

Garland, Mr. Bradley and Mark

There was something extraordinary about the manner and self-confidence of the huge man who married my Dad's sister. At age 13, the young man who would later become my uncle Garland was sent out to his grandfather's Archer County ranch to work. He grew up fast and tough on the Coppermine Ranch. He later served as a Deputy Sheriff in Archer County, rode bulls in Madison Square Garden, shot his grandfather's cattle during the drought and depression of the 1930s because there was no feed for them. His grandfather lost everything in the Crash of 1929. Those were hard times for a lot of people. Garland grew up during those times and became the man John Wayne wanted to be when he grew up.

Garland took an early interest in me. The big event of each year for uncle was the Fort Worth Fat Stock Show and Rodeo. During the late 1950s Garland would come to Fort Worth, pick me up and take his poor nephew to the show. For a ragtag kid living in the city, arriving at the Will Rogers Coliseum in uncle's Cadillac was a pretty special deal. Garland made people feel special. Every child needs someone like that in their life.

At age 15 I was given an opportunity to work for Garland during the summer months driving one of his tractors. The machines of that era did not have air conditioned cabs or satellite radio. In fact, the first tractor I operated didn't even have brakes. But if you planned ahead, you could make do without damaging equipment or fences and avoid killing yourself or others. But learning to plan ahead was essential. That summer went by fast, I swallowed a lot of Archer County dust, dirt and pollen and in the process learned a great deal about farming, ranching, repairing tractors, flat tires, heat and long working hours. It was a good summer and a fitting rite of passage.

Mom and Dad were having domestic issues and a divorce was inevitable in 1961 - 1962. Given the hard economic circumstances certain to befall Mom a decision was made that I would move to Wichita Falls and live with my dear (classy and beautiful) Aunt LaVera and her husband Garland. I had earned the chance to finish high school by being a reasonably good hand for Garland the previous summer. Earning that opportunity was an early lesson that hard work has benefits. I would work the long summer hours for uncle the next seven summers and in exchange be given the opportunity to finish high school in the big brick building at 2149 Avenue H and attend the local university thereafter. Uncle kept me "on the payroll" even though we both lost Aunt LaVera to breast cancer in December of 1963. She was special and she believed strongly in me, as did Mom. God only knows what my future would have been without that pivotal and heart-wrenching decision made by an apprehensive mother giving up her oldest son to what she hoped would be a better opportunity than she could provide. I doubt that I ever gave her angst over that decision the careful contemplation that it deserved. There were caring adults in my life that had an impact on my future.

In mathematics I encountered Paul Genung and Zela Gaskin in that first year at the "Senior" high school. As is the case for most teachers of that era, I remember them being dedicated and caring. The care on display by these two teachers for the cultivation of a

mathematically-educated mind made a lasting impression. My parents had instilled in me the value of an education. The opportunity afforded me by uncle and aunt made it clear that they too understood the importance of knowing. I was inspired by the students around me and by teachers to learn as much as my limited mental talents would allow. I worked hard at understanding the germane mathematical concepts. But it was in the 1963-1964 school year that I was introduced to that mathematical 'giant' on campus Mr. Randell L. Bradley, the faculty sponsor of the Math Club, the guru for number sense and slide rule and "Teacher of Calculus". Mr. Bradley came to school early; he seemed to stay late. He was involved with students and took great pride in their accomplishments. I was to later learn about Neils Bohr's atomic physics, quantum transitions, and allowed quantum states, but with Mr. Bradley at the head of the calculus class during that senior year I actually got to experience first-hand what a quantum transition felt like for mathematical comprehension. There was no doubt that as pertaining to calculus I was "stuck" in a lower allowed quantum state with no hope of making an upward transition. I knew an energy source would be absolutely required for me to make the quantum leap that Mr. Bradley was asking of me.

In the equestrian sport of stadium jumping, a jumper may make audible contact with but not displace a rail on an obstacle and hence not incur a fault. That kind of gentle rail contact of a horse's hoof correlates to my "C" grade at the end of the first six-week period in Mr. Bradley's class. As the round progresses for horse and rider, the jumps will tend to get a little more difficult and the horse may well knock down a rail or completely refuse a jump altogether. And that correlates very well to my "D" grade at the end of the second six-week period. The trend was not good. A rider has the option of leaving the stadium or continuing the round. Leaving the stadium produces a known result and in some instances is the correct decision on a difficult course for horse or rider. The call is subjective. The rider has no way of knowing the ultimate outcome if the course is continued. And I certainly had no idea of outcome if I stayed with Mr. Bradley's class. But I knew I wanted to learn and I recognized the problem was me, not the teacher. Like a rider collecting the horse in a lazy relaxed circle and regaining a little composure before the next jump, Mr. Bradley offered only encouragement and understanding of the struggle I was having re-wiring the neurons in my brain to grasp some of the mathematical material other students like Austin Maglothin, Don Mock and Ronnie Stockstill were comprehending easily. Mr. Bradley supplied some of the impetus I needed for that quantum transition to a higher state. For that I am eternally grateful. The rest of the requisite energy I needed came from the heart and soul of a gentle teacher's son named Mark Medford. There were caring teachers making positive impacts on the direction of my life.

Mark was one of the original nerds – extremely talented and gifted by God in many ways. About the only thing he couldn't do was throw the shot put as far as McGrath, but then, few people could. Mark was a musical man and music had been a big part of my life. We got acquainted in the Big Red Band hall. My uncle Garland's influence was at play here also. He and aunt LaVera had provided me with a used Conn coronet when I was in the fifth grade. Between that time and my junior year in a new high school in a new city, I was ready for the music that Mr. Prentice and Mr. Pruitt would choose.

Mark was of course in the calculus class with his mathematically struggling new friend. Mark was not only the original nerd, he was the original friend with benefits. Mark became my life-line to passing calculus at a time when there were no 'hands-free' or speaker telephones in homes, no internet 'help' sites. In the evenings Mark would work with me over the telephone for hours each night of the week explaining calculus over and over again. The only benefit to Mark was he really developed an exquisite understanding of calculus after explaining it repeatedly to his struggling classmate. It was an extraordinary display of kindness, an attitude that reflected Mark's character, a legacy from his parents Orville and Dorothy Medford, both of whom I fortunately came to know well. I began to improve in the field of mathematics and by the end of the school year, under Mark's tutelage, Mr. Bradley could write in my annual "congratulations for your improvement in math in 64". Mark was indeed that extra energy I needed to make a quantum transition to a higher educational plane. Marcus Tullius Cicero described Mark Medford this way in the fall of 44 B.C.: "A man who kindly shows the path to someone who is lost lights another's path, so to speak, from his own. For his own shines no less because he has lit another's". There was a special friend in my life during high school and that had an impact on my future.

People influence the paths our lives take. We should all be so lucky to have people like the three described above, people who 'light our light' from their own and make positive, life-altering contributions to the success in the lives of others. We beneficiaries owe a very public display of gratitude to those individuals.

The adults, the teachers, the great friends all are so important to the success of youth. And fortunately for this writer, there was a confluence of all those elements in 1964 in the school we knew as "Senior High". Fifty years after graduating, it is fitting and appropriate to ask: have we been a supportive adult to youth? Have we taken the time to be a teacher? Have we encouraged our children and grandchildren to reach out and extend a helping hand to a classmate?

In a little book (*On Duties*, Book I (157)) written hastily by Marcus Tullius Cicero in 44 B.C. one finds this sentiment:

Now it is not in order to make honeycombs that swarms of bees gather together, but it is because they are gregarious by nature that they make honeycombs.

At this point in our maturing lives what can a gregarious group of high school alumni do as a class to advance the educational outcome for students who will graduate from Wichita Falls High School in the future? The task is important. The course of history depends upon how well youth are educated, how well they know the immutable lessons of history. The effort to extend that help needs to be made. Let's do that together. And as to this journey and effort, Robert Frost phrased it well when he penned the line: "You come too".