

I. FROM NUMBER CRUNCHING TO SPIRITUALITY

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In extending their generous invitation to prepare this autobiographical chapter, John Smart and Alan Bayer kindly assured me of two things: (1) that accepting the invitation did not necessarily constitute an admission that I was “over-the-hill”; and (2) that the chapter did not have to be strictly autobiographical and that they would welcome some comments about what’s been going on in our field.

In recent years it has gradually begun to dawn on me that higher education has become overly preoccupied with the “external” aspects of our work, by which I mean such tangible things as programs, policies, practices, resources, etc., to the neglect of our “inner” lives, by which I mean our values, beliefs, hopes, dreams, fears, and the *meaning* that we make of our work and our lives. I will return to this theme later on in the chapter, but in the spirit of trying to practice what I preach, I will try to share some of my own “inner journey” in the autobiographical portions of it. Since I’ve tried to mix history (family, graduate school, subsequent jobs, etc.) with topical discussions (methodology, people, etc.), the chapter zigzags a bit between chronological accounts and substantive discussions.

THE EARLY YEARS: HOW I GOT INVOLVED IN HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH

In many respects my introduction to the field of higher education scholarship was serendipitous. I had recently completed my two-year service obligation, and was working as a clinical research psychologist for the Veteran's Administration in Baltimore when a former mentor, psychologist John Holland, invited me to move from the East coast to Evanston, Illinois to work with him at the National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC). John had initiated a research program that was focused on our nation's brightest young high school graduates: National Merit Scholars, Finalists and Commended Students. Education was a brand new field for me (I've never actually taken a course in education!), but the problems of student development seemed interesting enough and the opportunity to work once again with John provided sufficient incentive for me to accept his offer. So, in the summer of 1960, at the tender age of 28, I left the clinical field and began my career as a researcher in higher education.

Before discussing the research at NMSC it might be helpful to provide some personal background information to help set the context for my past and current work.

MY FAMILY

I was raised in a family which, in many respects, mirrored C.P. Snow's "two cultures". My father, a physicist, exemplified many of the stereotypical qualities of the hard scientist: he was quiet, reserved, thoughtful, and kept his emotions very much to himself. My mother, on the other hand, was very identified with the arts and literature and had a remarkable gift of language: she was a fabulous writer, a remarkable raconteuse, and had briefly worked as a newspaper reporter for a New York City daily paper while my father was working on his Ph.D. Her emotions, in contrast to those of my father, were very much on the surface. Like most scientists, my father was strongly oriented toward the "objective" exterior world, the world of objects and things, while my mother was very much focused on the inner world of feelings and emotions. To a certain extent my subsequent scholarly and professional life has mirrored both of these contrasting orientations.

I learned to play the trumpet at age 7 and became heavily involved in all kinds of musical activities and organizations during junior high and high school. Since music during those years interested me far more than

academics (which seemed tedious and boring), I ended up majoring in music as an undergraduate. When I finished college, however, I decided to abandon plans for a musical career and to attend graduate school at the University of Maryland to study psychology, which had been my undergraduate minor. (At almost the same time, and without knowing anything of my change of interests, my older brother — also a classic product of the Two Cultures — switched from a mathematics to a drama major, a field he remains in to this day as an actor, writer, director, and — most recently — college teacher.) The reasons for my own change of field are too numerous to detail here; suffice it to say that I felt that I lacked the talent and other personal qualities that would be required to pursue a successful musical career. Psychology, on the other hand, was something that was not only interesting but that always seemed to come easily to me.

GRADUATE SCHOOL

My graduate program proved to emphasize very “scientific” psychology, which put a great deal of emphasis on research, measurement, statistics, theory, experimentation, hypothesis testing, and the like. I did a laboratory experiment for my master’s thesis and a very statistically-oriented doctoral dissertation. At the same time, a good deal of my graduate work consisted of courses in clinical and counseling psychology and I eventually did an internship as a counseling psychologist with the Veteran’s Administration. I ended up completing my doctoral program with a double major: counseling and quantitative psychology. My wife Lena (Helen S. Astin) and I met during our second year in graduate school, had a whirlwind courtship lasting about seven weeks, and got married a few months before we both took our doctoral qualifying exams. Lena ended up majoring in counseling and social psychology.

In those days the Psychology Department at Maryland comprised a small and very tightly-knit group of about 10 faculty and 35 doctoral students. Everybody knew everyone else. Clinical psychology wasn’t allowed because it was considered to be too “unscientific”, and counseling psychology was tolerated only because it focused on “objective” testing, psychometrics, test theory, and the like. Despite the very strong emphasis on research, the faculty took their teaching and mentoring responsibilities very seriously. And while the department was a beehive of research activity, the counseling center also provided us with exceptional opportunities to develop our interviewing and testing skills. Further, in those days the graduate program was

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