

MY LIFE – PIG-BOARD LEARNING

I go to the county fair each year, usually with Margaret and often with our grand-kids. And something that has fascinated me are what are called, appropriately enough, “Pig-boards” or “Pig-moving Boards.” Pig-boards are large pieces of $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch plywood or polyethylene (2 x 3 feet in size), with several hand-holes cut in them, that are used to shunt running pigs this way or that way. Often there is almost like a tunnel or maze made up of people holding pig-boards to force the pigs where they have to go. And run the pigs do, squealing all the way. And it is not lost on me that my life often consists of the occasional pig-board, with me as the running pig. I often don't do what makes sense and have to be helped out by the hard knocks of life. LOL.

I am sometimes asked what my early life was like. Where did I come from? So, since it is a rainy day here, I thought I would jot down a little of my early history for those interested.

My early years: I was born and raised in rural Lancaster, Pennsylvania in a house my parents had built, the only one around, stuck between two large farms. For many years, there were no other houses or families anywhere near. As the oldest of (eventually) five boys, I was pretty much on my own for many years. There was no television back then and I rode the school bus home each afternoon. I listened to the radio for entertainment, but Mother Nature was my main source of education and interest.

Some of us are born for the school of hard knocks, well, at least some harder knocks than others. I'm not talking about being poor, because we were middle-class. Instead, I'm talking about my difficulties in being schooled, which were many. I am a hard nut to crack when it comes to schooling. I can't be educated. I have had to educate myself.

Some people don't always learn from logic or reasonableness, but rather from exhausting every exit but the right exit. I am, without a doubt, in that later group, if only because I am perhaps too clever for my own good. Yet, as the artist Michelangelo, who was also a poet, wrote “What if a little bird should escape death for many a long year, only to suffer a crueler death.” That would be me.

I have always resisted the obvious, society's groove, choosing instead to find my own way, often by the most circuitous, even backward, way possible. And this was evident very early on, when I played hooky, so my mother told me, from kindergarten. And I followed that approach all the way through grade school and high school. I ignored any teacher that did not inspire me (and, unfortunately for me, that was almost all of them) and chose, instead, to plan out what I would do after school each day during classes. This went on for close to 12 years. LOL.

I was a determined naturalist by the time I was six years old and working with (and hanging out with) professional naturalists (PHD candidates) by my teens. My other great interest, that of my own consciousness, found me a natural psychologist by my late

teens. I had read all 52 works by Fyodor Dostoevsky before I left high school and was busy learning Russian because of authors like Dostoevsky and Gogol.

By my early twenties I had read most of the philosopher George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and had pretty much become a phenomenologist. I read extensively in and was influenced by the Existentialists, but they were a bit too grand for me; instead, I found my niche as a phenomenologist, someone who studies life's inner phenomena from the point of view of the first-person, in particular, the direct study and monitoring of my own consciousness. I still do that today; that's who I am.

It is clear to me that I am a phenomenologist, a "gleaner," someone who monitors his experience to extrapolate the world. Yes, I can make a mountain out of a molehill, but I prefer the William Blake quote:

"To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour."

I never finished high school, of my own choosing. Instead, in 1960 I chose to leave school and hitchhike to the West Coast and Venice Beach in Santa Monica, California, where I lived in an abandoned walk-in freezer in the basement of the Gas House, an art gallery and well-known hangout for the Beat Generation. At the time, I thought I was a graphic artist and painted with oils. I also spent time in North Beach, San Francisco, and Greenwich Village in NYC. I was all of 19 years old.

I hitchhiked a lot, including a stint in 1961 with a young Bob Dylan. Dylan, and I, along with my friend guitarist Perry Lederman traveled together and hung out for a time. I was part of the revival of folk music in the late 1950s and early 1960s and helped Dylan put on a concert at the University of Michigan back in the day.

After years of hitchhiking (and a few years later -- 1964), I spent a year in Berkeley studying with a professor at the University of California, but looking back, I was actually busy absorbing the intellectual climate (and the spiritual arts) that presaged the birth of the alternative culture of the 1960s. As the assistant manager for Berkeley's "Discount Records," I was seriously engaged in studying classical music.

When what is called "The 1960s" came along (in 1965), I was just old enough to be a tutor of the hippies, and found myself a bit of a leader, introducing the hippies to the liberal arts – music, art, and literature. However, I personally was never a "hippie, for my soul had been already dyed in the Beat culture of Ginsberg and Kerouac. However, I was too young to make that train, but absorbed all the flavor from it that I could.

After my year in Berkeley, I then returned to Ann Arbor, Michigan and in the late summer of 1965 my brother Daniel and I started the Prime Movers Blues Band. At the same time, a little band called the Grateful Dead was forming in San Francisco. Our

band (and playing music), for me, was an even more direct plunge into the world of action. It opened another chapter in my book of life, which I may attempt to describe in a later blog. This synopsis of my early life gives you a little sense of my trajectory.

[Photo by me yesterday.]

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“As Bodhicitta is so precious,
May those without it now create it,
May those who have it not destroy it,
And may it ever grow and flourish.”