

Dan Beeman

Reflections on my youth

I was blessed to grow up in a household full of intelligent siblings where books were read, and TV was referred to as the “idiot box” by my father. My mother was always encouraging us to learn more about arts and culture. Reading lots of books was very important for all of us. I learned to love to read at a young age and made many frequent trips to the local library with my mom and siblings. She also employed a Socratic method of inquiry with each of us every day. What did you learn in school? Is your homework done? What do you want for breakfast? Did you make your bed? Etc.

Our dinner table conversations were filled with chaos (7 kids), information and dynamic conversation. Our father would sit at the head of the table and interrogate all of us about our day what we learned what we saw who we met and other activities. We were blessed to be led by a man who was a slow eater and naturally curious about each one of us. Our television exception was limited to Sunday night viewing of 60 minutes in the Andy Williams show.

My parents were, and are, big proponents of Catholicism. We all received a Jesuit education at some point. However, Humanism permeated our life experience. We were taught and it was often reinforced – you can do and be whoever or whatever you want in life, if you are willing to do the work. That faith gave us all confidence to pursue our individual destinies.

My dad and I still talk on the phone frequently. He challenges me to invert the concept of, “how is life treating me, to *how am I treating my life?*”

I walked to and from school every day with our neighbors all the way up through 8th grade. After school we would play in the yard or at the park until the dinner Bell Rang. Yes, we had a dinner bell.

Our outdoor activities were not very structured (compared with kids today) and that led to a lot of creative game playing. I attribute any of my creative skills to a combination of the DNA from my parents and the experiences of my childhood not watching television but playing freely with friends. We didn’t have cell phones or social media – Oh, the joy of innocence and a simple existence!

In high school I discovered and indulged in frequent marijuana use. It led to passivity, lethargy and lack of care about school. I was also very immature and entitled. I had no sense of direction or purpose. It is no wonder my parents opted to emancipate me from their domain (aka booted out) days after turning 18. I was a bad influence on my younger brother five years my junior. I definitely “earned” the right to figure it out on my own. Without anyone to protect me.

I have been exploring ever since.

My next decision had a huge impact on the trajectory of the rest of my life. One day I went from a being a child and acting like one to having the responsibilities for myself. It was a huge wake-up call.

I decided to join the army.

It scared the hell out of my parents.

It was also an Existential Epiphany: I discovered that I needed to take charge of my life.

But before I could, I needed to get my ass kicked around a bit. And boy, did I ever!

In basic training I learned that no preference would be given to me. I couldn't talk my way out of situations, and I was held accountable for all my actions.

I learned that nobody cared about my opinion. I was a number, not a name. I had no freedom. My long hair was buzzed to the scalp. The parties were over. I learned that I could trust no one.

I learned things like meritocracy and to appreciate diversity and that each person is a unique individual. I learned that racism is stupid, make your bed, work hard, persevere, manifest destiny, watch your back and take advantage of opportunities.

I learned that nobody owes you anything.

I have some great memories and some recurring nightmares. I lived with and learned from people of different ethnicities.

In the trenches, race, orientation and religion are irrelevant. Working together is paramount.

Real, sustainable success requires teamwork

I learned that whatever I wanted and whoever I wanted to be was solely about me.

I had to create my own destiny.

I earned an invitation after basic training to become an airborne paratrooper. This was another incredible experience for me as I was able to overcome a fear of heights and jump out of airplanes. Next, they offered the opportunity to go to Ranger School. I declined.

After airborne school I was stationed at the 3rd armored division in Germany and served there for 18 months. During this time, I was fortunate enough to be also included on the 3rd armored division swim team. We traveled and competed in swim meets and I got to experience learning about the culture and the beauty of different areas of Germany. This was during the

Cold War and the United States employed Pershing missiles in West Germany to protect our western European allies against East Germany and the Soviet Union.

While in Germany, I often read and explored my inner conflict of serving as a peacekeeper yet, at the same time, an agent of war. By nature, I learned that I'm a pacifist and don't like guns very much because I have seen some people do very stupid things with them.

In the end I served two years and was discharged honorably.

Looking back on that time I learned many things, but most importantly is that Knowledge is Power.

If I wanted to further myself in life and have control over my destiny, I had to get an education.

At that point in my life my options were quite limited because of poor performance in high school, but I knew that opportunity began with education. The transition from the army back to education was an interesting one.

During my first semester at the Junior college, I enrolled in a program called Interdisciplinary Studies. Their structure made learning fun again because often we would mix an English class together with philosophy or history with English. I thrived in that environment. I had a few of good friends at Eastern Illinois University so I decided to attend there after my semester in junior college.

At Eastern Illinois University I immersed myself in the collegiate and social life I embraced sports and all the intramural competitions as well as the fun parties. As a junior I ran for and lost the candidacy for student body president but still served the student body in student government. It was a humbling experience to lose but it taught me that it's important to be humble and to continue working hard. More important than the title of President was the contributions I was able to make through service to others.

In my senior year I was fascinated with the idea of sponsorship after attending a conference in Chicago. I took that knowledge back to Eastern Illinois and created an event for our triathlon club. It was an indoor triathlon. I actually paid more attention to this entrepreneurial endeavor than I did to my classes in my senior year, but I was having a blast.

I organically found my career and purpose at the same time: creating opportunities for people to have fun in a healthy environment while raising funds for great charities.

It has morphed since then and since I have learned more about myself and my interests.