did not put any value in such material things. They were not important to his happiness or sense of self worth. He always lived simply and modestly. He excelled in character, not stuff. And I have tried to follow his example in terms of what is important. Namely character, church, charity and family.....things like that that are priceless.

When Grandma Merrill died we were tasked with going through everything in her (their) apartment at Rossmoor, California, and among other things found in their garage storage closet was a stack of framed awards and certificates over a foot high. Beth typed up a list of 34 such awards, covering 2.5 pages. Malcolm's children took some of them home, including Jean. Here is one from his alma matter, Utah State University, which he received in 1981.

1981  
Utah State University

Malcolm H Merrill, USU and Cache Valley community take much pride in honoring you as one of the most illustrious native sons. Few if any of our alumni have gone further afield to serve their fellowmen. Fewer have brought such honor to their native state and its institutions.

The records reveal that 149 grandchildren of Marriner Wood Merrill attended college, mainly USU. Although most of them graduated and many went on to other graduate degrees, it is doubtful if any of your cousins have surpassed you in breath of experience or depth of contribution.

Having chosen the healing arts as your profession, you embarked on a career which, even in retrospect, is overwhelming. You served the State of California as Director of the Health Department, as Chief of the Bureau of Venereal Disease, and as Chief of the Division of Laboratories. In 1965 you left California for wider, national responsibilities. You served the American Public Health Association as President and as Director of the Community Health Planning Service. You also served in the Division of International Health Programs. In this latter capacity, you served several times as a delegate to the Assembly of World Health Organizations.

In every position that you have held, you have evoked the highest commendations of your associates and supervisors. The prestigious agencies which you have served have conferred on you their highest awards and medals. In fact the honors which have come to you are so significant and so extensive that they seem "far above our poor power to add or detract."

Nevertheless, we are elated to be able to recognize your accomplishments and take public note of your national and international contributions. It is a noteworthy event when a distinguished alumnus returns to the campus where he received his first degree 55 years ago and on this auspicious occasion we cannot honor you more than by presenting you our highest award for Distinguished Service.

GIVEN THIS TWENTY-THIRD DAY OF OCTOBER, NINETEEN HUNDRED AND EIGHTY ONE,  
AND THE YEAR OF THE UNIVERSITY THE NINETY THIRD

---

Glenn J. Mechan, Chairman, Institutional Counsel

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Stanford Cozier, President of the University

---

Carlos Smith, President, Alumni Association

And this was just one of 34 framed plaques and other awards in Grandpa Merrill's garage storage area. What a life of accomplishment. What a guy. And to us, he was just "grandpa," a guy who, incidentally, excelled in making good choices.

## 16. LESSONS FROM MAN'S BEST FRIEND

### Why Dogs Don't Live as Long as Humans

In a nutshell, they don't need to. That is, if Shane—in the following story—is correct, and I think maybe he is. Here is the story:

A veterinarian had been called to examine a ten-year-old Irish Wolfhound named Belker. The dog's owners, Ron, his wife, Lisa, and their little boy, Shane, were all very attached to Belker, and were hoping for a miracle.

The vet examined Belker and found he was dying of cancer. He told the family he couldn't do anything for Belker, and offered to perform the euthanasia procedure for the old dog in their home.

As they made arrangements, Ron and Lisa told the vet they thought it would be good for their four-year-old Shane to observe the procedure. The vet felt as though Shane might learn something from the experience.

The next day he felt the familiar catch in his throat as Belker's family surrounded him. Shane seemed so calm, petting the old dog for the last time, that he wondered if he understood what was going on. Within a few minutes, Belker slipped peacefully away.

The little boy seemed to accept Belker's transition without any difficulty or confusion. They all sat together for a while after Belker's death, wondering aloud about the sad fact that animal lives are shorter than human lives. Shane, who had been listening quietly, piped up, "I know why."

Startled, they all turned to him. What came out of his mouth next stunned the vet, who had never heard a more comforting explanation.

Shane said, "People are born so that they can learn how to live a good life—like loving everybody all the time and being nice, right?"

The four-year-old continued, "Well, dogs already know how to do that, so they don't have to stay as long."

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Dogs live simply. Love generously. Care deeply. If they could speak, they would speak kindly. Remember, if a dog was our teacher we would learn stuff like:

- When loved ones come home, always run to greet them.
- Never pass up the opportunity to go for a joyride.
- Allow the experience of fresh air and the wind in your face to be pure ecstasy.
- Take naps.
- Stretch before rising.
- Run, romp, and play daily.

- Thrive on attention and let people touch you.
- Avoid biting when a simple growl will do.
- On warm days, stop to lie on your back on the grass.
- On hot days, drink lots of water and lie under a shady tree.
- When you're happy, dance around and wag your entire body.
- Delight in the simple joy of a long walk.
- Eat with gusto and enthusiasm. Stop when you have had enough.
- Be loyal. Never pretend to be something you're not.
- If what you want lies buried, dig until you find it.
- When someone is having a bad day, be silent, sit close by and nuzzle them gently.
- Be always grateful for each new day and for the blessing of they bring.
- ENJOY EVERY MOMENT OF EVERY DAY!<sup>3</sup>

### **Pepper & the Seeing-Eye Dog**

When I was a boy in Little Rock, Arkansas, our dog “Boots” had a puppy we kept that we named “Pepper,” due to the black spots on his nose. Pepper was a little heavy on the aggressive, bravery side and more than a little light on the common sense side. He would charge anything on four legs. It did not matter that the dog was much bigger than he; he would charge it anyway—even if he got the worst of the deal. This had been his *modus operandi* in Little Rock as well as in New Orleans. He just didn’t ever seem to learn that discretion was the better part of valor. He always charged full speed into the fray.

Then, in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, a strange thing happened. We were out in the north side yard at Grandma and Grandpa Gray’s home (they had a double wide lot), playing Frisbee or something around the honeysuckle arbor there. Pepper was with us. Suddenly we saw a blind man coming along the sidewalk in front of the house, led by a slender, medium-sized Doberman Pincer.

Pepper was off like a shot, running flat out toward the other dog, oblivious to our shouts and admonitions to stop, just as in the past. The Doberman came to a halt, tensed, leaned protectively against its master and just stared at the onrushing Pepper. I don’t even think it raised its hackles; but somehow the Doberman conveyed something to Pepper that stopped him dead in his tracks. About eight feet from the Doberman, Pepper did something he had never done. He put on the brakes, squatting down and sliding about three feet on all fours and coming to a complete stop about 5 feet from the still intently staring Doberman. Then Pepper immediately trotted back to us, affecting an air of nonchalance that did not fool us. He had come about 5 feet (and one second) from death and I think he knew it. It was amazing. Somehow that Doberman had conveyed that he was not just another dog to spar with, that he was on a much higher mission, and that he would fight to the death to protect his master; and conveyed that message and warning so forcefully that even slow-witted Pepper picked up on it—just in time. And probably saved his own life or severe injury.

We of course apologized to the blind man, explaining what had happened. He of course knew that something was wrong from the action of his dog stopping and leaning protectively against him and from our shouts.

Moral of the story: Don’t mess with a seeing eye dog who is on duty – ever!

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<sup>3</sup> From Kent Hill, 4/19, 2007

## **Pepper's Second Lesson**

Well, as indicated above, Pepper traveled to New Orleans with us and lived there several years, thanks to the above decision to put on the brakes. The Carters next door had a cat named Patches. Pepper would chase Patches whenever the opportunity arose, and Patches followed the dog-cat tradition and always ran from Pepper.

Then one day Patches became a mother for the first time. She had a litter of about a half dozen darling little kittens, which she dutifully nursed and bathed, etc. Of course Pepper didn't know this, and would not have been smart enough to figure out the significance of that fact anyway.

As luck would have it, Edith Carter happened to leave the wooden gate to her back yard wide open one day when Pepper was in our back yard and Patches was in hers, surrounded by her helpless kittens. Pepper saw Patches and instantly charged. We yelled at Pepper to stop, fearing the worst for the helpless kittens, but he ignored us completely as he rapidly advanced toward Patches.

Then the most unexpected and amazing thing happened. I had never seen such behavior before and I will never forget it. With every hair on her back erect and legs and claws extended, Patches literally sprang to attack Pepper, bouncing stiff-legged from one side to the other as she rapidly advanced, snarling and spitting all the way, a bundle of fury. She jumped on the back of the totally surprised Pepper (who had no idea why Patches wasn't following the script), and proceeded to rake Pepper's back with her claws for a good 10 feet or more before jumping off and going back to guard her kittens. Pepper yelped and ran for his life down the Carter's driveway toward the street. He had bleeding scratches down his back and was thoroughly shaken by this totally unanticipated experience. He had not learned—until then—that while a cat may run from a dog, a mother cat—like any other mother—will defend its offspring to the death.

Moral: Don't mess with any mother defending her offspring. It just isn't healthy.

## 17. COMMUTING ADVENTURES ON B.A.R.T.

### Commuter Anatomy

For years as a resident of the San Francisco, CA, Bay Area I commuted daily by bus from our home in Berkeley and later Kensington, CA, called the “East Bay,” to San Francisco, where I worked for Matson Navigation Company and later, the U. S. Postal Service.

The buses were dependable, generally clean, and not uncomfortable. But in some situations they were a little less comfortable.

Being a reasonably quick study, I soon learned a valuable lesson that substantially increased my comfort-level when commuting. That is, I learned that sitting next to females, as a rule, rather than next to men, was a much better deal. And not just because by nature I admire women.

The fact is, that on average, women are both smaller than men and anatomically different in a way that affected my comfort level when sitting next to them when commuting.

Put simply, women tend to be proportionally narrower in the shoulders and proportionally wider in the—er—hips than men!

This is the truth. When my seat companion was a woman, we simply “fit” better than when my companion was another man.

When I sat next to a slightly overweight man (not uncommon in America), I ended up leaning about 5 to 7 degrees out into the aisle. I could not quite sit straight up. And THAT was not comfortable!

By contrast, when I sat next to an average-sized woman, I had more shoulder room, and I could sit straight upright—which was a noticeably more comfortable position.

So you see, it had nothing to do with the fact that women are much more attractive than men. It’s all about the fact of the relative sizes of their butts and shoulders compared to men. Think about it. It makes sense!

So naturally, whenever possible, I sat next to a woman commuter.

Naturally.

That is my story, and I’m sticking to it!! :D

## **“Mormon Smokes” on BART**

During my years as commuter Jean gave birth to three children: David Randall, Sharon Louise, and John Merrill Wilson.

On each of these occasions I obtained an empty cigar box, glued a piece of paper to the inside of the lid, and wrote a note something like this:

**IT’S A BOY!!! DAVID RANDALL WILSON!**

- **7# 4 OZ**
- **21 inches long**

**Mother and son are doing fine!**

The box was filled with the then larger, 5-cent Tootsie Rolls candy bars, that are cigar-shaped.

I would board the bus near last, and standing in the front of the bus, would shout out the news:

“Hi folks. My wife just gave birth to a baby boy, David Randall Wilson, seven-pounds, four ounces, 21-inches long. Both are fine! I want everyone to have a Mormon Cigar!”

Then I traveled the length of the bus, handing out the “cigars” (Tootsie Rolls). Occasionally someone would start to wave off the gift—until they realized it was Tootsies, then they would smile big and take one. I learned that “everyone smokes Tootsies.”

As I say, this happened three times over a period of years.

I recall visiting a bank in downtown San Francisco on one occasion to turn in some collections for some charity or other and the teller, who recognized me, said “You’re the guy with the Mormon Smokes!” and we had a chuckle. I apparently had made an impression.

There were two consequences as a result of my passing out “cigars” on those occasions.

The first was the short-term consequences. On all three occasions there were dozens of non-stop conversation on each bus. Normally people isolate themselves, read their paper or a book, in silence—with the exception of the occasions when two friends may be commuting together on a given day. But having broken the ice with the “Mormon Cigars,” *everyone* talked all the way to the East Bay.

But there was also a long-term consequence.

Several years later there was a serious car wreck on the Oakland Bay Bridge that stopped all bridge traffic for over an hour. I mean, *nothing moved* for something like two hours while the wreck was removed. When they finally announced that traffic would resume, they also advised that to expedite things, buses would not all run on their regular route home, but would take alternate, shorter routes in some cases.

I was one of those affected. I used to drive and park near the west foot (west end) of University Avenue, the last stop just before the bus hit the Eastshore Freeway to San Francisco. But the buses were only going to stop on the way home near the university campus, about two miles away from where my car was parked.

What to do??

Well, one of the passengers to whom I had given Mormon Cigars years before, and apparently knew I boarded at the foot of University, said she had called her husband and he would meet her in downtown Berkeley, on the alternate route, and that they would drive me down to the foot of University so I could retrieve my car!!

Wow! That was very nice on her part, and totally out of their way. And it was due solely to the fact that I had done something unusual and clever—passing out “Mormon Smokes”—that caused some good will that paid off and saved me a L-O-N-G walk that night.

Moral: Sometimes it pays to be different in a creative way that shows people you are a fun, pleasant sort of person. Had I not passed out those Tootsies I am convinced the lady would not have been (pre)disposed to offer to help me get back to my car that night. I guess it “pays to advertise” who you are if who you are is worth knowing.

[Editor’s note, namely David Randall Wilson, (who was apparently 7 pounds, 4 ounces back in the day:)]

I loved this tradition, so I did the same thing when each of our 5 children was born, using either Tootsie Rolls or single Twix bars.

When our youngest, Sienna, was born in 2004, I visited my previous company, *Fonix*, and passed out “Mormon Cigars” to my friends there. On the way out of the building, I got on the elevator, and two ladies stepped in. Everyone was silent as usual, similar to the setting on a bus described above.

Suddenly I glanced at the two ladies and said, “Would you like a cigar?” I let the question hang there for just long enough for them to start thinking about exit strategies, before opening the lid to my little cedar chest, revealing a box of Twix bars, a picture of my new baby girl, and the announcement, “It’s a girl!! Sienna Janelle Wilson...”

The gals immediately smiled (and perhaps gave a sigh of relief) and said, “Awwww!!” and took a candy bar.]

# 18. TULANE UNIVERSITY ALUMNI OUTREACH

WITH HELP FROM AN *A CAPPELLA* CHOIR QUINTET

## **Background**

Near the start of my junior year at Tulane University two of my friends from Wesley Foundation [the Methodist young adult organization] urged me to try out for the Tulane-Newcomb A Capella Choir. One of the friends was Shirley Pride. The other may have been Carol Mouchet (moo-SHAY). The choir was directed by Prof. Cardon V. Burnham, Jr.

I attended a couple of rehearsals to see if I liked it and if I could qualify for their high standards. I did enjoy singing with the group, but Shirley reported that I had failed to impress Mr. Burnham who had not been able to hear me.

At the next rehearsal I corrected that. I made little effort to blend in, but made certain that he could hear me. Apparently that worked, and I passed probation because I was soon made a full member of the choir.

Just prior to the end of my junior year, Mr. Burnham approached me and asked me to take over the bass part in the official Tulane University Barbershop Quartet—a real honor. However, he advised me that I would also have to join the Tulane men's Glee Club, as the quartet performed in both groups. I agreed to do that. It proved to be a lot of fun, and, among other things, resulted in an unforgettable two-day musical jaunt as part of an alumni relations-building PR effort by Tulane University in the Spring of my senior year. Here is that story.

## **Alumni Relations Tour**

During the Spring of 1955, Tulane University sponsored a traveling team of select professors to bring the latest happenings in certain fields to Tulane University graduates/alumni in the towns of Alexandria and Shreveport, Louisiana, both of which have large numbers of Tulane grads. They had professors of marketing, accounting, etc. who presented lecture/discussion on Saturday and Sunday afternoons on the latest happenings in their respective fields, followed by a Happy Hour at 5:00 PM both days following the professional presentation.

The powers-that-be in the university decided that it would be a good idea to have some classy entertainment during the Happy Hour each evening, and tasked Cardon Burnham to put it together.

And so I found myself part of a very select group of six A Capella choir members (including Mr. Burnham), hand-picked to provide the entertainment on both evenings. Mr. Burnham picked the following choir members to provide the approximately half-hour of entertainment:

- Himself (a good, solid baritone).
- Bob Wilson (ME!)(strong bass)
- Bob [Someone] (an excellent tenor)
- Carol Mouchet (easy, smooth-blending alto)
- Ann Scott (Wagnerian-like dramatic, soprano)
- Shirley Pride (petite, lyric soprano)

We sang a fun variety of songs, including a sextet number, quintet, quartet, trios and a duet of Mr. Burnham and me singing a corny western entitled *I Can't Get Off of My Horse* (lyrics below) while we both sat on a sawhorse—which we lifted when we bowed, so we were still “on” the horse. Corny but cute.

The numbers were very well received, in large part because of the quality of the voices involved and the aptness of the music chosen.

After our Saturday performance in Alexandria the entire entourage boarded the evening train for Shreveport, LA, arriving there after dark.

Antiphonal Choir? The next morning our entertainment group—minus Mr. Burnham—decided to attend Shreveport's First United Methodist Church, one of the largest churches in the south and dating back to 1845. We arrived just before the main service and were ushered to the last remaining seats on the top row in the rear of the balcony. Because the ceiling sloped downward we were, in effect, sitting in the mouth of a natural megaphone.

The result of this was that when we five musicians cut loose in strong, four-part harmony during the opening hymn, about 40 heads turned *en masse* to see where this incredible (amplified) sound was coming from (having two strong and beautiful soprano voices further enhanced the effect).

After the service several people came back to talk to us, and invite us to join their choir, etc., and we explained our temporary situation. But it was flattering and fun to be able to make such a contribution and receive their appreciation.

That evening we again performed before a friendly crowd of alumni and again it went over well.

Bill Little & the Dilemma. Present in the audience on *this* Sunday evening performance was one Bill Little, an old friend of my dad from (I believe) the Arkansas Louisiana Gas Company, where dad had worked when we lived in Shreveport. Dad had contacted Bill to alert him to my visit, and, following our performance, he and his wife invited me to dinner at the Shreveport Country Club—which was very nice, of course, and under other circumstances would have been welcome.

The “other circumstances” was that an old friend and ex-BMOTC (big man on the campus), Corky Falbalm and wife, Marie, had also invited all five of us entertainers to their home for dinner and to spend the evening. Corky was the brother of Billy Falbaum, one of my two best friends at Tulane. My preference was to have gone to Corky and Marie's, with my friends, but I could not do that without ruffling a lot of feathers and upsetting my parents. I was duty-bound to go to supper with the Littles—who had asked me first.

Shirley Pride to the Rescue! Shirley Pride had been one of my more treasured friends at this time. We were never “sweethearts,” but had dated some and enjoyed each other's company. My folks also enjoyed Shirley.

Being predisposed by nature to be sensitive to the feelings of others, Shirley *immediately* recognized my dilemma and my disappointment at not being able to go to Corky and Marie Falbaum's with our friends,

and asked me “Bob, would you like me to go to the country club with you?” Wasn’t that nice? She was willing to give up an evening with our friends to make sure that **I** would not be left without a friend for the evening.

I thanked her, and told her she need not rob herself of the evening without our mutual friends, but she said that was o.k. It probably helped her decision that she probably did not know Corky and Marie as I did. But she proved willing to spend the evening with me and the Littles. And I loved her for that.

A Triumphant Evening. Well, we were soon on our way to Shreveport’s lovely Country Club where, upon Bill’s recommendation, we ordered prime rib. While waiting for our orders to be filled we notice a couple of things. First, since it was a Sunday night, the club was perhaps only one-third occupied. And second, in spite of that, they had a dandy little three-piece band playing music, non stop—and we noticed right away **they were good.**

The band, we discovered, was called “Jeannie and Her Boys,” and consisted of Jeannie on the drums, her husband on an electronic organ—from which he could get a variety of musical effects and rhythms—and a talented, would-be concert pianist on the piano.

After small talk and enjoying the background music, the band played a medium fox trot. Shirley and I looked at each other, grinned in understanding, and I asked Bill if it would be all right if we danced, and he said by all means and we hit the dance floor—which had been empty ever since we entered the club. That is, we had the dance floor all to ourselves, and we made good use of it—with twirls, some open dance positions, etc.

When the music ended we received some polite applause from other guests.

We had no sooner sat down, than the band played a lively “swing” number, and with another “go ahead” from Bill (who read our body language accurately) we were back on the dance floor, doing the *Lindy*. More applause when the band ended. We approached the band and asked for a medium waltz and got it. So we waltzed, with graceful moves and the grapevine, etc. More applause.

While dancing I kept glancing at our table to see if Bill looked like his feelings were being hurt by our extended absences. But I noticed a series of people talking to Bill and his wife, obviously asking who was this charming young couple putting on a floor show. I realized that we were causing Bill’s PGR (“peer group rating”) to rise by the minute and probably not being resented for our dancing.

We did alternate back and forth so as not to totally ignore our hosts, though I distinctly recall being away from the table enough that we ended up eating cold prime rib.

Before the evening was half over we were well acquainted with the three band members.

Upon being questioned by them we explained who we were and why we were in Shreveport, and they asked if we would perform for the other guests. Shirley asked the pianist if he could play Gershwin’s *Summertime* (in Bb I believe it was), and he said he could, and after discussing repeats, etc., one of the band members told the guests over the PA system who we were, and that Shirley would now favor them with *Summertime*. “Shirley?” She started singing—and **she completely “nailed” it.** It was just

beautiful. And she got a huge ovation. I remember feeling proud of her. I think I also played *Maple Leaf Rag* later, but it was Shirley's rendition of *Summertime* that caused Bill's PGR with the country club set to reach the stratosphere. I mean, not only had he brought this dancing duo to the club for their enjoyment, but they were also incredibly talented and entertaining to boot!

I have to admit it was fun to bask in such glory, even if only temporary in nature, and to know that we had been able to repay Bill somewhat for his kindness in inviting us to dinner. I believe Mom and Dad Wilson got some glowing reports back home in New Orleans.

A Bonus for the Evening. There was one other bonus besides the joy of dancing with Shirley that night and enjoying entertaining the crowd. The pianist gave me—taught me—a new (to me) song. During one of our earlier conversations the pianist asked me if I knew “this song”—and quietly whipped out a darling little song on the piano called *Auntie Skinner's Chicken Dinners*, which had some really cute, only slightly racy, lyrics (“*no one crochets panties quite like Annie's*”). I asked him where I could find that song—which would be perfect on the ukulele—and he said “I'll write it out for you during our next break.”

And HE DID!—on musical staff paper with the melody, the chords AND words! That was really kind of him. I still have that piece of paper, and have used that 30-second song countless times since, usually playing it twice through.

I mention this because it also illustrates how well we were received and treated that special night. I think the band really appreciated that we were so enjoying their music. We were, in affect, validating their presence there that Sunday night. We were the only couple dancing the entire evening, and we were obviously enjoying—and complimenting—their effort.

In summary, this was one of the most memorable evenings of my life up to that time. I have never forgotten Shirley's kindness in agreeing to go the country club with me and the Littles, and sharing her talent and amazing dancing skills and self.

Ironically, when I called her on the phone a couple of years ago she had only a vague recollection of the events of that evening; but she recalled that after she became engaged to Ariel (“A.W.”) Ellis—a math major and a really gentle, fine young man—**my mother** held a wedding shower party for her. I had no memory of that at all, but was happy to learn Mom had done that for Shirley—which showed the high regard in which Shirley was held by my family.

Moral? Sometimes simple little acts of kindness can have a disproportionate positive effect on others. Shirley barely recalls that evening in 1955; yet it left me with a wonderful memory which I will never forget. So take advantage of every opportunity to bless and serve others, because it is not only the right thing to do, but we never know the extent of the difference it can make in the lives of others. And it makes the world a better, happier place.

# 19. DANCING

## **An Important Social Skill**

I think everyone would agree that dancing is an important social skill. It is one of the major things that people engage in during their formative years—roughly ages 12 through 30+. And when you know what you are doing, it's a lot of fun—it can be sheer joy.

My mother encouraged me to learn to dance, starting about age 12 with classes in folk dancing at the Y.M.C.A. in New Orleans.

We learned to do the *Skaters Waltz*, and *Put Your Little Foot*, and other group or line dances. Since my mother was my partner there were no “sweaty palms” involved—no danger of getting “girl germs”—as would have been the case if my partner had been girls of my own age.

But about this same time a group of parents at church thought it would be cute to have a ballroom dance party for our age group (about 12), and that proved to be an entirely different matter.

The problem was, of course, that the parents had made a big mistake in their planning. None of us had been given any instruction on how to lead a partner. We were essentially just thrown together on a dance floor and expected to dance. But we were not born knowing which foot to start with, or knowing to be slightly to the left of each other so our feet would not bump into each other, or to slide or feet; or how to hold each other and slightly pull away from each other to form a tension so we could lead without body contact. Etc. Etc.

I recall that many of us headed for the boy's bathroom, and that one of the dads had to come in and (pardon the pun) “flush us out” of there and back onto the dance floor.

It was a disaster from my standpoint, and I never forgot it. I eventually learned how to dance, and became rather good at it. But this early experience did not help.

## **Learning to Dance**

I don't recall how it happened that I was able to overcome this inept introduction to ballroom dancing. Maybe it was my love of music and inborn predisposition to dancing (my mother had been a belle-of-the-ball growing up in Bartlesville, OK); but I became eager to learn to dance.

I recall many evenings at someone's home experimenting with new dance steps with several willing young ladies, mostly from our church youth group in the Methodist church.

I believe it was the summer of my junior year in high school that several of the societies held balls—to which I was invited. I recall that at these dances I learned some new tricks and steps. I would observe some better dancer doing something cool, and I would ask him, right after that dance, to show me the step, and how he had been able to signal to his date what he was going to do so she would know how to follow his lead, etc. Then my date and I would try to duplicate what my role model had done, usually with some success.

So my repertoire of dance steps and moves began to grow with each dance attended.

Then toward the end of my junior year I was involved in a high school operetta at McMMain High School (all girls). I had a small part that had a solo. It was in the rehearsals for this operetta that I met my high school sweetheart, Joan Helen Miramon. She was not only **my** sweetheart; she was the official “Sweetheart” of McMMain High School—so elected by the entire student body, who held her in high esteem. She was a lady’s lady.

And she was a wonderful dancer, as well as a good friend. Having her as a frequent dance partner helped me hone my skills. And because she was so admired by her classmates at McMMain, she was forever getting invited to sorority dances—which gave us lots of opportunity to practice together.

Joan was being heavily pursued by me and another young man (Bill someone) and finally announced that she had decided to date Bill only—which was a very painful revelation at the time, especially since Bill’s principles were not up to her standard as he eventually proved. Worse, we three were all enrolled in Tulane University’s school of business administration in the fall of 1955, so there was ample opportunity to observe Joan and Bill.

But life goes on, and I soon began to date a young lady named Pat Hester whose father worked for the same company as Joan’s dad. Ironically, Pat lived two blocks further away than Joan—I had hoped to find someone closer!

My first few dates with Pat were to “rush week” parties at the Sigma Alpha Epsilon ( $\Sigma$ AE) fraternity. Pat was a wholesomely beautiful brunette, with a great smile and naturally curly hair. I am certain that having Pat on my arm during these rush week parties was a positive factor in my receiving an invitation to join that fraternity (which I did). I quickly discovered that she was also a great dancer.

I will be telling you more about Pat in a later chapter about ladies whom I dated, but for the purposes of dancing, Pat had a profound effect on my dancing life, primarily because her good friend, Francis Goss (now Verne), dated a fellow named Louis Verne, who had come to New Orleans from Puerto Rico, where he had taught latin dances professionally. He was a *wonderful* dancer and a delightful guy, and we had frequent double-dates during my freshman year at Tulane (Pat was a high school senior at this time).

Well, there were nights when Pat and I had private dance lessons as Francis, Louis, Pat and I danced in our basement dance area (wax sprinkled on the smooth concrete) and Louis and Francis taught us to do the Cha Cha, Mambo, Rumba, Samba, and Bolero. We got to be pretty good at these dances, and used to occasionally go dancing at a night club called *La Luna* in the French Quarter, where we rubbed shoulders with the predominantly Spanish-speaking clientele who loved these latin rhythms and dances and were fun to observe. This helped us polish our dancing skills in these latin dances.

Thus my freshman year of life was probably when I really developed, enlarged and honed my dancing skills—special thanks to Louis and Francis Vergne (they later married) and Pat.

Babs Bartlet. During my four years at Tulane I met a lot of nice people and dated some nice young women. But I had a secret “crush” on one of them—a truly lovely lass named Babs Bartlet. Babs was

always one of the campus favorites. I think she had been named “Miss Tulane” or some such honor. She was the regular girlfriend of my Navy ROTC squad leader, Jim Van Horne, a genuine “Big Man on the Campus,” and I let Jim—with whom I was on friendly terms—know that I admired greatly his girlfriend, and we joked about it. When I would see him dancing with Babs at some school dance I would put my right hand inside the left side of my jacket and pretend to make my heart beat heavily—to his amusement. But for quite a while I never mustered up the courage to cut in on him or others who were dancing with Babs.

But one day during my Junior year at a party at the New Orleans Country Club I got up the nerve and went out on the dance floor and “cut in” on some chap (not Van Horne) and started to dance with her while introducing myself, and she said “I know who you are Bob”—letting me know that Jim had probably told her of my playful “crush.” I quickly went into a couple of twirls and an open dance position to get Babs as far out of sight of the stag line on one side of the dance floor as I could. As I suspected, Babs was light as a feather on her feet, followed beautifully. Within less than a minute she made my day by saying “Bob, **you** are a wonderful dancer.” [Melt!]. The dance ended, and I thanked her, and returned the compliment. And since we were as yet undiscovered by the stag line, I asked her for the next dance—and we proceed to dance some more. Eventually we were discovered, and I was unable to finish that dance with Babs, but my evening had already been “made.” I had gotten to dance with the lovely Babs Bartlet, who had been kind enough to compliment my dancing skills. And she had proven to be as nice and down-to-earth as I suspected, a real person, not stuck-up because of beauty and popularity.

Later I took her as my date to an off-site  $\Sigma$ AE dance party, but that’s another story.....

### **Nan Parkinson and our “Engagement”**

Between my sophomore and junior years at Tulane I applied for—and obtained—a job at Zion National Park, working at Zion Lodge, run by the Utah Parks Company. There I met and dated a lovely young lady named Nan Parkinson. I’ll say more about Nan later when I discuss “women in my life.” But later that summer, after Nan and I had become really good friends, she and a friend with a car thought it would be fun to go dancing at a night spot in Kanab, UT, about 40 miles from Zion Park. I’m not sure, but I think the night spot was in a cave in the sandstone mountains around Kanab.

Since there was a possibility that they would appear underage (liquor was served at this night spot) Nan and her friend bought rather large *fake* diamond rings—which they wore conspicuously on their left ring fingers.

It worked. We were not challenged for being too young.

Well, all my dancing experience and lessons from Louis Verne came into play, and coupled with Nan’s skill and grace, we made good use of the dance floor.

One of the patrons at the nearby bar was obviously enjoying watching us dance, and he also noticed our clean-cut appearance and modest dress, and finally spoke to us, asking a personal question or two out of curiosity. I think he wanted to know if we were seriously dating, I think. I gently raised Nan left hand—so that her “engagement ring” was clearly visible, smiled at the guy (without saying a word), and he got the picture and said “Pretty soon, huh?” I just smiled as if confirming his conclusion. Meanwhile Nan

was looking up at me and almost choking with laughter at my audacity. I was taking advantage of her ring “disguise”—her idea—which served her right. It was a fun moment—and made the man happy, and perhaps made him think that the world was that much better of a place when clean-cut young people like us were getting married.

That’s the closest I ever came to being engaged until I met Jean.

### **Salvation in Havana, Cuba**

The summer following the above venture in Kanab I returned to Zion, this time as the Program Director, responsible for putting on the nightly shows for the guests of Zion Lodge. I worked there only half of the summer, as I was scheduled to attend my Midshipmen Cruise the 2nd half of the summer.

THAT was an adventure! It consisted of living and working on a navy cruiser, and cruising to Havana, Cuba, and Quebec, Canada.

While in Havana I attended a dance put on for all 500 or so midshipmen by the Cuban government, held at the Cuban Naval Academy. I recall that there were scores of tables—probably around 100—and there was a single young woman at each table as a hostess.

After some formalities, a band proceeded to play music for dancing, and with a ratio of 8 or 10 to 1 you can imagine how long you got to dance with a hostess. To make things more interesting, the band played *rumba* music—for which Cuba is famous. And I observed that those who were dancing with our hostess did not know how to rumba.

Well I waited in line to cut in on my peers and finally got my hands on our hostess—and started to do the rumba. Her delightful reaction was: “YOU KNOW!!!” And, thanks to Pat and Francis and Louis, and all those lessons in our basement, I did! I was only able to dance a couple dozen steps before I was cut in on, but at least for that brief time I was able to add a little joy to my hostess’s ordeal.

### **Teaching Mary Law to Dance**

One of my favorite people at Wesley Foundation was Mary Law, a slightly petite, always smiling, attractive young lady, and a “P.K.”—Methodist talk for “preacher’s kid.” Her father was the minister at the Napoleon Avenue Methodist Church in New Orleans.

Like I did, Mary lived at home during her first two years at Tulane/Newcomb. Her father was a conservative person, and did not approve of dancing. So Mary honored her dad’s beliefs about dancing not being a proper thing for young people to engage in.

But Rev. Law was reassigned back into another church elsewhere in Louisiana at the end of Mary’s sophomore year, and a few months into Mary’s junior year she approached me one afternoon at the Wesley Foundation house. With a somewhat embarrassed look, she said, “**Bob.....will you teach me how to dance?**”

I was sensitive to her situation. This was not only a request, but a declaration of independence. She had honored her dad’s opposition to dancing for years; but more recently she had also observed that all her

friends at Wesley were wholesome, that nothing bad was happening to them because they danced, and that they seemed to be having a good, wholesome time when they did dance. And she made up her own mind that dancing was NOT evil or sinful, and that it was time to do something about it.

I was very honored that Mary felt comfortable enough with our friendship that she would trust me to teach her. I responded immediately “Mary, I would be honored to teach you to dance. What are you doing right now?” When she answered “Nothing” we adjourned to a vacant room with a record player in it and started from scratch. I started out with some simple basics—like I didn’t receive on my first attempts at dancing.

I told her dancing is basically walking to music. I told her the man always starts with his left foot, so, knowing this, she should always be ready to start with her right foot.

We discussed proper dance position, that she should rest her left hand on her partner’s right shoulder, and slightly push him away from her while he will be trying to slightly pull her into his embrace with his right hand on her waist—creating a slight bit of tension, which will allow them to move together without actually touching bodies.

And how she should be slightly off to her left (his right) so their feet could slide next to each other’s feet without bumping toes. And that tilting off balance temporarily to one side or the other was O.K., and that she should trust her partner to bring her back into balance with the next beat, etc. Just relax.

Well, she proved to be a very fast learner. She caught on right away. Before the lesson was over, we were practicing open dance positions, twirls, etc. Mary was a natural. And I felt a lot of gratification in being able to help my young friend get off to a good start to the dancing part of the rest of her life.

We’ll revisit Mary later when I went by her apartment for a “goodbye kiss” as I left for duty in the U.S. Navy. :D

### **Teaching the Boy Scouts to Dance**

Many years later, I became a scoutmaster for our church-sponsored Boy Scout Troop 579 in Eugene, OR (for seven years!). At one point our troop had a significant number/percentage of boys who were approaching 14 years of age.

Age 14 is a significant age in our church, because at that age they become eligible to attend our church-sponsored Saturday Night Dances. They are issued a “dance card” that certifies they understand the rules the church has established (like “no leaving the dance once there or they will not be allowed back in,” no super-close dancing, reasonable lighting standards, etc.).

But turning 14 does not in any way suddenly make you proficient in knowing how to lead a young lady on the dance floor, and I knew that some of the boys had some concerns about their combined ignorance of dancing skills as they approached this rite of passage.

Remembering my early experience at this time of life I made a most un-scout-like proposal to my troop: I proposed that on a given night in the near future that for Scouts we have a “dance instructions night!”

This had never been done in any troop in the area, and the reaction was—‘interesting.’ And mixed. Our senior patrol leader Alan Martin and a couple of the older scouts (those approaching 14) were rather receptive to the idea; the younger scouts vigorously and vocally opposed (“Gross!”). They threatened to boycott any such meeting, saying they would “get sick,” or some such.

I told them they would NOT miss the dance instruction class, because THEIR MOTHERS would be their partners. Furthermore, they would wear Sunday clothes, and that their moms would have a lovely flower corsage, and that they would serve their moms (first) banana splits for dessert afterward, and generally be on their best behavior. [This was a brilliant move on my part, because by having their moms as their partners, both attendance and good behavior was assured].

They pretended that the idea of dancing with their moms was yucky, but I could tell that they were greatly relieved, because that way no sweaty palms were involved.

My die-hard, super-scouter Assistant Scoutmaster, “Jake” Jacobs, was initially completely against this idea of a special dance instruction meeting as part of scouts because it was so “non scout-ish.” But since he owned the Sony Only store in town, he DID agree to furnish and set up a good sound system.

Well, the night finally arrived. The mothers, dressed up, arrived with their equally spiffy sons, received beautiful corsages, and were politely asked to dance by their sons (that was the first thing we taught them: proper dance etiquette). Then, after teaching them proper dance position, and things like the fact that the man ALWAYS starts with his LEFT foot, we had each boy take four small steps forward, giving a slight ahead-of-time dip of their right shoulder to clue their mom into the fact they were going to walk forward (and their moms backward)—and this was done to carefully selected music—a slow foxtrot.

Then we had them stop at the end of four steps, and do a couple of in-place side-to-side steps (called a “two step”). Then we had them take four step backward, using their right hand around their mom’s waist to lightly pull their mom’s toward them. Then a side-to-side “two-step” again. Then we stopped and told them they had just danced, and wasn’t it easy?

We went on, showing various steps, including how to get into open dance position and back, and by the end of about 45 minutes, some of them were actually leading pretty well on their own.

Then they politely served their moms banana splits.

Near the end of the evening I saw Jake Jacobs off to one side practicing the dance steps with an imaginary companion!

The upshot? It proved to be an amazing, highly popular event for both the boys AND their moms. Almost all the boys individually approached me at the end of our meeting, admitting (some of them sheepishly) “Brother Wilson, I had a good time.”

And the moms? They loved it. I recall Betty Martin, SPL Alan’s mom, calling me the next day to profusely thank me for having this dance training session, and saying “Alan was actually leading on his own (not just mechanically following the practice steps) by the end of the lesson.”

I was gratified by the results for a couple of reasons. MY scouts would hit the Stake dances without having to endure the feelings of embarrassment that I had suffered when thrown onto a dance floor with absolutely no instructions or knowledge of what to do.....not knowing how to hold a girl, or which foot to start on....nothing. They would “be prepared” (Scout motto!).

And it was gratifying that Jake reluctantly acknowledged that it was a good idea, even if unusual for a scouting activity.

How sweet it is when good plans pan out!

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Above are a lot of pages spent talking about my experiences with social ballroom dancing—a major component of courting and socialization. I could tell other stories about ballroom dancing, like teaching youth in Springfield wards to dance, or teaching adult classes in dancing. I recall Jean and I working with Del and Marlene Matheson prior to an upcoming adult dance party. Both Mathesons are large in stature, but I recall starting to dance with Marlene—to analyze her dancing habits—and within seconds I could tell that she was already an excellent dancer, and I quickly told her so. I remember her fervent response as we were spinning about the floor: “I was born to dance!”

I was also called to be the Dance Instructor in the University Ward (College Ward) in Berkeley where I also worked to improve the level of dancing skills to this wonderful group of about 200 young people.

In a nutshell, dancing has been a source of joy and personal satisfaction for many years. I am a little sad that age (I’m 85 as of 2018) has robbed me of the ability to dance. I can no longer dance on the balls of my feet (which is essential), and I have become unstable and unable to stand upright without losing my balance. But I still have a wealth of *memories* of many happy times over the bulk of my lifetime on the dance floor, as indicated above. There is nothing quite like flowing gracefully across the dance floor to beautiful music with a beautiful friend in your arms. It’s sort of magical.

## 20. I MEET THE MORMONS— A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE

### Utah, 1953: Working At Zion Lodge

During the summer of 1953 I was lucky enough to land a job in Zion National Park, an amazingly beautiful place, working for the Utah Parks Company at Zion Lodge. My job involved cleaning the auditorium (sweeping, buffing) and the main men's latrine and shower stalls—all night. An unwritten part of the job—what enabled me to “land” the job in the first place—was my willingness and ability to participate in the nightly entertainment acts for guests of Zion Lodge. I told them I played the ukulele well, the guitar a little, and sang well, and they hired me.

I performed an average of five nights each week all summer, playing and singing funny little solos on the uke, and acting as a co-MC and calling square dancing on the weekly Western Show, along with a nutty bishop's son from Centerville, Utah, Bill Crane. I was “Cactus” and Bill was “Rawhide.” And we put on quite a show. I went from knocking knees the first night to being comfortable hamming it up by summer's end.

Unrelated to the performances, there is a “Mormon” Folk Song called *None Can Preach the Gospel Like the Mormons Do*. The song is pretty self-serving, but I found that it's true. None can preach the Gospel like the Mormons do because I have found other religions simply do not have as much truth to work with (my opinion, but bear with me).

It was this summer of 1953 that I ran into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for the first time. That's the actual name of the Church which is nicknamed the “Mormon” church because of a unique set of scriptures called the *Book of Mormon*. Interestingly, the actual name of the original Christian church was The Church of Jesus Christ (see Ephesians 3:21).

My introduction to the church occurred one day prior to my arrival in Zion National Park when I picked up a “tract” (pamphlet) called *Joseph Smith Tells His Own Story* at Temple Square in Salt Lake City.

Those who have grown up in the church can hardly imagine the impact this story had on me.

I was barely 20 years old. I had grown up in a Christian home where my parents—especially my mother—had read Bible stories to us kids. I had grown up believing in God and in Jesus Christ, his Son. I believed they were two separate beings, though one in purpose. I did not know that my church believed in the inconsistent “Trinity,” an idea that came along many years (centuries) after all the apostles were dead. I was active in the Methodist church and in Wesley Foundation at college.

And here was this fellow I had never heard of—this Joseph Smith—describing his frustrating search for religious truth and describing the astounding, completely unexpected answer he received to his inquiry to find the “true” church, if it existed, namely, a visit from God Himself and His son, Jesus Christ. In the process of receiving his answer he was told not to join any of the existing churches on earth (including mine), because they were all “wrong”....they all lacked official/divine sanction of God, and did not possess the power or authority to act for Him. I read this tract in the five-hour trip from Salt Lake's Temple Square to Zion Lodge.

As you might imagine, this bold claim by Joseph Smith was a bit unsettling to a good Methodist boy; but even more unsettling was the fact that Joseph came across in his astounding testimony as a rational, sincere person, not some sort of religious nut. I recall wishing he *was* an irrational, unhinged zealot. But his message had a ring of truth to it.

Plus, his account of the nature of God and Christ as two totally united-but-separate beings agreed with my understanding of the scriptures.

All this was unsettling, because now that I knew of this claim I had some decisions to make.

- I could ignore it, and pretend that it didn't exist. But it **did** exist, so THAT wasn't the way to go.
- Or I could check it out, and see if Joseph Smith's claim had any merit. But that would take time.

At first I was too busy with my new work assignment and the excitement of being in Zion and getting to know lots of new friends. But without going into lots of interesting and fun details, I chose the latter course of action. Within a few days I started checking it out. And the rest is history.

In this process I had a lot of help and a major incentive. In addition to my interest in Smith's claim itself, I soon met a lovely young Mormon lady from Franklin, Idaho, a farmer's daughter, named Nan Parkinson—who was incidentally the Sweetheart of Franklin High School—who became my first Mormon girl friend. The help came from Nan and about a dozen other LDS students working at Zion Lodge. I recall that Nan's family had regular daily family prayer. That impressed me.

I recall one fateful day about a week after my arrival at Zion, I was eating dinner with a small group of other employees, and enjoying a glass of weak ice tea. I knew good Mormons did not drink coffee or tea. One of my less tactful and fearless peers, a lady named Joan, said: "Are you drinking tea to thumb your nose at us or do you really enjoy it?"

I could have taken offense, but didn't. I laughed, and responded honestly, "A little of both, I think." And then I surprised Joan by asking her: "What's this 'mormonism' stuff all about anyway?"

Her response: "Oh dear.....How much time do you have?" I told her the show started at 8:00 PM, so we had a couple of hours. She replied "well, we could get started....."

We adjourned to the front lawn in front of the lodge and that was the beginning of my schooling in the doctrines and background of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Joan had just finished her freshman year, and she brought a couple of older, more experienced 'sisters' along to help keep her on track (I found out they were returned missionaries).

It turned out that 75% of those employed at Zion Lodge that summer were church members, and they were not bashful about sharing their testimonies about the truthfulness of the church

There was also a kindly old night watchman (in his 70s I'm sure) whom we befriended that would stop and chat with me (and Nan) when he was making his evening rounds, and, knowing I was not a church member, he would often bear *his* testimony at the drop of a hat. His English grammar left something to be desired, but his kindness and sincerity were unquestionable.

I began to seriously investigate the church. First, I attended every LDS Sunday afternoon service at Zion Lodge. I was very much impressed that my peers were conducting the services, leading the music, playing the piano, giving the thoughtful opening and closing prayers, the Sacrament prayers, the talks, etc. I found out later that several of those leading the meetings were returned missionaries where they had learned to conduct services while on their missions.

Most of the talks were surprisingly good and reasonable and consistent with my understanding of Christianity. There was occasional questionable (as in erroneous) grammar, but otherwise the lessons were well-thought-out. But I recall being astounded to note that they NEVER PASSED A COLLECTION PLATE—EVER!!! As a good protestant, I was amazed at this. At protestant meeting they ALWAYS pass the collection plate.

So I asked the chef (an older employee and a church member) “How do you finance church operations?” I knew they had no paid ministers (impressive and consistent with the early church). But they must have other expenses? I was informed “Oh we don’t mess around with a paltry collection plate. We go for the jugular. We expect you to pay a full tithe!”

Well, I knew about the concept of a tithe from Bible study, but knew no one in my church who actually paid a tithe. But I was o.k. with this knowledge. It was a plus to me, because it meant the Latter-day Saints “put their money where their mouth (faith) is.”

I asked a lot of questions that summer—and continued to do so when I got home—and for the next three years, which included two years of military service. Having an intelligent “Mormon” roommate, Howard Barnes—a Harvard graduate who was a convert and who was raised (as a non-Mormon) in Salt Lake—helped.

It was while in the military service—much of which was spent on the west coast—that I was able to really attend LDS services and get to experience the church in action. I took a lot of time to investigate the Church in large part because of my respect for my parents. I knew that my mom would be upset if I left the Methodist church, so I wanted to be doubly sure I was taking the right step if I joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

But the truth of the matter was that I was converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ long before I actually joined. The fact was that my exposure to the gospel, starting at Zion National Park, had had a cumulative effect. The more I learned, and the more I heard and understood, the more answers I received—about the trinity, and the apostasy, baptism by immersion, the discontinuance of vicarious or proxy baptism, (practiced when Paul was an apostle—see 1 Corinthians 15:29) and loss of other original features of the Church when it was in its infancy—the same organization in the LDS Church as in the original church—things like that—the more my testimony of the truthfulness of the restored church grew.

Because, like the song mentioned above states, none *can* preach the gospel like the Mormons do! And the effect was and is cumulative.

So on February 7th, 1957, in the middle of an unusually cold winter in Southern California, I was baptized in the unheated font in the San Pedro Ward (then under construction). I'll never forget that!

Four years later, after meeting my lovely wife, Thelma Jean Merrill, I made additional covenants in the Los Angeles Temple, and have tried my best ever since to live up to all the covenants I made there and at my baptism.

In the Doctrine and Covenants, Section 46, verses 11 through 14, it says:

11. For all have not every gift given unto them; for there are many gifts, and to every man is given a gift by the Spirit of God.
12. To some is given one, and to some is given another, that all may be profited thereby.
13. To some is given by the Holy Ghost to know that Jesus the Christ is the son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world.
14. To others it is given **to believe on their words**, that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful.

I think my testimony is something of a combination of verses 13 and 14. I have always had a conviction of the divinity of God and Christ, even as a little child. And I had a growing conviction of the truthfulness of the message which Joseph Smith bore to me through his written testimony in 1830, and which now I am convinced was absolutely true.

I have acted on that conviction and have conformed my life to live the principles taught by Christ's modern-day prophets and apostles, and have given many years of service—service that has expanded my talents and given me a great deal of joy, happiness, self respect; and I have taught our six children by example and helped them to become righteous, useful, unselfish adults who are contributing to make the world a better place. They are doing a good job raising our 20 grandchildren. I have been truly blessed. And my testimony has been strengthened by the service engaged in during my many callings—roughly 40 formal and 17 ad hoc callings to the best of my recollection—over the years.

I will conclude my comments in this chapter by referring you back to the story of Dr. Brown on his deathbed, told earlier (Chapter 8). Like Dr. Brown, I pray we can all feel that we “never had a fallin’ out with God” when it is our time to approach the veil, as we all surely will. And I pray we will believe our Savior when He told us that He would take our sins upon His shoulders, and that through obedience I can show my appreciation for His great gift to us by being as obedient as I can so as to lighten His load as much as possible.

## 21. SHARING THE GOSPEL WITH OTHERS

[Note: Most of this is from a talk given in Eugene 1st Ward Jan. 4, 2000].

The “Mormon” Church has always been a missionary church, and you are likely to hear at least one talk during every session of our bi-annual General Conference broadcasts strongly encouraging the members to do a better job in *sharing the Gospel* with our friends and neighbors, and a better job of helping new members truly become integrated into the church—by making them our friends, and letting them share their talents and build their commitment through a meaningful church calling.

In January, 2000, I was serving on our Stake High Council and was assigned by then Stake President Gary Stewart to share some “personal experiences” in sharing the Gospel with others during the third Sunday Sacrament Meeting (known as “High Council Sunday”). This I was more than happy to do, though I am not a paragon in this area of service.

I have selected three such true stories that I think you will find interesting. I will close by recommending to you a simple-yet-highly-effective device that will help you to focus your otherwise well-meaning intentions *vis a vis* sharing the Gospel, and help you convert your *intentions* into a very few simple *actions* that have been proven effective in changing your non-member friends into fellow “Saints”.....an action plan used effectively by the Lucette and John Reaksecker family of Eugene.

### **Experience #1: Nick, the Graduate Research Assistant**

I spent several years at the University of California in Berkeley, CA, working on, first, a Master’s degree in Business Administration (MBA) and later considerable work toward a doctorate. During those years I supported myself and later my young family by working as a graduate “research assistant”—assisting one or more professors in their research.

One of my fellow researchers with whom I shared an office was a sharp young man I’ll refer to simply as “Nick” because I can’t recall his last name. In those days hand-held calculators—that instantly give you the square root for “least squares” and other statistical analysis—simply did not exist, and we used some very complex mechanical calculators with hundreds of moving parts that would take two or three minutes for the machine to mechanically churn out each single square root calculation. Sometimes we would chat in the interim while waiting for the results, or when doing other mechanical math work that could take place while talking or listening.

Over the course of a semester or two we talked about various aspects of our lives and interests and inevitably, like any happy Church member, this would include reference to some positive experiences from my Church activities—my wife and I were in charge of the Stake young adult program at the time. For a long time he never commented on my Church activities, though he had no doubts as to what Church I belonged. But finally, one day, he had heard enough—or maybe too much—and felt a need to say something—not aimed at me personally—that had been bothering him for a long time. He said:

“You’re pretty wrapped up in your church, aren’t you?”

I admitted that, yes, I guess I was. He then said:

“How can you support and justify belief in an organization that, in effect, condemns or excludes from Heaven all of the millions of people who have lived on the earth and never had a chance to hear the gospel or be baptized during their lifetime?” [See John 3:3-5 where Jesus tells John that a man must be baptized or he cannot enter heaven]. He did not say this in anger, but with a touch of sadness—as if he hated to burst my “Polyannic” bubble, but felt a need to confront me with what he felt to be an inconsistent and unfair position of my apparent happiness compared to all the misery of the souls dammed to eternal nothingness [“Limbo” in the vernacular of the Catholic church].

He went on to add that he “used to be a member” of the Roman Catholic faith, but that he simply could not stomach the unfairness of his former church’s doctrine that required baptism as a prerequisite for entrance to Heaven, but provided no way for those millions so unfortunate as to be born at the wrong time or place and to die before having an opportunity to meet this prerequisite. This had obviously bothered him so much that he gave up on his church in particular; and, because most Christian churches recognize this prerequisite, Christianity in general. That is, most—but not all—Christian churches recognize the absoluteness of Christ’s instruction to Nicodemus in John 3:3-5: that “Except a man be born of the water and of the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

Well, Nick’s question is a **dream question** for any LDS missionary or Church member—because it sets up a real **slam-dunk** response—a response that only members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are in a position to make and answer satisfactorily.

I think he knew something surprising was coming from the smile on my face and my utter lack of being fazed or rattled or made defensive by his heartfelt and profoundly challenging question.

I initially responded to **his** question **with another question**. I said “Nick, have you noticed that big, imposing white building with the tall spires that is being built up there in the Oakland Hills near the Warren Freeway?”

He responded that he had.

I said, “That building is the latest in an ever growing number of temples that our church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is building throughout the world.”

I continued, “There are three main things—ordinances—that will take place in that building as in all our other temples. I won’t go into the other two just now; but **one** of those three things—highly relevant to your question—is the performance of **vicarious** or proxy **baptisms**, where members of our Church, in good standing, are permitted to enter the temple and be baptized **as a proxy** for those who have lived and died without that ordinance being performed for them or performed properly—for whatever reason.”

I explained that they are baptized, by immersion, in a circular font of water about 4 feet deep which is located on the back of twelve oxen—three facing north, three south, three west and three east—exactly as described in Solomon’s temple in Chapter 7 of 1st Kings in the old testament.

I told him that this principle **of vicarious or proxy actions** on the part of one individual **in behalf of another** was, of course, *a fundamental principle of Christianity*—as demonstrated by Christ’s vicarious

atonement “for and in behalf of” each and every person ever born or who will yet be born into the world—to vicariously cleanse us of our sins. This he understood and agreed with.

I explained that just as Christ, with his infinite righteousness, was able to do something for us, vicariously, that we couldn’t do for ourselves—that is, cleanse us of our sins—we were permitted, in a much smaller, less demanding way, to vicariously do something for those who preceded us in death and who had not been baptized, or were not properly baptized by one with the property authority to perform this sacred ordinance.

I talked about the prophesy of Malachi—the last verse in the whole Old Testament, about the hearts of the children turning to their fathers and vice versa, and explained about our world-wide genealogical research and efforts to uncover the names of those who need this work done — including photo copying millions of church records in Europe and elsewhere— and that this work would continue well into the millennium in my view, as some records were undoubtedly destroyed and would have to be divinely revealed at a future time for such individuals to become known and their baptismal and other ordinance work to be done.

I told him our church did not invent the concept of vicarious baptism on behalf of people who had already died, and quoted 1 Cor. 15:29 from the New Testament, in which Paul, in an effort to revitalize the flagging faith of some backsliding former Corinthian Sadducees in the reality of the resurrection, refers to what was obviously the well-known practice of proxy baptism to bolster his argument for the less tangible doctrine of the resurrection, concluding his argument by saying:

“Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?”

On other words, Paul asked why would we have members of the church going to so much trouble to be baptized on behalf of their kindred dead—something the former Sadducees knew was happening all the time—if those same dead people were not going to be resurrected anyway? Why bother?

I told him that early church history documents that the practice Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 15:29 was a common practice among early Christians until about 100 AD, at which time the practice stopped....which was also about the time that the church lost its last apostles and many other precious things.

After about four or five minutes Nick knew three things he had never realized before.

**First**, he knew that there was at least **one** Christian church—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—that had an answer—a good, compellingly, logical, scripture-backed answer—to the plight of those who, through no fault of their own, had not received the blessing of baptism—a plight Nick well understood and which had led him to reject his church and, pretty much Christianity as a whole. He now knew—for the first time—that his objection and rejection of Christianity **just might be ill founded**.

**Second**, he knew that at least one Church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, was already actively engaged in making this essential ordinance available to as many of those who had died without this opportunity as presently possible.

**Third**, he knew that there was clear biblical evidence that this practice of vicarious baptism was practiced by the original Church of Jesus Christ—regardless of whether or not other churches knew what to do with this historical knowledge.

**And finally**, he knew that it made sense. Not only was it consistent with the concept of a just God, but it was also consistent with the principle of vicariousness which underlies—is basic to—the atonement itself.

And I think he could see the **beauty** of a plan which gave those of us still living an opportunity to share in a process that not only fulfills the letter of Christ's declaration to Nicodemus, but that simultaneously fosters love and appreciation between those living and those that have gone beyond this life in the process.

[Effect] This brief explanation on my part had a profound affect upon Nick, as you might imagine. His concern for mankind was genuine, and his long-standing objection was understandable and sincere, and had been wrenching. And suddenly, in about a five-minute period of time, he realized that perhaps—just maybe—the blessing of the Gospel and heaven were, after all, open to all—that the Gospel was NOT inherently unfair. I think what I did was give him renewed hope that there was—or at least could be—a just God in heaven after all!

I wish I could give you the end of this story, but I can't. Nick was leaving for an assignment in the Peace Corps within the next ten days or so that would take him out of the United States for at least a couple of years.

But this much I can tell you: I arranged for Nick to come to my house a few days later, and meet with J. Bonner Ritchie, who lived upstairs from me. J. Bonner Ritchie was a missionary's missionary, who had an encyclopedic knowledge of the Gospel and a lifelong testimony to boot. His father was a Stake President at the time in San Jose, CA; his mother had taught seminary for years. I had been a member of the Church for less than five years, so had a limited understanding.

J. Bonner and I talked to Nick for over two hours that night, covering all aspects of the Gospel. Mostly I let J. Bonner do the talking. I don't know whatever happened to Nick, and cannot even remember his name for certain. But the young man who left for the peace corps mission a week later left with a knowledge and understanding of things—facts and concepts—he never even imagined existed two weeks before; and a mind so stretched never returns to its original dimensions.

One thing is certain: He had a completely different view about the potential comprehensiveness of the saving ordinances within Christianity, properly understood, and a profound respect for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its position in this respect. He could be a Christian in good conscience again! And he understood, now, how I could be so happy in my religion.

This experience with Nick was good for me too. It made me appreciate all the more what I had—by way of understanding of God's plan for me—and my forefathers....and the fact that I could enjoy the gospel truths without having to compromise my sense of fairness, or reason, because of ignorance of revealed truth. Scores of my ancestors have since had this vicarious work done for them.

## Experience #2: Mark Bailey

I believe I was in the bishopric when I first met Mark Bailey. He was a construction worker in the building trades. His specialty was lathe and plaster work—which is the way they used to build walls in houses and buildings before sheet rock made that skill virtually obsolete. He had big, strong, rough working-man’s hands and a physique that reflected the hauling and mixing of a lot of heavy bags of plaster compound. His upper canine teeth protruded noticeably. His hair was unruly and he looked a lot like the hayseed character, Alfred E. Newman, of *Mad Comics*, only he appeared more intelligent, and his grin was not a stupid grin, but an engaging one, if at first a bit cynical.

Mark was not a member of the Church. He was also not well educated, and was a “serial murderer of the King’s English.” His grammar was just terrible. Expressions like “he done it” and “he come to town yesterday” were common misuses of the language, along with frequent screw ups in the proper use of the pronouns “I” and “me.” Yet there was something likable about Mark, and for all his obvious lack of education, he was not lacking in native intelligence.

Only one thing caused Mark to show up at the LDS Institute and University Ward: Mormon girls. I know this for a fact, because he admitted this to my brother-in-law, Bruce Merrill, then a stake missionary, and to Bruce’s companion, Reed Call, at the end of their first missionary discussion to which Mark had reluctantly agreed to listen.

Following the completion of that first discussion—in which Mark had shown obvious disinterest—an attempt was made to set up an appointment for the second lesson. Mark decided to put it straight to the two missionaries. He said, “Look guys, I’m really not interested in your religion. I’ll be honest with ya. The only reason I came to your church was to meet some Mormon girls.”

To his surprise, these two stake missionaries thanked him for his candor, said they could understand his position, and agreed with him that Mormon girls were pretty special. Then Reed Call, an old horse trader from Malad, Idaho, said “Look, we’re brand-new stake missionaries. We have never had a chance to go through all six lessons with anyone. In fact, we’ve never gotten beyond the first lesson. We’ll make you a deal: You keep coming to church and dancing with our girls and we won’t say anything to anybody that would prevent you from doing that. That’s our part of the deal. And **you** let us come back five more times for about 30 minutes in the next five weeks so we can practice giving the other five lessons so we can learn how to do it. That’s **your** part of the deal. What do you say?”

Well, Mark had had a good time the first “mutual” night, and the Mormon girls **were** pretty special, so he could understand the advantages of the arrangement from his perspective, and he was willing—or at least not adverse—to helping out these two nice stake missionaries too, so he said OK, they had a deal.

Of course Reed and Bruce told us what happened, and we kept a general eye out to make sure Mark’s behavior was appropriate at our Wednesday night activities and dances, and we gave him a lot of fellowshipping attention—which was the main extent of my role in this true story.

Poor Mark.....He had no idea what he was getting into. Reed and Bruce and the rest of us, on the other hand, well understood the persuasive power of the Gospel, especially combined with sincere testimony confirmed by the Holy Ghost, and you can guess the outcome.

Mark became more and more interested in what he was hearing. He started asking sincere questions during the 2nd lesson and thereafter. He started attending church on Sunday. By the end of the six lessons he had committed to baptism—and not as part of the “deal” but “on the square.”

Then to the surprise of all, soon after his baptism Mark began courting in earnest—and fell in love with—and won the heart of—a fine, cultured Mormon young lady, Mary Aschman, who taught English in one of the Bay Area high schools. Remember what I said about Mark’s English? Hold on to that thought for a minute.

Mary was a very nice young lady, but hopelessly shy when it came to men. If you complimented her on her outfit she turned beet red—starting with her neck, and rising to the top of her head like a thermometer with a match held under it. Some of the ornery fellows used to pay her compliments of a semi-personal nature just to see her blush.

I doubt that Mary had ever dated much, and her self-confidence around men and in dating situations was near non-existent. Although not unattractive, her lack of dating skills and ill-of-ease in potential dating situations would have gained her just about everyone’s vote for the University Ward’s “madam-librarian-most-likely-to-become-an-old-maid” award, had there been such a thing. Yet macho Mark was singularly attracted to this young lady—to the surprise (and delight) of all.

Well, Jean and I transferred to Berkeley Ward, a regular ward, shortly thereafter. Meanwhile, this most improbable match between rough Mark and shy, gentle, refined Mary blossomed, and about a year after his baptism they were married in the Oakland temple and commenced their life together.

That’s a pretty good story, but it doesn’t end there. I’m going to pull a “Paul Harvey” and give you the “rest of the story:”

A few years later, on a trip back to the Bay Area from Oregon to attend a wedding reception that had lots of old friends present, Herb & Sharon Layton and Jean & I were greeted by the soft, cultured voice of a Mark Bailey that I almost did not recognize. Gone were the prominent canine teeth, thanks to some competent orthodontistry. Gone was the hayseed look and uncared for hands. In their place were a confident handshake, a high degree of social confidence and an English teacher’s polished command of the language—guess where *that* came from!?

We discovered that Mark had gone back to school, obtained a college degree in psychology (I think it was), and was presently a counselor with the county juvenile justice system in sprawling Alameda County—a job for which his education, tough upbringing and intimidating physical appearance, tempered by his gentle wife’s sweetness, his own inherent kindness and his newfound religion, made him ideally prepared.

In addition, I learned that he and Mary had bought and completely renovated two homes that had been in bad repair, and had made enough profit from their labor to virtually pay for their lovely new home which they had essentially built from scratch and would shortly own debt free—while still in their 30’s (a remarkable accomplishment!).

And Mary—what a change in Mary! She was now a successful wife and mother, as well as a talented school teacher. She was no longer a bashful wall flower, but had become the confident, socially at ease person she was obviously destined to be. It was a double miracle....all because a group of us worked together to share the Gospel with one of God's diamonds-in-the-rough, and followed through—just like President Hinckley has said—to teach Mark, be his friend, and give him meaningful things to do in the church. Think of how many lives will be blessed just through the work that will be done by this one man and his lovely—now outgoing—wife during their lifetime.

## 22. FAITH-PROMOTING EXPERIENCES

### Introduction

Over the years I've come across or experienced some events that have had a mysterious element to them. Some are humorous and have a logical explanation. Other stories or experiences are not so easily explained. Are they coincidences? I don't think so. I think our Heavenly Father sometimes hides his actions in coincidences. So fasten your seat belt, sit back and enjoy.

### Grant's Pass Miracle

Thirty-some years ago I attended an arbitration in Grants Pass, OR, to assist my friend, Max Morelock, with a case. We arrived the day before the case to interview our witnesses and plan our approach and strategy.

I don't recall much about the case, but I DO recall that Max had an old friend, Ester Vaughn, probably in her 70s, who lived on the south side of the Rogue River in a distinctive two-story house, set back a couple of blocks from the Rogue River Highway (Hwy 99). I recall that Ester had a somewhat mentally handicapped daughter named Virginia.

We had a lovely visit with them that lasted about an hour, and I recall I was impressed with Ester and had some empathetic feeling, perhaps because I had had a somewhat mentally handicapped brother (CBus) when I was growing up, and could appreciate what such a mother had gone through (mixed blessings and trials).

Anyway, several years later I was back in Grants Pass for another arbitration—possibly with the same grievant—but without Max along. I had the case well prepared, and the evening free, and since the evening was reasonably young (about 7:30 PM) decided to call on Ester and Virginia—so they would know that I had fond memories of them, etc.

The problem? I was not exactly sure where they lived. I knew they lived a couple blocks north of the Rogue River Highway. But I discovered there were about 25 places you could turn north from that highway, and I had no idea which road it was. Max had been driving my last time there, and it had been dark.

I drove across the Rogue River bridge to the Rogue River Highway and cruised east and west along that highway, hoping I would find something familiar. I took a couple of turnoffs, but they were not the correct road, with the unusual two-story house and fenced in backyard I could still visualize in my mind.

I realized I could waste a lot of time by such trial and error methods, so I just said a little prayer. "Heavenly Father, I would like to see Esther and Virginia again—to let them know I remember them fondly, but I need a little help." Just then I crossed over one of other 25 possible north-

south turnoffs, drove about 30 feet, and then *immediately* made a sudden 180-degree turn, and drove down the street I had just passed.

Two blocks later I was staring at the Vaughn house and fenced-in yard I so vividly recalled. I rang the bell, heard a “Who’s there” from Ester, and had a dandy half-hour visit with the Vaughn’s who were in their bathrobes (they had gone to bed early).

It was an amazing event. SOMETHING (or someone) prompted me to do that U-turn down the correct street that night, and do it NOW! I did not even have to think about it. I just instantly took action. Perhaps I had subconsciously recognized the corner from some years before. I guess that’s possible. But it was very unlikely. I personally attribute help from a Higher source.

### **Another Coincidence: Florence Golding’s Blessing**

I have had several occasions that could be fortuitous coincidences, though I often doubt that. One of these started on a Sunday morning just before church services began, when I was approached by “Sister” Florence Golding, a widow.<sup>4</sup> She advised me that she was scheduled for eye surgery the following morning (Monday) to remove a cataract. Though cataract surgery seems almost routine to us now, anything that has to do with your eyes is still a bit scary, and Florence asked me, her “Home Teacher,” if I would come by her home that afternoon, after church, and give her a blessing.

When we perform a blessing we always have two brethren holding the Melchizedek<sup>5</sup> priesthood, so I had to find another “brother” to go with me for the blessing. In virtually all former occasions when I needed a partner to go with me for a blessing I took Dale Bartmess, one of the sweetest, kindest, most spiritual men I have ever known. He is so tender hearted I used to say he starts tearing up when he reads the dictionary. He was also our bishop at one point and during the 9-11 emergency he served as temporary bishop in Cottage Grove ward. He’s just a gentle giant of a man, spiritually.

For some reason I felt impressed to ask brother Howard Bingham to accompany me to Sister Golding’s house that afternoon. Bro. Bingham has been a Bishop, I believe, and later a member of the Stake Presidency, and was also a fine man. He agreed, and I picked him up at the appointed time and we went to the Golding home.

Sister Golding smiled broadly as she opened the door for us to enter, and after a few minutes, it was decided that I would do the anointing with the consecrated oil, and that Howard would give the actual blessing, and he proceeded to give one of the most beautiful blessing I had ever heard.

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<sup>4</sup> Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint tend to use this old-fashioned manner of address—which may appear corny—because that’s the way we feel about each other. We believe we are literally children (spiritually) of one Heavenly Father; and so in that that sense we are brothers and sisters. I once told an interviewer in a job interview that, “of course I like some brothers and sisters better than others!” :D

<sup>5</sup> Melchizedek was a priest in Jerusalem to whom Abraham paid tithes.

It was inspired, it was touching, and it was perfect for the occasion. It was comforting to Sister Golding.

It was about a week later that Sister Golding revealed to me that she had been talking to herself after requesting a blessing, saying (to herself) “Oh, I hope he brings Brother Bingham!” And I was sufficiently in tune with the Spirit that somehow I picked up on it. I had never used Bro. Bingham before nor since. I am convinced that my decision to ask Brother Bingham to assist administering Florence’s blessing that day was inspired. I can’t accept that it was a “coincidence.”

### **Immediate results**

We used to have a “Sister Adams” in our ward, a single sister at the time. She had a son named Brett, who was about 11 years old at the time of this incidence. It took place on a Sunday night, about midnight.

On this particular Sunday—for some reason—I did not change into informal, more comfortable clothing when I got home from church. I kept my Sunday-go-meetin’ clothes on. I don’t think I even took off my coat.

As bedtime approached I think we had family prayer as usual, and my family got ready for bed and retired. I recall not feeling sleepy, and I “retired” to my corner study downstairs, and sat at my desk there and read. I think I was reading church materials, perhaps the scriptures. I don’t recall what, but only that (a) I was not sleepy, (2) I was reading, (3) it was getting later and later, and (4) I was fully dressed, complete with coat and tie. It was as if I were waiting for *something*.

And then it happened. At midnight the phone rang.

It was Elder Steve Thornock, a member of the church and a neighbor who lived almost exactly one block away. He apologized for waking me up (he thought), and advised me that Sister Adams, his “home teachee,” had called to say that Brett Adams, her son, was quite sick, and experiencing major stomach pains. He had requested a priesthood blessing, and could I get dressed and meet him at the bottom of the stairs and go with him to give Brett a blessing?

He was very surprised when I told him I was fully dressed and would meet him at the bottom of our steep driveway in seconds. I was waiting for him when he arrived, complete with a bottle of consecrated oil. Five minutes later we were in the Adams’ dining room with a sick Brett in a bathrobe.

I believe I volunteered to give the blessing—which I did as soon as Steve anointed Brett.

I didn’t hesitate or waste words. In the name of Jesus Christ I literally commanded that whatever was causing Brett’s sickness to leave his body. He immediately started vomiting

convulsively—which sister Adams caught in a blanket or robe, and I closed the blessing a few seconds later.

He immediately felt relief. We found out later that he felt so good the next morning he wanted to go to school, but she made him stay home.

In walking back to the car Steve Thornock said, “Wow, Bob, you don’t mess around!”

It was a strange situation. SOMETHing had made me not go to bed or even undress. SOMETHing had kept me up and alert. SOMETHing had told me I should be the voice in the blessing....I mean I didn’t hesitate to volunteer to do that. I SOMEhow knew I was supposed to do it. SOMEhow I knew exactly what to say, and it turned out to be exactly the thing to say. I had never before been impressed to “command” any action during a blessing; but I clearly felt impressed to do so that night. And it was the right thing to do. It worked.

And once the bug or whatever had been causing his distress was gone, he was fine! He slept like a baby after the blessing.

Another coincidence?

### **Sister Freihube’s Brother**

At one point I was assigned as the ‘Home Teacher’ to Walter and Theresa Freihube (Fry-WHO-bee).

Sister Freihube had a non-member brother who was confronted with a major career decision and was wondering which of two choices to make. Sister Freihube told him that her home teacher was a wonderful man who held the priesthood and suggested he ask me to give him a blessing to help him make the right choice.

That was sorta putting me on the spot, so to speak, and could have been distressing—assuming the brother took me up on requesting a blessing.

Well, he did. So one day during my monthly visit with the Freihubes the brother was present and he did request a blessing to help him make the correct choice.

Sometimes you feel closer to the Spirit that other times—like when giving a blessing to the Adams boy (above)—and I recall feeling very calm and completely composed that day. I didn’t use consecrated oil, but I DID give him a blessing—that he would be blessed to know, without doubt, which course of action he should take after seeking help through prayer to his Father in Heaven.

And he did seek God’s blessing, according to Theresa, and did receive an answer to his prayers and did make a career choice that proved to be right for him.

I don't know that this involved any coincidences, but it was notable that on this particular date I felt completely in tune with the Holy Ghost so that I could know what to advise Theresa's brother, and apparently it worked.

### **Coincidence City: Yreka, CA**

On our frequent trips to visit Grandma and Grandpa Merrill (later, just Grandma Merrill) we always stopped at regular fueling stations for gas and bathrooms. One of these stops was the Mobile station in Yreka, CA. It was only a couple of blocks off of I-5, which gave us an easy off, and easy back on.

On this one occasion—a Friday evening—we had gotten a late start from Eugene, anticipating a late arrival in Rossmoor, CA about midnight.

We pulled into our favorite station and as I killed the engine there was a slight kickback or backfire. When I went to start the car after we had all used the bathrooms and fueled our Dodge van, it did NOT start. In fact, it made a smooth whirring sound—not the usual chugga chugga sound associated with the compression of eight cylinders.

There was a pleasant and knowledgeable young man in a tow truck in the adjoining aisle that said, matter-of-factly, “You're not going anywhere in that car tonight.” I asked him why not, and he explained in clear English why not. He told me that to make the Dodge V-8 run quieter, they coated the timing gear on the cam shaft with nylon.....and that when the nylon gets old and starts to crack, eventually the nylon flakes off. When that happens, the diameter of the coated gear gets slightly less, and then all it takes is a slight kickback on stopping for the timing chain to slip a few degrees—which causes the valves to open and close at the wrong time.....which, he said, is why we hear no chugga chugga sound—because the valves are opening when the pistons are going up instead or remaining closed.

I knew immediately that he was correct.

He then said he had a friend who ran a garage that was open on Saturday morning, and if I wanted, he'd call him and see if he could take me tomorrow morning. If so, he could tow us down to a motel 6 on the way to the garage so we'd have a place to stay for the night. And if we were still here tomorrow night, he invited us to the Saturday night races at the local race track—a race he often participated in.

Well, he called his friend, and luckily he had time to work on our car the next morning, so we had the tow truck driver drive us the south end of town and, as luck would have it, got the last two rooms at the Motel 6. He then waited while we unloaded the van with our luggage, and then towed our van a mile south on a frontage road to where the repair garage was located. We got the van as close as we could to the entrance, and then he brought me back to the motel and dropped me off.

We had not discussed money during this whole period of time. I asked him what do we owe you for all your help. He said he normally got \$70 for towing (and he had done much more than just tow us...he had waited for us to unload, helped us find a place, find a garage, etc.), but he said because we had trusted him to be fair and not tried to negotiate, and because we were facing a big repair bill, he was only going to charge us \$35. THAT was really nice of him! Maybe SOMEBODY was touching his heart.

We had a good night's sleep. I got up early, ate a quick bite, and started walking a mile down the frontage road to the garage, arriving about the time it opened, so I could be on hand to oversee the repairs

If you know anything about a Dodge van, you know they are difficult to work on, because there is almost **no room** under the hood, and we needed to pull the front of the engine off to expose the now defective (too small) timing gear.

It was a big job. I assisted the mechanic by holding the work light at a good angle to facilitate his work and anything else that helped. Being a pretty good mechanic myself I was pretty good at anticipating what he needed help with, and we made pretty good time. By about 3:00 PM we were done, and our bill was \$160. We later discovered that if we had had the work done in Walnut Creek, CA, it would have been \$300. That is, these guys "had" us at their mercy, but were honest and fair. That was the second blessing that trip.

While the mechanic and I were hard at it, Jean and the kids had taken advantage of the special "street sale" the town was having, as well as attended a movie, so they had interesting things to keep them busy. I found them easily after I was finished, and we loaded up and hit the freeway heading south at a good clip. For a little while.

Then I notice when I hit the horn, the car slowed down. There was something wrong with the electrical system. I immediately diagnosed the problem: They had forgotten to re-connect the wire lead from the alternator when they had put everything back together. The problem got worse and worse and finally we coasted to a stop about 10 miles from Yreka. I pulled off the highway at a reasonably safe place—a wide shoulder—and removed the engine cover between the two front seats (which involved removing the ice box cube, the CB radio, etc.), and as suspected, there was the wire dangling loose from the alternator (it clips on easily).

I reattached the wire to the alternator, replaced and bolted down the engine cowling, replace the ice box and CB, etc. Now all we needed was a jump start. How do we get one of the speeding cars to stop and give us a jump start??

Then, almost immediately, a highway patrol in the northbound lane on the other side of the freeway, stopped to give a citation to a car. He was directly across I-5 from us. I motioned to him we needed help. He motioned for me to stay put, and he would be right there.

In an amazing display of driving, he was able to cross over into our southbound lane in seconds. He pulled behind me, and I told him quickly what had happened—that we had, in effect, ran out of electricity, and that all I needed was a jump start.

That meant he had to pull onto the highway, and turn around, and come nose to hose with our van. Meanwhile cars were whipping down I-5 toward us at 70 mph. There was no margin for error.

I then witnessed a really professional driver in action. He whipped his patrol car onto the highway, between speeding car, and had his car facing ours in about five seconds. It was amazing to watch.

In less than two minutes he got our van jump started (my diagnosis was accurate), and in another few seconds he had his cruiser headed south again. We followed less than a minute later (but never saw him), and got to Rossmoor before midnight, safe and sound.

That highway patrolman was our third major “coincidence” in less than 24 hours. We could have waited for hours for help, but didn’t have to. If a novice had tried to help us it could have been very dangerous. But this patrolman made it a safe operation. He was GOOD!

In summary,

- We had a tow truck when we needed it—with no waiting
- We were able to find a garage that could fix our problem.
- We were able to find a motel—the last two rooms!!
- We were right next to McDonald’s for an easy breakfast the next morning.
- The motel, the garage, and the tow truck were reasonably priced.
- The kids and Jean had something fun to do while waiting for the car to be fixed (only on this particular weekend).
- When the electrical problem occurred, a highway patrol car showed up exactly when and where needed, so we could again be safely on our way.

What a string of “coincidences”!? I think not. Someone loved us!

### **Labor Day Weekend In Boise, ID**

The last half of August, 1984, was a very busy and rather exciting time for the Wilson family. First, starting August 15th, Randy and I attended a week-long Western-States-wide Boy Scout “Encampment” at Farragut State Park in northern Idaho. We had driven to Farragut in a bus from Eugene—at least a 15 hour trip.

This was a *major* event with archery, wood carving (I assisted in teaching that in a huge Indian teepee), a rappelling tower, go carts, and much more. I discovered that teepees were amazing shelters. The weather was hot, but with the bottom of the Teepee rolled up about a foot, and the

sun beating down on the side of the teepee, the updraft of heated air exited out the top of the teepee with such force that it created a cooling breeze all around the bottom. Those Indians were plenty smart!

I won't try to describe all the activities (which were nonstop) but will comment on a couple of things. First, I was able to purchase three lovely recurve bows from the fellow who made them especially for the Encampment for about \$30 each. And second, I met a brother Pipkin, a friend of Max Morelock, who lived in Sand Point, ID. He was a Vietnam Vet who had lost his lower left leg during the war and managed to get along well on a prosthesis.

Getting to know Bro. Pipkin was a double blessing, because we had the rest of our family—Jean, Leslie, Bobby, Sharon, John, and Joe—meet at Bro. Pipkin's home in Sandpoint, ID, on August 22nd, the afternoon of the last day of the Encampment. And Bro. and Sister Pipkin graciously invited us to stay for supper and spend the night with them—all eight of us!

From Sandpoint, ID, we headed north through British Columbia, through the Canadian Rockies to Lake Louise and Jasper Park, camping along the way. We visited Banff National Park, and then went to church in Claresholm, Alberta, Canada, where we were invited to Sunday lunch after church on the Chatterton family ranch just south of Claresholm. We ate a wonderful meal, and then detoured 78 miles around a forest fire (after temporarily losing John [again!]), and spent the night at Glacier National Park (setting up our tent after dark as usual and watching out for bear signs).

The next day we started through Glacier National Park, further south through more of Montana and Yellowstone, to St. Anthony, ID, where Jean's cousin, Patsy, lived. By Friday night we were back in Provo, spending the night with the Stirlings.

We spent much of Saturday, September 1st, getting Leslie moved into her new apartment, then took off east toward Eugene, getting as far as Glenn's Ferry, ID, arriving there about 9:30 PM and camping at Three Island State Park campground (in the dark as usual, but camping on grass no less!).

[Then it happened.....]. Because we needed to be home Monday, we decided to drive on Sunday, and to hold Sunday School of sorts while under way. That was the plan, and we read scriptures during the roughly two hours drive from Glenn's Ferry until we got to within 10 miles of Boise when *all of a sudden we heard a crescendoing grinding noise* and then the windshield became coated with green antifreeze, and we coasted to the side of the road—about 400 yards from a state rest stop.

What had happened? The water pump bearings had literally disintegrated, allowing the fan blade to tilt forward — which caused the fan blade to chew its way into the upper front of the radiator—which allowed the radiator fluid (antifreeze) to escape from the radiator and coat the windshield. Our car was definitely out of commission.

[Then the good luck starts.....]. I got out, raised the hood, verified the above, and started walking toward the rest stop. Before I got there another motorist stopped to check of us, and Jean told them to pick me up and take me to the rest stop—which got me there a bit sooner.

At the rest stop there was a small group of volunteers serving free coffee to anyone who wanted some, and, as luck would have it, they....

- had a CB radio, and
- knew a service station that had a CB on all the time, and could call AAA roadside service for us. (This was before cell phones).

Less than 30 minutes later the AAA towing vehicle arrived on the scene (we were just 8 miles from Boise when the car broke down) and soon towed us into the Union 76 station associated with AAA in central Boise. And of course they were open for business, as the Labor Day weekend is a big day for them

The owner of the station was very nice, and in short order had located a new water pump for us (more good news), but said the bad news was that since we had the heavy duty towing package with the oversized radiator, he could NOT pick up this particular radiator until TUESDAY MORNING! We were definitely stuck in Boise until Tuesday morning.

Well, he let us park our van over to one side of his station where we could work on it. I had coveralls and tools with me. When the water pump arrived I began the onerous job of removing the old water pump and installing the new. This is and was hard work on a Dodge van because there is very little work space under the hood of a van, but I was able to generate more space by getting the destroyed radiator disconnected and out of the way, and with a lot of hard work in some lovely sun (it was hot), by about 4:30 PM the new water pump was installed.

Now we could turn our attention to what we needed to do next, mainly find housing. We knew there was a motel 6 about four blocks away, but frankly we didn't like that idea. So I told Jean: "Why don't we try calling the transient bishop<sup>6</sup> and see if he knows someone with a big back yard we could camp in. All we need is access to a bathroom. We've been camping most of two weeks, and are otherwise pretty much self-sufficient." So that's what we did. We called the transient bishop. Jean called the number, and then didn't quite know what to say, so she handed the phone to me when the bishop answered.

I said "Bishop, my name is Bob Wilson from Eugene 3rd Ward in Eugene, Oregon. I'm calling from the Triple-A station here in town. Our car broke down from a collapsed water pump. First off, I want to say **we don't need any money**. We've got cash for any meals and credit cards for

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<sup>6</sup> The Church will help members in good standing who need help on the road. But so that travelers won't be able to "work the system" and hit several bishops, each town with more than one church and bishop appoints one of them to be the "go to" guy. That way dishonest people can't take advantage of Church funds.

car repairs and a motel....” There was a moment of silence, and then the bishop responded, “Brother Wilson, how can I help you?”

I told him that the thought of spending two full days cooped up in a motel 6 with “those we thought we loved best” was not very appealing. I asked him if he knew any empty nesters with a large back yard where we might camp for two nights, as we had been camping regularly on our trip, and all we needed was a yard and access to a bathroom. He said: “Let me talk to my Relief Society President and call you back,” and he hung up.

Instead of calling us back, about 20 minutes later his RS President AND her husband, Brother Anderson, who was the Director of the LDS Institute of Religion in the area, drove up to the Union 76 station in two cars, explained that they lived on a semi-farm plot, had a big house, had five kids to entertain, had four movies rented, and we should pile everything we were going to need into their cars and come with them!

The transient bishop (who doubled as the Anderson’s actual bishop) came over while we were eating supper, bringing some dessert to help out the Andersons. But I suspect his **real** purpose was to see what he had gotten his Relief Society President into. Within seconds of seeing our clean-cut family (at our age we are responsible for what we look like) you could see the obvious look of relief on his face.

After a few minutes of small talk the bishop said, “Brother Wilson, I’ve been a transient bishop for several years, and I’ve NEVER had someone say, ‘First of all. Bishop, we don’t need any money.’ You don’t know how refreshing that was!”

Well, this turned out to be the perfect solution. The Andersons had someone (a kid) in every age group. We provided someone to keep THEIR kids entertained as well as ours. They were doing some major canning of corn from their acre or so of Golden Jubilee corn, and needed some major help shucking corn. And they had a barbecue for the whole ward Monday afternoon, so our family would hardly make a dent.

Plus the next day we bought them a tube of hamburger meat, and a huge tub of vanilla ice cream, **and, using our two Son’s-of-Habachi charcoal barbecue stoves, actually cooked all the hamburgers for the ward party...**...so we proved to be pretty handy, and not a burden.

Tuesday morning Brother Anderson ran me down to the Union 76 station where my radiator had arrived, and I went to work. I think Bobby might have helped me. (He was with us instead of back at BYU because he was leaving on his mission to Mexico in early December). While we were busy fixing “Old Blue”—as we lovingly called our van—our kids and the Anderson clan were enjoying the last day of Boise’s water slides, where they were giving away the food for free.

We finally got out of Boise at 2:30 PM—with a total repair bill of \$311.95 (not bad considering)—and arrived home, in Eugene, at 12:50 AM. We had dropped in to say hello to JoAnne and George Hardy when we passed through Unity, OR, who invited us to stay with them in the future...but we had already lost a day so we opted to keep driving.

The next day was Wednesday, Sept. 5th, our 23rd wedding anniversary as well as the 1st day of BYU. We mostly just unpacked, and I took Jeannie to dinner at the North Bank restaurant, and to see the *Karate Kid* at the movie theater. It was nice to be home.

Summary. This trip proved to be another bunch of coincidences. In addition to a wonderful Scout camping experience, we got to see a lovely part of Canada for the first time, and then when things started to go wrong with the car, consider:

- The initial breakdown occurred within walking distance of a rest stop, not in an isolated spot.
- A car helped me get to the rest stop.
- People at the rest stop had a CB radio, and knew others with a CB that had a telephone.
- They called AAA who was on the scene in short order.
- The AAA station was open and able to get most of the needed parts, and even gave me some help and advice.
- The transient bishop had a good idea, and knew who to ask for help.
- The Andersons had perfect accommodations for us, lots of delicious food (outstanding corn on the cob) and gave us a service opportunity.
- There was someone in every age group for our kids to play with, so no whining
- We made some wonderful new friends.
- The repairs took a lot of work, but we were able to do most of it and keep the costs minimal.
- Other than a lost day, we actually suffered no ill effects.

Conclusion: What a lot of happy ‘coincides.’ We must be doing something right again. I still think that Someone still loves us.

### **Miracle at Millican**

On April 20, 1987, Jean and John and I headed for Provo, Utah, in our trusty (we thought) 1972 Dodge van. I believe our objective was to fetch our son, Robert Bryan, for the summer from BYU at the end of the Spring term. Leslie and Jeff lived in Provo at this time, and our son Randy was on a mission in Korea.

The car had in the prior two months received a new transmission (March), a new tune up (just 2 days before), a new water pump and a new alternator that morning. So what could possibly go wrong, right?

The car ran smoothly on the way to our first night’s destination at the home of Ted and Adeline Romoser, then of Redmond, OR. We arrived late that evening (11:40 PM!) and headed for Provo the next morning via Bend, OR, and highway 20—which is shorter and faster than highway 26 through John Day.

We tanked up in Bend, and headed east. But 26 miles later, as we were climbing a hill just west of the tiny (population 2) town of Millican, OR, the car belched and bucked and coughed, and just as we got to the crest of a hill, the engine simply stopped. We coasted downhill and right into the parking space in front of the Millican General Store.

We noticed, with relief, as we came to a stop that there was a garage attached to the left side of the main building.

Our relief was temporary, however, as the mechanic who worked there had quit two days prior! Furthermore, Millican had **no telephone**. The proprietor was a rather unfriendly guy (he was later murdered, we discovered), and his assistant, a “tugboat Annie” sort of woman (rather uncouth) was his temperamental equivalent. For \$30 they offered to drive us to the nearest store that had a telephone, and we had no choice but to accept.

So I left Jean and John back in Millican and headed back toward Bend for several miles until we came to the store with a phone where Tugboat Annie dropped me off.

I called AAA in Bend, who eventually picked me up in their tow truck and we retraced the few miles back to Millican.

The Farmer. When we pulled up next to our van there was a man in bib overalls who had been looking under the hood/cowl of our van, and he said to me: “Have them check your **coil**. It seems hot. Also, have them check your **fuel pump**. And have them check your **fuel line**.” I recall that I asked him his name and where he lived. He said he lived in or around Hampton, OR, which was another 40 miles or so further east of Millican, and he also gave us his name (which we cannot remember now).

The Triple-A driver hooked up our van, and towed us 26 miles back to Bend to Bill Westphall’s Union 76 station. We got back to Bend about noon, but it was 3:30 PM before their top mechanic, a man named Rodger Stagg, could get to us. We just had to wait our turn.

With nothing else to do I watched Mr. Stagg working on the car ahead of us (he didn’t mind), and was impressed as I watched him work. He obviously seemed to know what he was doing. I noticed that he had Snap-On tools (the best). I discovered that he had been rebuilding and restoring cars and engines for years, both to earn a living and as a hobby, that he used to build race cars from scratch, and that the rare and beautifully-painted-and-outfitted restored 1937 Dodge panel truck behind the service station was his.

We told brother Stagg what the farmer back in Millican had said about the coil, fuel pump, and fuel line, but the repairs went slowly because the problems with our van were a mechanic’s worst nightmare: They were intermittent. For example, the coil would work up to specs....and then it eventually would not. Finally he noticed it was NOT working properly and announced, proudly, “It’s your coil, Bob!” (We were on a first-name basis by this time).

We settled up our bill, and started back toward Utah.

We got three blocks. We called AAA and they came and towed us back. Obviously it was not just the coil. I repeated the farmer’s concern that it might be the fuel pump and/or fuel line, and Rodger set to

work checking out the fuel pump. At first the pump seemed to be working fine; but as he continued trouble-shooting, he exclaimed “Look, Bob, the fuel goes from the pump up to filter, but it doesn’t to any higher. It’s your fuel pump!”

So we replaced the fuel pump, and except for the cost of the fuel pump, surprisingly no additional charges were levied. I guess he felt he should have got it done 100% the first time. So we shook hands, thanked him profusely, and headed east again, around 4:30 PM.

This time we got 22 miles—four miles short of Millican. We coasted to a stop right next to a side road. What to do now? By now it was about 5:00 PM, and here we were in the middle of nowhere.

Within less than 10 minutes a double cab pickup came out of the side road, saw our raised hood, and stopped to see if they could help. It was three men who were laying out a motorcycle cross-country race course, and they offered me a ride back to Bend.

So I (reluctantly) left Jean and John with the dead van and took up the spare seat in the double-cab pick up. The trip back was interesting, and we talked all the way. One of the guys introduced the three of them as a “Protestant, a Catholic and an Ignoramus!” I introduced myself, then asked them “Which is the Protestant, which is the Catholic, and which is the Ignoramus—Or do you take turns?” [meaning they could all be ignoramuses].

This resulted in some lively conversation about who was it that agreed “to pick up this guy?” (me).

They dropped me at the AAA station and I was able to get hold of Rodger Stagg at a pizza parlor where the crew had met for dinner. He asked me some questions I couldn’t answer about whether I could see fuel in the fuel line, reminded me of the motel just behind the AAA station, and said he’d see me in the morning. I’m sure I mentioned the farmer’s third diagnosis about the fuel line.

Well, the next morning after some father-and-son time in the motel pool, I drifted down to the station where Rodger Stagg was hard at work re-routing the fuel line, got a big paper sack to write on, and went back to the motel where I composed a song (below) about Rodger, to the tune of *Rodger Young*. Rodger Young was a World War II hero in the Marine Corps who had save a bunch of fellow marines in a battle in the Solomon Islands. Burl Ives sang this song at a “Coronation Concert” at Queen Elizabeth II’s request in June, 1953. [See Decca Records DL8080, entitled Coronation Concert].

Similarly, I make Rodger Stagg the hero of this song. Here is how the song goes:

#### THE BALLAD OF RODGER STAGG

Oh they talk about mechanics at the Triple-A,  
About the men who use the square red rag;  
But the one they always speak about in reverent tones  
Is the man, is the man called Rodger Stagg.

Is the man....Rodger Stagg.....  
He’s the greatest ever used the square red rag!

And the one they always speak about in reverent tones  
Is the man, is the man called Rodger Stagg.

Oh there's lots of men can changes some points and tune a car,  
And about their Snap-On wrenches they can brag,  
But they couldn't hold a candle in a hundred years  
Next to the man, to the man called Rodger Stagg!

Next to the man,.....Rodger Stagg....  
He's the greatest ever used the square red rag.  
But they couldn't hold a candle in a hundred years  
Next to the man, to the man called Rodger Stagg.

There's a special place in Heaven for the Triple-A,  
For the men who keep the nation on the go.....  
And presiding o're the angels who were Triple-A  
Will-be-the-man-called-Rodger-Stagg down here below!

Will be the man.....Rodger Stagg,.....  
He's the greatest ever used the square red rag!  
And presiding o're the angels who were Triple-A  
Will be the man, be the man called Rodger Stagg.

It took me about 15 minutes to come up with lyrics to this heroic song. Then I made another trip to the station to fetch my guitar, then back to the motel to play the song for Jean (she loved it), then played it through several time to make sure I had it down. Finally I took my guitar and headed down the hill to the station where Rodger Stagg was hard at work under our van, adjusting the fuel line on our Dodge van (the third thing the old farmer had diagnosed). I walked into the stall and said: "Rodger, I've made up a song for you," and started playing and singing.

By the time I got to through the second line Rodger was out from under the car, sitting on his rolling creeper, listening with great interest and an equal amount of disbelief, and others working in the station (except one guy still pumping gas) were starting toward us with similar interest.

By the end of the fourth line Rodger was grinning from ear to ear, and all hands not pumping gas were assembled in a semi-circle around us. By the end of the first chorus Rodger, still grinning ear to ear, was shaking his head in disbelief that anyone had thought or bothered to write a song about him.

At the conclusion of the song I got a tremendous ovation—and Rodger's undying appreciation. The owner's wife had me play it for the owner, Bill Westphall, when he returned a few minutes later, and Bill had me play it for a reporter from the local newspaper. Later, at Rodger's request, I bought a cassette tape and, using a tape recorder one of the mechanics happened to have in his car, played the song again and recorded it for Rodger.

Rodger disappeared with our car for 45 minutes—to test drive it—and came back grinning. He said "Bob, I drove it up hill and down hill. I drove it fast and I drove it slow. It runs fine!"

And so, after a 30-hour delay, we were off again to Provo, Utah, and the car ran like a German sewing machine or Swiss watch—thanks to the best tune-up I’d ever received.

I called Rodger the next day from Provo to let him know we had arrived safely, and that the van fairly “purred” along all the way to Provo. He seemed genuinely happy that I’d called and added “Say, Bob, my wife had a fit when I played her that tape!”

And so ends the Rodger Stagg story. Almost (stay tuned).

I really enjoyed being able to make a small difference in someone’s life, especially someone who took on our problems like they were his own, and who never charged a nickel extra for his labor after the first charge (about 3.5 hours of extra work on Tuesday, April 21st). It gave both of us an unforgettable experience, and gave my son, John, a good example of NOT letting events govern your conduct or actions. I didn’t rant or rave, for example, when the car broke down on any of the three occasions. Also, I followed my father-in-law’s example by being prepared with AAA towing insurance to minimize the financial damage.

Finally, we made the best of a bad situation, using spare time the 2nd morning for some father-son swimming at the motel, and of course, bringing joy to someone else (to Rodger Stagg). True, the visit with Leslie and Jeff was cut short, but that couldn’t be helped. The real secret of contentment in life is how you choose to react to what life bring your way. In fact, how you react can actually change what life brings, since the reaction of others is influenced by your own actions. That is, there is a reciprocal aspect about our actions and reactions.

And now for what journalist Paul Harvey used to call “the rest of the story....”

Remember the old farmer—the one that beautifully and perfectly diagnosed our three intermittent problems that morning in Millican (on April 21, 1987)? He told us that he lived on a farm in or near Hampton, OR. Hampton is a wide spot in the road about 45 miles EAST of Millican. Highway 30 runs right through it. I think there is a single building—a combination general store with a gas pump—and that constitutes the whole “town” of Hampton.

On our way back toward Utah—with our van finally fixed and running like a top—we stopped at this little store in Hampton and inquired about the farmer—whose name we have since forgotten, but which we had at the time. We wanted to get his address or other contact information so we could write and tell him about his amazingly accurate diagnosis and all that had happened.

Imagine our surprise when **they told us they had never heard of him.**

That was and is amazing! In small communities like Hampton EVERYONE knows EVERYBODY. I think they receive and distribute mail from this store. Yet they had never heard of this man!

That’s just about impossible.

We are reminded of the story about Jean's great grandfather, Marriner Wood Merrill, and the miraculous event associated with his fetching five big logs (10" x 20') one freezing day when he became trapped with one of these logs pinning him down on top of the other four in below-freezing weather and alone in the mountains. Mariner had tried to extricate himself to no avail, and had decided he would probably die in the mountain.

Two hours later, he found himself sitting on top of his load of five well-secured logs, with his coat folded beside him, and being pulled slowly home by his two docile oxen. He was injured, and could barely move. He had no idea how his logs were loaded, and his load hooked up to the oxen, etc. Subsequent inquiries revealed no one had been anywhere near him that day to explain his rescue—it was 20-30° below zero and everyone else had too much sense to venture into the mountains that day. He was later called to be an Apostle in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, and the first president of the Logan Temple (at the same time), and he figures he had divine help. The Lord had other plans for him besides freezing to death in the mountains of Utah that day.

Well, we don't know if our farmer was an angel in disguise; but we cannot help but wonder.

First he showed up in Millican, 40+ miles from what he said was his home, right when we needed him. There is nothing in Millican that would interest the farmer or cause him to stop there. Second, he gave an absolutely accurate diagnosis for what was wrong with our van—three things! How did he do that? He's a farmer, not a mechanic. And while it's true that farmers on remote farms have to be jacks-of-all-trades and pretty good at fixing their own mechanical problems, that's beyond any reasonable explanation. Then we discover that no one in the town he claims to be from has ever heard of him.

Very strange. We call it our **Miracle at Millican**. An angel? Or for you Mormon readers, one of the three Nephites?

### **Excuses, Excuses**<sup>7</sup>

The following true story (see Snopes) is perhaps the ultimate example of how God hides his footprints in "coincidences."

Mrs. Paul is the choir director for the West Side Baptist Church in Beatrice, Nebraska. Her daughter, Marilyn, is the church pianist. Neither has ever been late for choir practice; on the contrary, both are in the habit of arriving 15 minutes early.

It's Wednesday evening, March 1, 1950—seven o'clock. Choir practice begins at seven-thirty. Mrs. Paul calls to her daughter upstairs: They should be leaving now. It's almost time.

No answer.

Mrs. Paul returns to her last-minute preparation. And the minutes are ticking away.

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<sup>7</sup> From *More of Paul Harvey's The Rest of the Story*, by Paul Aurandt, son of Paul Harvey, Bantam Books, 1980

It's 7:15 P.M. when she realizes—her daughter is asleep. So Mrs. Paul goes upstairs, awakens her daughter. There is time only to tidy up and start out. This will be the first time either Mrs. Paul or her daughter, Marilyn, has ever been late for choir practice. Their perfect attendance record is broken.

But you know what? There are eighteen members in the West Side Baptist Church Choir, and each and every one—that very same night—is also late for practice! All eighteen have perfectly valid excuses, and all are late.

You've heard the excuse of Mrs. Paul, the choir director: Her daughter Marilyn, the church pianist, had fallen asleep after dinner and did not awaken in time. But others had excuses, too.

- Ladona Vandegrift, a high school sophomore, was having trouble with her homework. Like Mrs. Paul and her daughter, Miss Vandegrift knew practice began promptly—and she always came early—but this evening she was detained by a particularly baffling geometry problem.

- Royena Estes and her sister Sadie were ready to leave their house on time. But their car wouldn't start. So the two sisters called Miss Vandegrift and asked her to pick them up. Miss Vandegrift was working on her geometry, remember, and the Estes sisters had to wait.

- Ordinarily, Mrs. Schuster was ten minutes early for choir practice. The night of March 1 she was detained at her mother's house. The two were preparing for a later missionary meeting.

- Herb Kipf was at his own home—would have been early, too. But there was this important letter he had to write. He had been putting it off for some time. The time got away from him.

Excuses, excuses.

- Joyce Black would probably not have been early. She would have been on time, though. It was just so cold out that evening, she wanted to stay in the house until the last possible minute. So she was late.

- Harvey Ahl would have been on time, but his wife was out of town. That left him in charge of their two young sons. A friend had invited Harvey and the two boys out to dinner. A pleasant conversation carried them away, and Harvey was late.

- Lucille Jones and Dorothy Wood were high school girls, and lived next door to each other. Lucille was listening to a half-hour radio program that began at seven o'clock. She just *had* to hear how it ended. Dorothy waited for her.

- Pastor Klempel and his wife were always on time for choir practice. Not the evening of March 1, however. Pastor Klempel's wristwatch—the accuracy of which he was always so proud—was that night: five minutes slow.

- The remaining choir members had equally valid excuses for their tardiness.

Excuses, excuses—eighteen in all.

Never before nor since had each and every choir member of the West Side Baptist Church been late for choir practice on the same evening. That was Wednesday, March 1, 1950—choir practice scheduled as usual for 7:30 PM. No one showed up at 7:30.

Now for.... the rest of the story.....

Seven-thirty P.M. was the time when a natural gas leak—surfacing in the basement of the West Side Baptist Church—was ignited by the furnace. The church blew up, and was demolished. The old furnace of the West Side Baptist Church was directly below the choir loft....The *empty* choir loft.

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Note: Snopes checked this story out and it's true! Only, choir practice started at 7:20, not 7:30, and the church blew up at 7:25, not 7:30, and there were 15—not 18—choir members. The explosion blew out the wall and the roof collapsed on the choir loft—the empty choir loft. The odds of all 15 being late on the same night were estimated at 1,000,000 to one. As my sister, Anita, would say, “Way to go, God!”

## 23. OTHER COINCIDENCES

There have been other coincidences not associated with my faith, in possible divine connections, although who knows? Here are a couple samples of strange coincidences that I have incurred in my life time. There may be more, but these are sorta fun.

### The International Market Place Evening Show, Oahu, Hawaii

While working for Matson Navigation Company in the late 1960s I recall having to fly to Hawaii (Oahu) on at least one occasion. Matson's home office was in Honolulu, and I was sent there for orientation. It's about a 2,500 mile trip, and takes just about 4.5 hours.

I recall stepping off of the airplane, and being met by an old acquaintance and friend, Jay Wrathall, then a math professor at the University of Hawaii. Jay had graduated from the University of California in Berkeley, and I knew him when he attended the University Ward there. You will meet Jay again when you read the story of Jay and the "bullwhip" (below, under *Jeannie Cracks the Whip*).

On this occasion Jay picked me up about 5:00 PM at the main Honolulu Airport and drove me to the International Market Place (IMP) in the old downtown part of the city. The IMP is across the main street from—and behind—the famous big pink Royal Hawaiian Hotel.

The International Market Place is an open-aired "lanai" composed of over 90 stores and places to eat, including one open-aired cafeteria that served mahi mahi, a delicious local fish. I recall it was cooked to perfection in this humble fast food shop.

Following our supper Jay led me to the area of the IMP where a free show is put on every night for the tourists. The performers come from all over the south sea islands, such as Tahiti, Tonga, Bora Bora, and Samoa.

Jay was dating one of the performers, a slender and vivacious brown-skinned cutie from Tonga who had a lovely smile. It was she who had placed two large cushions near the front-row-center for me and Jay.

We came in and took our seats (as other, mere mortals, wondered who we were to deserve special treatment). After conversing between the two of us (we were still catching up) and giving our cushions to those sitting on concrete, I turned to a middle-aged lady sitting next to me and introduced myself. I said "Hi, I'm Bob Wilson, from Berkeley, California." She responded with *her* name and the fact that she lived in Pullman, Washington, home of Washington State University, where Jean's Uncle Thais Merrill had taught (horticulture). I immediately responded and told her that my wife had a Aunt who lived in Pullman, named Merrill, the widow of a Washington State professor.

The lady immediately said; “**Alice?**”

“Yes!” I said.

The lady then said “**She’s my best friend!!!**”

Get the picture? I travel 2,500 miles in 4.5 hours, go the first place I come to in Honolulu, and the first person I meet besides my guide and friend is **Jean’s Aunt Alice Merrill’s best friend!** Wow! Small world! (Incidentally, Aunt Alice was the wise dorm mother mentioned at the end of Chapter 2).

### **Recruiting Trip Phoenix/Scottsdale Arizona.**

In the Spring of 1969 I was sent to the Thunderbird School of International Management in Scottsdale, AZ (Phoenix area), to recruit potential employees for Matson. It proved to be a treasure trove of talent (we ended up hiring five TSIM students) and led to my story about Jay Wrathall and the bullwhip (below).

I landed in Phoenix about mid afternoon, and did not have any interviews until the following day, so I decided to use my time to do some shopping for two things:

1. A good, old-fashioned, authentic **bullwhip**—which I had always wanted ever since I was a boy; and what could ever be more macho?
2. A nice western-styled shirt—to wear for square dancing.

I rented a car, got a free map of the area from the car rental folks, and consulting some yellow pages and my map, headed out of the airport for Downtown Phoenix.

Now, mind you, that except for the car rental people, I had spoken to **no one** since deplaning.

I found myself at a corner in downtown Phoenix near two places that sold western wear. One store was called Stapley’s Western Wear. And directly around the corner was another western wear company with a more modern-sounding name. I went for the older looking establishment with the same name as the Apostle who had interviewed me shortly after I had been called as a counselor to Bishop Cline Black back in about 1960, when I was attending University Ward in Berkeley, CA (as mentioned in Chapter 4, about my interview with Apostle Stapley).

I entered the Stapley store, and saw the proprietor, a man in his 60’s or early 70’s, waiting on a Navajo Indian couple. One of them had on a traditional dark purple flannel shirt. The proprietor, who turned out to be the owner, Mr. Stapley, acknowledged my presence and said “I’ll be with you in a moment, sir,” and then turned his attention back to the Navajo couple as he should have.

When my turn came, I told him what I was looking for, but I started out first with a question:

Me: “Are you Mr. Stapley?”

Stapley: “Yes.”

Me. “That’s a Mormon name.....Are you a Mormon?”

Stapley: “Yes.” [Somewhat guardedly]

Me: “Are you any relation to the Apostle, Delbert M. Stapley?”

Stapley: “He’s my brother!”

Me: “Well.....Let me tell you what your brother did to me!!!”

Then I went into the story in Chapter 4, telling him how his brother had caused me to marry my sweetheart months earlier than originally intended (which was actually quite O.K.).

Stapley: “Yep. That sounds like Delbert!”

Well, I figured I could probably cash a check for \$50 after that story, but moments later a young, blond-headed man came into the store and blurted out—in obvious surprise—“Bob Wilson, what are you doing here?!” It was Delbert Ellsworth, who I had known well at University Ward in Berkeley, and who, incidentally, was now this brother Stapley’s home teaching companion. I figured that I could cash a check for \$200 now! Ironically the first two people I talked to since leaving the airport I knew or had had some sort of relationship or tie in.

But fate was not done with me yet. Within about 10 minutes of Delbert Ellsworth’s appearance, in walks another Mormon friend of both Delbert and Bro. Stapley, and is introduced as a “Brother Ashby.” I asked him if he is any relation to Armus Ashby of Oakland, CA—a dentist by trade, I believe, and who lived just across the street from the Oakland Temple and had a bowling alley in his basement—and who pioneered the audio visual tracks in the temple ceremony. He responded: “He’s my first cousin!”

So the first three people I met on that trip to Phoenix were Mormons I either knew, or had relatives I had met and had some connection with. Small world indeed!

### **Jean Cracks the Whip**

I was successful that first afternoon at finding a real, bonafide bullwhip, the kind with a stiff, rawhide inner spine that gives it the rigidity needed for making it crack with a satisfying noise—much like a firecracker.

It took many attempts before I got a single crack out of it, however. I practiced over an hour one afternoon after completing a day's worth of interviews in Scottsdale. Like most things we do well there is a learning curve and a couple of tricks.

The main things I had to learn were:

- make sure that I used sufficient speed on the way up so that the whip would not have any sag prior to the snap (otherwise you can snap your ear); and
- wait a moment after the upswing so that the whip can continue well behind you—so that the end of the whip was basically horizontal behind you—before coming forward and down hard in front.

Well, I flew home to Berkeley Friday night late. The kids were already in bed. Saturday morning the kids woke up and invaded our queen-sized bed—crawled in bed with us—a frequent happening. I had been gone about three days, and the kids were glad to see their dad back home.

We talked and tickled etc., and then I told them there was something I wanted to show them, and produced the bullwhip. I think it was Leslie who said “Wow! Are you going to use that on us?” She had a smile on her face when she asked the question because she knew we would never do that, but I answered back “I’m not going to say, but when I tell you it’s bed time you’d better pay attention!” They made big eyes, like they were scared (they weren’t) and said “wow” or other appropriate noises. And we all laughed.

I think I demonstrated how to make the whip pop later that day.

[The Sequel]. I think it was the next day—Sunday—that we had Jay Wrathall and a friend over for Sunday dinner. Jay was visiting the mainland from Hawaii. And after dinner, just before leaving, I told Jay I wanted to show him my new toy—the bullwhip.

We adjourned to the front lawn at 814 Cragmont Avenue and I demonstrated how the whip could make a loud pop. On my first loud pop, Leslie came around a corner bush and said “I know...nap time”...and marched into the house as if going to take a nap...like I regularly used the whip to make them take naps.

Jay and friend really laughed at this, and threatened to report me to the California Children Protection people. I explained that I just got the whip, and I had never used it on anyone, and told Jay what I had told the kids in jest the day before. Misunderstood it could have be a problem; but we all had a good laugh at Leslie’s spontaneous comment.

And of course Jay and his friend HAD to try out the bullwhip—it was the macho thing to do.

So I demonstrated carefully, giving them the above pointer, **but after perhaps 30 or more efforts, neither Jay nor his friend could get a single pop.** I would demonstrate with a simple twist of a wrist (“POP”) but they just could’t get it to pop.

Then, without a word, Jean—who had been looking on and listening to my instructions—took hold of the whip, laid it out behind her, brought it up, gave it a momentary pause, and then brought it down and POW!—got a perfect crack out of the whip, on this, her first try.....and putting Jay and friend to shame!

Whereupon Jay’s friend said “Come on, Jay, let’s get out of here while we still have some macho left”—or words to that effect. Here they couldn’t make the whip pop, after multiple tries, and Jeannie got it right **on her very first try!** [Good job, Jeannie!!!]. But then she was Teancum Holdaway’s granddaughter!

## About the Author

Robert E. Wilson was born on March 25, 1933, in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, to Collie Bryan & Gladys Louise (Gray) Wilson. He grew up in Little Rock, Arkansas and then in New Orleans, Louisiana, where he attended Tulane University.

He spent two summers working at Zion National Park, where he was first introduced to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. He also joined the Naval ROTC and graduated in 1955 as an Ensign. He went on a midshipman's cruise to Cuba in 1954, was assigned to Pt. Defiance in San Pedro, California in 1955, and toured the Pacific in 1956-1957, where he explored Japan, Okinawa, Hong Kong, the Philippines and Hawaii.

He joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in California, and continued his education there, receiving a master's degree from UC Berkeley. There he also met and married Jean Merrill, the daughter of Malcolm and Thelma (Holdaway) Merrill. They were married September 5, 1961.

Bob worked at the Chevron Shipping Company in Richmond, California for 2 years, then for Matson Lines, and eventually worked at the U.S. Post Office in labor relations. He and Jean lived in San Francisco, Berkeley, and Kensington during that time. In 1975, he moved his family to Eugene, Oregon to accept a new position as the director of labor relations for the Post Office there.

He and Jean raised six children: Leslie, Bob, Randy, Sharon, John and Joe, all of whom have married and had children of their own. As of January 2023, Bob & Jean have 20 grandchildren and 8 great-grandchildren. When his daughter Sharon was a teenager, she was once asked to describe their family in three words. She said, "Musical...Close...Fun," which seemed to sum it up perfectly.

Bob learned to play the ukulele as a teenager, and eventually the guitar, banjo and a few songs on the piano. He has entertained groups with his music throughout his life. He won second place in a Pacific-wide talent show in the Navy with a ukulele medley that included "I've Got the Guy Who Used to Be My Captain Working for Me" and "Five Foot Two", which was his signature piece. He also played The Maple Leaf Rag and St. Louis Blues on the piano quite well.

He served in many church "callings", including serving as scoutmaster for many years, for which I believe he is guaranteed comfortable accommodations in heaven. Instead of a harp, I assume he will be playing a ukulele there (or a banjo if he ends up in the other place).

As his son, I have always appreciated my father's upbeat attitude towards life, his encouragement in our worthy pursuits, and his example of unwavering integrity.

I hope you have enjoyed the experiences and lessons shared in this book, and that it inspires you to write down and share your own stories with those you love.

—Randy Wilson