

“MY LIFE IS MY WORK”

It is easy for me to say quite casually and emphatically, “My life is my work.” This raises hackles for some people, and they are instantly reproaching, saying, in effect, “Eunice, get a LIFE!” But I defend myself, for to me, work has always been play. I have deliberately chosen work all my life that comes from an inner wellspring—the recognition of what is alive within me that needs expression outwardly in some activity in the world.

Therefore what follows here is the thread connecting all of my work life, beginning with my recognition of a similarity between my brother and I, yet spun the thread in contrasting ways. He essentially stayed within the U. S. Navy for his entire career, whereas I made several distinct changes. But both of us took care to keep our work life enlivening and in line with our core motivations.

In writing of this to my brother, I wrote:

I am convinced that you and I share a common thread in our enjoyment of work, and the way we have concentrated on it. Many of your stories relate to your professional career. I suspect both of us would consider it ridiculous to have spent most of the house in our days in occupations that bored us.

I also can see similarities in the kind of work we have engaged in. Both of us have an entrepreneurial streak and have been essentially “self-employed” for portions of our work life. At other times, our entrepreneurship has come out in creating within our jobs—initiating and developing projects.

Another interesting similarity is the way some form of writing and public relations have been elements in our jobs. We are natural promoters. I think our working styles tend to be organized systematized, efficient. As for coming out on top, I think this has assumed more importance in you, and you have succeeded in doing that. You also worked in an environment where that kind of recognition was built into the system.

The Child at Work/Play

For me as a child in the home, work meant distasteful domestic chores—dusting, vacuuming, mopping. These I learned to avoid the rest of my life as much as possible. Work outside the home became instantly gratifying. Aside from the menial jobs in college I took to pay my bills, I gravitated to work that drew on my social and intellectual abilities. As young as seventeen, I was taking on counseling responsibility in summer camp—something that genuinely interests me and required more demanding

skills. It also put me into the role of teacher, which made it natural for me to major in Christian Education in College.

From then on, I would always do work for which pay was gratuitous. I could not tell when I was working, and when I was playing.

A Natural First Career in Pioneer Girls

I moved easily into my first job after college. I was already familiar with Pioneer Girls after eight years in camp. I was asked to become Publications Manager at a salary of \$135 a month—a sum that looked enormous to me in 1950. Although I had coveted the more glamorous position of field representative, I was much better suited to writing than field work, and it proved a good way to “earn my stripes” in the world of work. So I plunged into the task of researching ideas for writing program materials. I quickly discovered that my job did not stop with the writing. I must also be the one to cut the mimeograph stencils, run them off on the mimeo machine, collate the pages, fold and stuff the pages into envelopes, lick the stamps, and walk them over to the Post Office. I used to say mockingly, “Now I have to go home and read them!”

Soon technology of the 1950s progressed to the point where I had to learn how to prepare material for offset printing. This meant learning a whole new language in order to negotiate with printers. Then came the IBM Selectrics with proportioned spacing, making justified margins automatic and possible. I learned to cut and paste in actuality, not by computer commands as we can do now. I left Pioneer Girls before the computer age, whereas my brother made a smooth transition to cyberspace and its infinite possibilities, becoming a Macintosh Consultant in its infancy!

But before I left, I had written or co-written three books (two published in-house), had taken on the duties of National Camp Director (which required extensive summer travel), and directed two years of our Leadership Training program in our newly developing center in Upper Michigan. This included creating and directing an internship program for graduating college students intending to go into Girls Work as a profession overseas.

Seventeen years was a long time to stay with one organization, but I was allowed to develop my potential rather fully in Pioneer Girls, for which I am thankful. I was given privileged status in the organization over time, even early on—sharing an office with the executive director from my first day at work. I was also granted time off and some financial support to get my Master’s degree in Christian Education. At the same time, I like to think that I made a significant contribution to the organization, especially to its articulation of its basic philosophy—the center of my interest and focus. My Master’s thesis detailed the historical development of that philosophy and helped guide the training of new staff members for some time after. I wish my influence had carried more weight, for after I left, I was disappointed with the direction the organization took under

new leadership. I felt as though the philosophy I had articulated was pretty much abandoned, or at the least, misapplied—a small betrayal.

When In Doubt Go to School

By 1965, I had become restless with the small world in which I was encased, and took off three months to test the waters of academic life again. I had lived by the motto, “when in doubt, go to school.” I had a pretext for further study—my designation as Overseas Program Coordinator, working with persons from other countries developing girls work programs similar to ours. I went to the University of Chicago, ostensibly to study Cultural Anthropology and return to Pioneer Girls to develop the cross-cultural aspect.

But such was not to be. I was already alienated from the organization, and on my way out—not knowing where I would land. 1966-1967 was a watermark time. A brief foray into much-needed therapy first surprised, then settled things for me. I headed for marriage and an unknown future.

The university was a cauldron in which to experience not only the turbulent late 1960s in the world, but also the intellectual stimulation and variety of a larger world. I had to support myself in some way until I could get established in the Sociology department (Anthropology would only accept PhD candidates who intended to pursue serious long-term research and teaching within the academy.) I got a job at the Oriental Institute, worked with a Portuguese professor cataloguing pottery finds from the eighth century B.C.E. I did not quite share his level of enthusiasm over each “find” but it was a good job to have while I immersed myself in my therapy and all the inner changes it was generating—in the diverse areas of sexuality, spirituality, and societal change.

Ironically, a wealthy and prestigious university is cheaper to attend than other schools because it can provide full funding for most graduate students. I hooked up with Sociology Professor Peter Blau, and his Comparative Organization research group, and received a fellowship supporting me. I lagged behind my colleagues in interest—being more intrigued with the research going on down the hall on “pupil dilation as an indicator of interest”—a project of Psychology Department Chair Eckhard Hess (best known for his work with Konrad Lorenz on imprinting geese, and other kinds of animal behavior), a study with which Don was helping. However, despite my lukewarm interest, in the summer of 1968, I was sent on a cross-country trip west to interview college academic vice presidents and vice presidents of financial affairs in selected universities, using a questionnaire on centralization of power. I was a fascinating array of schools—twenty-four in all, including a bleak one in rural Kansas whose name escapes me, posh Mills College in the Bay area, Reed in Oregon, several California state universities, and ending in South Dakota at two state schools. I did a good job of interviewing, but my greatest pleasure came in taking photographs of the distinctive sculptures found at each school to create a slide show.

Because my interest in sociology was weak, to say the least, my professor did not expect me to do well in the PhD “prelims”—those ghastly two-day exams, spending each day answering just three questions. When I was awarded the coveted “high pass”—I know how to take exams and how to use exam prep groups to consolidate my thinking—he let his true feelings about me slip out. In his heavy Kissinger-like German accent, he remarked, “I was surprised!” He took me out for a coke to celebrate, and immediately proceeded to offer me a doctoral fellowship. I felt a little huffy at that point. Yesterday, I was nobody worth attending to. Today, because of the scores, I was a prime catch. He was making a big error of judgment. Had he read me right, he would have known that I did not have the interest for the field required of a good researcher, either yesterday or today.

I did not leave the university before completing my M. A. in Sociology, writing my thesis on Masculine and Feminine Sex Role Identity in Adolescent Girl Campers, using a questionnaire-and-drawing tool developed by others. I used it with Pioneer Girl campers the next summer. One interesting finding was that the more years a girl spent in our all-girls camp environment, the stronger her feminine role identity was. Perhaps girls unsure of their identity needed the contact with boys and affirmation from them and had moved on to coed camps in order to feel secure in their own identity.

Marriage Takes Center Stage—and Work Fills in Around the Edges

The M. A. was enough; I never intended to finish the PhD track. In the mist of the burgeoning women’s’ movement around the university, I shamelessly embraced the new “Mrs.” identity contentedly as more than enough, and as a new grounding for my choices.

I was referred by a friend to an extraordinarily competent woman in the field of Adult Education. Lucy Ann Geiselman had accepted a position with Urban Research Corporation, newly founded by John Naisbitt (author of Megatrends) and was looking for assistants. The corporation was based on Naisbitt’s conviction that people in business would benefit from following current trends by receiving a subscription to a kind of news service—reprints of salient articles from major newspapers, topically arranged. Lacking today’s Internet capabilities, he had giant xerox machines producing reprints instantly. He hired “proles” to sift through newspapers, cutting and pasting the articles. A big chunk of funding came for conducting mammoth national conferences on topics hot in the news—bringing together major figures in government, academia, and the professions as speakers. He charged conferees \$300 for the weekend conferences.

It was this conference division in Urban Research Corporation that required the services of a top-class Adult Educator. Lucy Ann hired me as Conference Coordinator. My first day at work, I was assigned to write the promotional blurb for an advertising flyer for

the first conference—on Preventive Detention. I had scarcely heard of the subject before, as so was given material to read up on it. I am a quick read, so I managed to pull together a short piece suitable for the brochure. John was big on size, so its brochures were actually 24 by 36 inch posters. It was galvanizing to see my few short paragraphs blown up to that size.

The keynote speaker at the conference was Dick Gregory, who flew in from Seattle, arriving just before his speech was scheduled. When he got up to speak, he seemed a little jet-lagged, not quite “with it.” “This here preventive detention,” he began, pulling the poster-brochure out of his pocket! I winced. He began to read verbatim from the blurb I had composed. On he went, cracking jokes, as was his style, but taking the points he was making directly from my copy. I wondered if I was more competent than I had expected! And all this with Gregory’s short-lived run for the presidency a year before.

The third conference featured Educational Technology. This was an era when there was both excitement and government funding for putting technology into the classroom, and before computers were ubiquitous. One thing I can say for John Naisbitt, he could spot the growing edge and take advantage of it. In this conference, Jonathan Kozol appeared (all John’s major speakers tended to be left-leaning), droopy and weary from an all-night ride from New Mexico where he had been with Indians on a reservation in some capacity in relationship to education. He clutched the microphone close to his mouth, and spoke into it hoarsely, as though uttering his final breath. It was not particularly effective.

The conference highlight was Marshall McLuhan’s appearance as keynoter. Most of the audience could not understand him; he spoke in “probes not paragraphs”, and used metaphorical language to describe scientific phenomena. But John had engineered to include a group of high school students in the audience. Don and I clustered around them at the end and asked what they thought of McLuhan (we were thrilled). They told us he was “awesome” (or whatever word used in 1970 that meant that). “How did you ‘get it?’” we asked. “Vibes,” was their only reply. Which is precisely McLuhan’s point, of course. The medium is the message.

McLuhan talked a lot about the differences between hardware and software. He claimed radio was a “hot” medium and TV was “cool.” In the same way, he saw “hard” and “soft” differences in technology. When the question and answer time came up, his illustrious panel—some from academia—began challenging his statements that did not make sense to them. “By hardware,” Talcott Parsons, noted Harvard professor, began, “I presume you mean the equipment. . .” “Oh no,” replied McLuhan. It turned out that McLuhan had reverses the definitions, calling technical gadgetry “soft” and the curricular material as “hard.” Everyone on the panel suddenly relaxed with little

“ohhhs” and “ahhs” having to rethink the way they had heard his entire speech. How McLuhan could get away with this reversal boggles the mind.

I was the one to oversee the transcribing of this speech and see that it got printed. I still remember some of McLuhan’s aphorisms. “The Navy sees the world as a total unit,” was one. Another was “In the world of the blind, all things are sudden.” And “we don’t look at television. It is iconic—fingers of light scanning the screen; television is looking at us, and this has produced a different attitude toward nudity.” And “The mini skirt is today’s version of the high rise; it is here to show that the end is in sight.”

Urban Research Corporation did not last. As a “Golden Boy” with friends on Wall Street, Naisbitt had gotten an infusion of venture capital from Goldman Sachs, who foolishly bought his idea. Within a couple of years, Urban Research Corporation was foundering, and soon Naisbitt was off to Colorado with his new wife. He still clung to the idea that newspaper coverage would chart major trends. He and his wife published the moderately successful Megatrends. Lucy Ann was the first to leave—she had been enticed to join Urban Research Corporation with a ballooned salary, so was immediately expendable. Those of us on lower echelons (my salary was \$8000—an astronomical amount to me, to Lucy Ann’s \$20,000) carried on to some degree for a short time.

However, Thea Flaum, another colleague who worked there free lance, latched onto me, sensing my talents that were complimentary to hers. She had warned Naisbitt that his motion of conferences was wrong-headed and doomed to failure. She quickly saw that the format of listening to speaker after speaker—no matter how famous or erudite—goes contrary to the laws of learning. Naisbitt was enamored of the Big Name speakers. But sometimes people have Big Names for reasons other than their ability to project and involve others in a conference setting. I was an educator at heart. I knew conference program design and longed to be able to change things. We decided to approach John with our ideas.

Together, Thea and I pitched a proposal to Naisbitt for a Landlord Tenant Conference, one that we promised would work—both in its effectiveness of design and in the number of conferees we could produce to meet his bottom line. His conferences had been failing to attract sufficient numbers, and he had hamstrung our department from changing the format and approach.

Thea and I had unlimited confidence in our ability to succeed, and we worked together seamlessly. We did two conferences together—first the Landlord Tenant one, and later on Industry-Related Day Care—a phenomenon that was just beginning to catch on in parts of the corporate sector as more women were recruited into the workplace. We became fast friends during our work together, Thea decided she wanted to explore a career in television production, and at that point she sailed right past me, and our paths gradually parted. Through her shrewd skills and key contacts, she was soon creating

and producing Emmy-award winning shows on the Chicago PBS station, WTTW. She created the original Sneak Previews program with Siskel and Ebert. She went on to develop her own production company.

Finding—and Founding—Work We Could Do Together

While I was working on conferences with Thea, Don and I were in the first stages of working with friends to found an “urban semester program” for Christian college students that we named the Urban Life Center. For the first two years, it was a struggle to get the Center off the ground, and we made a lot of false starts that needed to be overcome. By 1972, we became co-directors and the Urban Life Center became our primary focus until we left in 1979. We made a basic living by taking other jobs on the side—for me, teaching at Roosevelt University. We were learning how to milk the advantages of working together—using complementary skills, and having a companionable life in each other’s presence all day every day. We were moving into the pattern of marriage modeled by my parents in Dad’s pastoral work.

When it came time to leave the Center, it seemed imperative to leave Chicago as well, for a number of reasons. First, our shadow would linger over the new director if we were still in town. Second, Don was restless to try another part of the country, having lived within a six-mile radius on the south side of Chicago all the forty-two years of his life.

Geography and Identity Mix to Create Freedom to Be

We settled on Boston, and that was where we stayed ever since. In Boston, we both have come into our own. As long as I was in Chicago, my past lingered like a haunting ghost. My old friends were close by, still engaged in a life I once knew but now to some extent had left. At the Urban Life Center, I still felt old tensions and conflicts with some of the folks involved who were also personal friends. I did not feel free to find out who I was on my own. In Boston, no one knew us; we could present ourselves afresh in an original way. Gradually, we emerged into the kind of position and reputation we hold today.

After an initial period of settling into the new environment, and finding a way to support ourselves while we looked for that elusive goal of “a vocation uniquely ours”—we stumbled into the opportunity we were looking for. We needed to create from the ground up a venue for our combined gifts. Thanks to a friend, Richard Faxon, an Episcopal priest whose attempt at an ecumenical inner city ministry had run aground, we could create a way of working that fit our gifts and desires. Calling it Life/Work Direction became an archetype in itself of my own lifelong passion for caring about how one’s life and one’s work can satisfy one’s deep need for purpose. In a way, I had been living out that passion in my camp directing in Pioneer Girls and training of young leaders; and again in the Urban Life Center with impressionable college students. Now

Life/Work Direction capsulized everything and could expand to meet whatever clientele came to our doors.

We started simply—getting clients by word of mouth, rather than trying to promote it through public channels. It was a risk, but also cheaper and less harried. What is more, it seemed to work; we relaxed into staying with the project as long as people kept coming in our door—and since that never has ceased, it kept us attentive to changing needs of different populations over time. Our referrals came from satisfied customers—and were therefore more accurate, because we were a known quantity. We also decided not to apply for grants or appeal for donations, but exist solely on program fees paid by clients. This meant that for a long time Don and I worked on outside part-time jobs to earn our board and keep—Don as a security guard weekends, and I taught one or two courses at Northeastern University. Richard had other resources in his family including involvement in real estate, and his wife's professorial position at Simmons College.

In 1986, I gave up the teaching, except for a short three-month part-time position as administrator of a faculty program at Lesley College where I had served in an adjunct program in their program for non-traditional students. By 1990, Don stopped working as well. We learned to live close to the edge, without depriving ourselves of enjoyments. Periodic generous donations to Life/Work Direction from persons of means provided a possible hedge for future retirement needs, though we did not see the future clearly.

It was in 1990 that another major shift occurred, when Scott Walker, one of our earliest clients, was looking to establish a home for his wife and about-to-be born first child and offered to buy a house big enough to house our work and a residence for Don and me. None of us could have known then what a difference this would eventually make. But the aesthetics and informality of a home environment—rather than a storefront was in itself a kind of statement. We settled in for the long haul moving into the 21st century.

Some Hazards of One's Life Being One's Work

A few years ago, I wrote this soliloquy about my work as my life:

I have been identified with my work all my life.

LWD is wrapped around me, hard to distinguish boundaries

My focus always was: who we see today

The rest was peripheral: ordering supplies, keeping files and books, writing the newsletter

Gradually my interest and energy have shifted, waned.

Writing two books was part of that.

Don's participation became more prominent, and I receded.

I feel my aging.

Now another door has opened:

I like administrative tasks - concrete, orderly, achievable.

I make mistakes, need checks and balances S & L provide.

The challenge: to think organizationally but in an organic way.

Be sure philosophy and basis are sound and meaningful

- consistent with charter's stated purposes

-but also in accord with Scott and Louise's distinctive calling

(where their deep gladness meets the world's needs)

Draw out each person's strengths, and their growing edges for the sake of the work.

Example: How does Eunice take time to double check and reflect, and submit her work to scrutiny of others? And how does Scott have time to reflect and process alone and still interface with the rest of us and get tasks completed imperfectly?

Work That Lasts

There is now another tale to be told. In 2005, Don and I invited Scott and Louise Walker to join us at Life/Work Direction. Their vision was akin to ours. I was 75, Don late 60s, and both of them close to 50. They brought their own creation of a program geared especially for twenties young people, naming it Threshold, and marked with their own particular stamp in character and depth. Their leadership evolved steadily over time to steer the organization toward the future in ways that were rooted in our core philosophy, and in harmony with the changing world emerging into the 21st century. Since my work is primarily who I am, not what I do, I continued working in various capacities through my 70s and 80s, whereas Don stopped in 2010 in order to concentrate on his poetry writing.

By 2017, the question of sustainability raised its head. Over the year, I began relinquishing much of my role and responsibility, leaving the Walkers free to contemplate their own future. We had not paid as much attention to the development of our board of directors until this point—so we entered into a time of introspection as an organizational entity. The infusion of youthful energy has become important, even as the spread of ages who come to us has also expanded upward, coinciding and underlining our focus on “lifelong learning”—or the idea of a pilgrimage that requires a lifetime to complete.

The metamorphosis of this organic “being” called Life/Work Direction is an intriguing process, and we are approaching it within the framework and attitude of our core values. We know the importance of a purposeful life, that deep growth takes time and needs to probe deeply under the surface, that experiential learning is what changes deep habits and desires, that persons need to discover the way each person has been “intricately woven by God in the womb.”

In 2018, I continued to step back from many of my roles involving oversight, but continued to be engaged in the part of the work—spiritual companionship—that has

increasingly been my core contribution—to listen to peoples' hearts and help them discover that deep purpose for which they have been brought into the world—and find it anew at every life stage—including persons living robustly into their 70s!

As I anticipate my 90th birthday in November of 2019, I am comforted by the knowledge that the work of Life/Work Direction will last—and in many disparate ways—including organizational vibrancy and health. Much of that depends now on others.

It is a release for me, because now I can write my life and that is now my work. I am thankful for the technology that makes dissemination of that pain-free!