

From the Managing Editor

OK, OK ... so the *Journal's* editorial offices just up and packed for Kansas...and I just lost another job.

As a representative of Harvard once told an applicant who had killed both his parents, "Well, these things do happen" (Ivins, 1991, p. xvi).

* * *

If I'm not a professional advisor: Going over back issues as we prepared the Index drove home just how replete our literature is with references to *professional* advisors. Not being a professional makes me, I guess, an *amateur* advisor. (I'm paralleling here the design consultant approached about becoming part-time art director of a magazine I once worked on—after about the ninth time someone contrasted this setup to having an in-house art director, he asked, "If I'm not to be an *in-house* art director, what would that make me?")

At first I bridled at the label *amateur*, but as anyone who's ever conjugated *amo*, *amas*, *amat* knows, it's derived from the Latin for *lover*, suggesting—perhaps—advising from the heart or advising for the love of it.

Not a bad way of thinking about what I do as a faculty advisor.

* * *

He needs to build a yurt: Last semester I had a student whose performance in an Introduction to Journalism class was lousy. Likeable and intelligent, Stephan was the son of a writing student I'd had a while back who had truly impressed me. I wanted him to succeed. We talked after class several times. I struggled to understand what was afoot. As far as I could figure out, at this point in his life he was into a dozen things (directing a play, working, exploring new social roles)—damn near anything but school. Made me think of another student I once knew.

As a teacher in a private school (K-8), I was sharing playground duty with a colleague. Watching the youngsters, we chatted in brief intervals between the crises that Noam precipitated with clockwork regularity. There was nothing mean about him; Noam was a big kid, all energy and mischief that knew few restraints. Consequently we had our hands full dealing with the bystanders who were forever getting pushed, bumped, slugger, and knocked down simply because they

happened to be in the same corral with this spirited colt.

In exasperation my colleague turned and said, "You know what he needs? He needs to go build a yurt.... He needs a year to live in the woods and chop down trees and build a yurt."

She was spot on. Whenever I hear talk of education vouchers these days, I think I'll throw my support behind the system that includes a voucher for a year out of school sometime in adolescence, a year to do nothing but read, play Thoreau, work on old cars, ride horses, surf the Net, work with Habitat for Humanity, or canoe the Alaskan bush—a self-chosen, self-defined year to mature, to get one's act together.

Perhaps my most powerful year of higher education was the year I dropped out of college, hitchhiked crosscountry, and ended up working as an office boy and apprentice draftsman in an architectural firm. I worked, I read, I rode my motorcycle, and I spent some time alone in a country farmhouse.

When I went back to college, it was the first time in my life that I was in school because I had chosen to be. I wasn't there because of someone else's expectations or requirements; I was there because I wanted to be. I had built my yurt.

Alarms are buzzing in the Office of Retention Studies, and I'm about to be tagged an "attrition enabler" for saying it, but it may just be that Stephan needs what Noam and I needed, to stop out for a while. His mom, my impressive writing student, might understand. She was in her 40s when she got her first college degree, and she's gotten a couple more since then.

* * *

Serendipity & uncertainty, decidedness & major changers: Wendy Kopp (1992), who founded Teach for America as an outgrowth of her senior thesis at Princeton, was the NACADA *Journal* speaker at the annual conference in Atlanta. When we offered a printed version of her remarks in the *Journal*, she opened by saying:

As advisors to today's college students, many of you must at times disparage the directionlessness of today's undergraduates. I am writing in the hope of convincing some of you that directionlessness is not always a bad thing. It can be the impetus for creativity.

(p. 56)

Dealing with the directionless is right up there alongside dealing with major changers and the undecided on the academic advisor's To Do list. I guess I'm with Kopp on this one.

Our older son had gone away to school in New York City and, in the process, fallen in love with the city. He stayed there each summer, rather than coming back to Illinois; consequently we managed only a couple of visits a year, and it's tough to keep abreast of a young man's "decidedness," given adolescent volatility and a couple of visits a year. During one visit he was in a state of high anxiety over knowing neither what he wanted to do for the rest of his life nor even what major he wanted to declare. I had to chuckle at the role reversal; rather than being his old man putting the pressure on to buckle down, grow up, settle down, and make up his mind, I was being—well, I couldn't escape being his old man—the old man saying, "Relax. Just get a solid liberal arts education. Shop around. Take your time. It really doesn't matter what your major is." He ended up a drama major, got a job in corporate development for a major orchestra and then one in administration for an art museum. From a strictly careerist point of view, all those theater courses he took haven't done a damn thing for him.

Times have been good. They may not always be. And should they turn bad, those theater courses and all his other liberal arts coursework will stand him in good stead. Or he may change direction in his life and strike out after new goals. Anton Chekov was a doctor first, you'll recall, and Joseph Conrad a sailor. Perhaps some of the best academic advising and career counseling we can offer boils down to: Prepare for the unexpected. Equip yourself to make the most out of serendipity.

* * *

The theoretical physicist as teacher: Although a Nobel Prize for his work in quantum electrodynamics was still a few years off, Richard Feynman was already legendary among members of the scientific community by the early 1960s when he agreed to teach a physics course to first- and second-year students at Caltech. According to Paul Davies, "he did so with characteristic panache and his inimitable blend of informality, zest, and offbeat humor" (Feynman, 1995, p. xiii). Goodstein and Neugebauer, two colleagues, note:

Through the distant veil of memory, many of the students and faculty attending the lectures have said that having two years of

physics with Feynman was the experience of a lifetime. But that's not how it seemed at the time. Many of the students dreaded the class, and as the course wore on, attendance by the registered students started dropping alarmingly. But at the same time, more and more faculty and graduate students started attending. The room stayed full, and Feynman may never have known he was losing some of his intended audience. (Feynman, p. xxiii)

Afterward, assessing this "experiment" with undergraduate teaching, Feynman observed, "I don't think I did very well by the students," but quoted Gibbon to the effect that "the power of instruction is seldom of much efficacy except in those happy dispositions where it is almost superfluous" (pp. xxviii-xxix).

What we do as educators can easily be lost during the significant delay until return on investment becomes noticeable. When Feynman succumbed to cancer, Caltech students hung out a banner that read simply, "We love you, Dick."

* * *

Johnnie B. & the infamous Dr. Shine: Can't remember the first time I met Howie Schein. Turns out that both of us were at Berkeley back when the national anthem of those under 30 enjoined travelers going to San Francisco to wear some flowers in their hair. He was busy working on a doctorate in zoology (and presumably heading over to the Fillmore to catch the Dead, the Doors, Janis, & Jimi in his leisure time). I was busy, too... for a while. Made it almost to Halloween my freshman year before I quit school and hitchhiked to—of all places—Cleveland. (This was in the old days, before the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame, and *nobody* who wasn't desperate went to Cleveland.) Anyhow, Howie and I might have passed a time or two along Telegraph Avenue or on Sproul Plaza.

Many miles (Champaign, Illinois) and many years (oh, 25 or so) later I got a call out of the blue. Howie—by now almost universally referred to as either "Champagne Howie" or "the infamous Dr. Shine"—had been named editor of the *NACADA Journal* and needed someone to handle various editorial and production tasks. A colleague recommended an editorial maven who handled a journal for the Society for Psychophysiological Research. She, however, was overextended; she passed along my name. I like to think she did so because of my invaluable assistance on articles covering scoring criteria for electrodermal

habituation, baroreceptor reflex function during mental stress, and venous occlusion plethysmography. I suppose, though, that it was because we were then part of an abortive attempt to purchase the *Journal of Irreproducible Results* and she knew me to be a freelance writer and editor living precariously. Either that or she just figured that giving up a name to the authorities was the surest way to get the infamous Dr. Shine off her case.

So I got this call out of the blue, said yes, and the rest isn't quite history. (Heck, it ain't even urban legend.)

Despite his marriage to an estimable clinical psychologist, Howie Schein has been living about an hour east of Normal for most of his adult life.

Normal, Illinois, that is. (That's my story, and I'm sticking to it.) Smack in the middle of the prairie, somewhere between Flatville and Farmer City, where the CIA offices house the Crop Improvement Association. Living so long in a place like that can do strange things to a man.

Who else, for instance, could persuade the otherwise prim and demure editor of the *Newsletter* to don a Hawaiian shirt (one that he was happy to loan her) for a professional presentation? Who else would have leavened this issue with "urban" legends from within the halls of academe?

Fortunately Schein has had the *Journal* as an anchor in his unstable world. Now that he is without it, one trembles to think of the mischief about to be unleashed.

* * *

Addendum: Howard Schein has been both mentor and friend, a constant source of information and, more importantly, insight. He has brought the *Journal* to maturity and has brought me along for the ride. As do so many others in NACADA, I owe him a great debt. For now, all I can say is "Thanks, Howie. I owe you."

References

- Feynman, R. P. (1995). *Six easy pieces: Essentials of physics explained by its most brilliant teacher*. Reading, MA: Helix/Addison-Wesley.
- Ivins, M. (1991). *Molly Ivins can't say that, can she?* New York: Vintage.
- Kopp, W. (1992). The driven—yet undirected—generation...and the difference we can make. *NACADA Journal*, 12(1), 56-58.

John Lansingh Bennett