

Chapter Seventeen: The Real Higher Education Trail Begins

Sophomore Year at Long Beach City College

Author's Note:

No animals were used/abused in testing this product.

Oh wait. Wrong disclaimer. Try again:

Living persons retain privacy rights that I will not violate. Further, I am not motivated to feed prurient interests, show off, or drop names. Some stories are simply better left untold; this account does not “kiss and tell.” All persons appearing under their real name provided informed consent..

*My purpose remains: Significant back-stories are required to properly illustrate and understand the **Threads** that swirl in my life and motivate this project. While true, the stories about me, post 1971, are not “the **whole** truth, so help me God.” I’m leaving out a lot of juicy stuff. Maybe someday there will be an additional, X-rated, story project. Rather than name some of the people I was close to, I prefer that they “live long and prosper” while the stories remain untold. Plus, in hindsight, I’m ashamed of a lot of my behavior.*

I often joke, euphemistically, that during the three semesters I spent at Long Beach City College I “majored in pharmaceuticals, gender studies, and tennis.” The euphemisms are actually metaphors: one did not major in any subjects at California junior colleges in those years. Although my tennis game consistently improved, it never exceeded the advanced-beginner stage. The other two parts, advanced.

Once I moved back in with Roger and Evangeline, my newfound appreciation for marijuana and long-standing efforts toward the opposite sex were pushed underground but not extinguished. LBCC presented few academic challenges; still, my grades remained exceedingly low, appropriate to my lack of effort. I played a lot of tennis, chased females, and smoked a fair amount of pot.

I enjoyed the basic speech course that I took from Dr. Gordon Zimmerman during the single semester at UNR. I was good, though untrained, at public speaking before college and I

was excited to learn that one can study Speech in higher education. I often found college coursework interesting, but only Gordon's class struck me as fun as well. At LBCC, I enrolled in "Introduction to Oral Interpretation" and my performances impressed the teacher. He suggested that I enroll in a theater course. The theater class was great fun and I exhibited talent in basic acting. The school presented a series of three plays during summer sessions. I needed extra hours, so in the last summer at LBCC, I auditioned for one of the shows.

Without detailing all of the coursework that I mostly ignored during the three semesters at junior college, I should note one important feature in addition to my involvement in Oral Interpretation and Theater. While the three semesters at LBCC were just short of failure, California state law snatched my academic life from the jaws of defeat. That acceptable outcome was pure good fortune and mostly contrary to my best efforts to screw up my academic future.

I made no effort to earn an Associates' degree (AA) at LBCC; I did not care to earn a degree from the local community college. Rather, I focused my attention on completing the requirements enabling me to transfer to Cal State Long Beach. At the time (this is no longer the case) the four-year California State Universities were required to accept in-state students, who had not been admitted via application directly after high school, if they met one of two entry requirements: (1) graduation from a junior college with the associates' degree or (2) presentation of 66 hours from an accredited institution of higher education (junior colleges counted). As a result, I signed up for the maximum number of JC hours that were allowed without special permission: 18 credit hours, during the first two terms, 15 hours my third term, and 3 hours over the 1973 summer. Combined with the 12 hours I transferred from UNR, I qualified to enter CSULB in the fall of 1973. Unfortunately, my GPA at LBCC was a sorry 1.95. However, the

grades brought from UNR raised my total slightly above the 2.0 required for admission. Although they got me into CSULB, those low grades would eventually come back and bite me.

An additional academic protocol that facilitated my future at CSULB is that the four-year school was required to accept all previously completed general education requirements. At LBCC, students were required to complete a *combined* math & science requirement by taking two courses, one of which could be math *or* a science course *with lab*. I took and passed biology with the required lab. I fulfilled the second part of the requirement by taking a televised geography class. You can imagine how diligently I paid attention to that distance-education course delivered through our television in the living room, for one hour beginning at 8am, three mornings a week (not much). Nevertheless, the biology and geography classes meant that I met the math and science general education requirement at LBCC, and transfer that to CSULB, without taking a math class.

Since the math requirement at colleges, in those days, was almost always basic/college algebra, not having to take the class was a career-saver. I had flunked algebra at St. Anthony and then again in summer-school. The third time I took the class, in the summer-school session between high school graduation and my trip to the Midwest, I barely passed with a “D.” I was mightily relieved to know that I could graduate from CSULB without being blocked by a college algebra class that I was pretty sure I was unable to pass. We should also note that, unlike UNR, CSULB did not require a foreign language for graduation, not even when earning a BA.

My participation in the summer theater arts program at LBCC embellished my time there. To earn a passing grade in the summer theatre course, students had to perform as an actor in one of the three shows or serve as a member of the technical crew for two of the three. Although I’d

been in a play in 8th grade, I'd never before auditioned for one. The first audition was for the two adult plays on the summer bill, a French farce, *A Flea in Her Ear*, by Georges Feydeau and *Not Now Darling*, a mostly British social farce that was being made into a film around the same time as local theaters were starting to produce the play that premiered in 1967.

My "participation" in the audition was memorably odd. I thought that I might avoid auditioning altogether in favor of working on the technical crews. Nevertheless, I attended the audition. I was reading William Peter Blatty's recent book, *The Exorcist*, during the audition and I was so engrossed with the book that I failed to notice that the audition was virtually over when the director brought me to my senses by loudly asking if there was "anyone who had not yet auditioned." Though he meant "who wanted to audition," I heard his exact words so stood up somewhat hesitantly; the director instructed me to "read the part of the German."

I have never been good at producing accents and this instance was no different. I found a passage featuring the German male character and I mumbled a few lines. I quickly took my seat, reopened my paperback, and fully expected to fulfill a technical role for the theater company over the summer since I'd muffed the audition. I was surprised, the following Monday, to find my name listed for a prominent speaking role in one of the plays: that of Camille Chandebise, the nephew of the play's male protagonist in *A Flea in Her Ear*.

Camille suffered from a speech impediment caused by a poorly corrected cleft palate. When I had mumbled the part of the German—because I could not produce an accent—I accomplished the only successful audition for playing Camille. I was happy to be in the play but I was worried about the speech impediment. I went to the director's office immediately and voiced my concerns. Gratefully, Mr. White gave me a simple pronunciation tip that enabled me

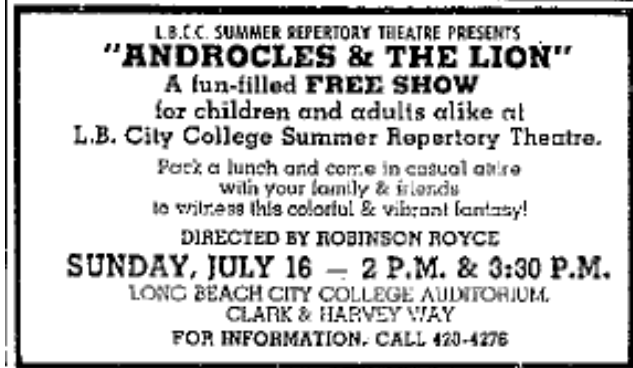
to produce the speech impediment with very little effort by thrusting my tongue firmly into contact with my bottom row of teeth so that I could “hock [talk] hike [like] hat [that].”

As it turned out, being able to easily reproduce the speech impediment helped me embody the character subtly rather than making a big deal over his disability. This, in turn, enabled me to humanize the character and deliver his comedic lines with natural charm. I received loud applause nightly and a strongly positive review in the local paper (notwithstanding my last name being misspelled). This was just what my already over-inflated ego did not need: more attention, especially to the fact that I was somewhat naturally talented on stage.



The third summer play was *Androcles and the Lion*, done in the *Comedia del arte* style. During the bulk of the summer, students produced the two adult plays. Concurrently, a smaller group of students dedicated themselves to constructing a traditional *Comedia del arte* wagon to be towed behind a pickup truck and writing a musical adaption, for children, of the classic play. The production was directed by Robinson (Rob) Royce a man who was a Hollywood set designer with film and television credits. As soon as *A Flea in Her Ear* closed I asked if I could

join the *Androcles* cast and was happy to learn that one of its actors had dropped out: there was a role, *the Lover*, for me to play. We spent the rest of the summer presenting the show at city parks and other nonprofit-organization-sponsored locations around the Long Beach area.



The pinnacle of the summer occurred when we were invited to serve as the opening show for the new upstairs theater at the *Long Beach Community Playhouse*. We ran *Androcles* there for a full week. On the downside, the reviews I received for that performance were not positive. The heroine, with whom I was supposed to be in love and do some very light (and very fake) kissing, had a steady boyfriend. She struggled engaging with a pretend lover on stage. Our interactions were awkward and detracted from the overall performance. Getting “panned” brought my “big” theatrical head down a size or two. On the upside, the attention the play received brought us an invitation to bring the play to television. That’s right, the second play that I appeared in was recruited for production as a televised performance in Hollywood.

Now, I should be clear, we were neither asked to appear on a popular television program nor our own network television special. Robinson Royce worked as the set designer for a Sunday morning religious program on one of the local Los Angeles television stations. The show runner, a colleague of Rob’s, saw our play and wanted us to adapt it for his religious television program. Members of the troupe disagreed on whether we should move the play to television. Some in the group looked at singing and/or acting as potential career paths and eagerly said “yes.” Others wanted to move on with their lives after the summer school session was over.

I became involved with one of the cast members; she had a friend already working in Hollywood. Through her friend's invitation, we spent time on the Paramount production lot watching shooting for an episode of *Mannix* with Mike Connors as well as a first-season episode of *Happy Days*, with Richie Cunningham, I mean Ron Howard, during the season before the Fonz—Henry Winkler—was featured on the show. We also attended one small, but very “connected,” Hollywood party. I was sorely tempted to join the group wanting to go forward and it would have been easy to recruit replacements for the cast members who declined.

Instead, for one of the few times in my young life, I made a decision that was calculated to overcome some of my key weaknesses (thereby, perhaps, over-riding a freshman mistake or two?). I suspected that I would be unlikely to resist the entertainment industry's “fast lane.” I worried that the more successful I became, the less healthy and happy I would be. So I joined with the naysayers and *Androcles and the Lion* closed without venturing into television. We did not all foreswear equally however. The woman I was dating went on, after college, to a long and very successful career in the business-support side of the entertainment industry.

California State University, Long Beach

I should begin by noting that CSULB was just about perfect for me by fall, 1973. Visually and environmentally stunning, campus was a wonderful place to enjoy the benefits of Southern California life in the early 70s. A short walk or bike ride from the house on Driscoll Ave, there was lots of grass (yes, both kinds) and a laid-back vibe encouraged by a mostly commuter-based student body with things to do other than hang around school after class. The school had some graduate programs at the Masters level but was mostly focused on undergraduates, without the dorms (then only one) and the rituals (except Greek-life: lots of that) associated with elite

universities. The intellectual experience was challenging and fulfilling: the Speech faculty was outstanding. There were lots of on-campus activities and an overabundant supply of Southern-California-girls. It was a great place to find oneself.

I transferred to CSULB the fall after playing summer stock. Gratefully, my girlfriend joined me, transferring from the four-year school where she'd spent her first two years of college. She hadn't been happy there, "State" was closer to her home and saved lots of tuition money compared to the private school. Importantly for my academic career, the girl took wickedly good class notes; I suspect that I would not have done as well as I did without her help. Almost as appreciated was the fact that her family controlled two season tickets at Anaheim Stadium, home of my beloved Angels. I was fortunate to accompany her to a number of games and was particularly lucky to witness some of Nolan Ryan's most impressive pitching performances. Nolan Ryan throwing 100-mile-an-hour fastballs at dusk was a sight to see and we were fortunate to witness his work from the third row directly behind home plate.

My transition to CSULB provided a preview to areas of study that became my major in graduate school (a place to which I, initially, had little-to-no intention of going). The recent experience with theatre made clear that I could study acting. However, the combination of Gordon Zimmerman's Basic Speech class and the Oral Interpretation course at LBCC brought me to the major that would become prominent in my life's work: Speech. After declaring the major and digging into the coursework, I discovered that I was intellectually stimulated by the content. Further, my talent level enabled me to excel in the required performance courses. I'd found my scholarly home, though as an undergraduate I was far from a scholar.

The Speech faculty at CSULB was particularly strong in those days. In two years I received a solid and broad introduction to many of the most important topics in the Speech discipline. My increased engagement with the material, since it interested me, combined with my girl-friend's carefully taken notes to produce academic performances that landed me on the Dean's list all four semesters at Long Beach State. I earned a 3.85 GPA during my time there; unfortunately, my previous low grades meant that my overall undergraduate GPA never exceeded 2.999999; failing to push past 3.0 later constrained my ability to qualify for graduate programs in the hotbed of Speech scholarship: Big Ten schools such as Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota.

Although I was more dedicated to school while at CSULB than I had been in almost a decade, social life was still on the front burner. SAHS teammate Danny Ponchak had faded into the background by, of all things, getting married. Ramon Estape and I, however, took to college life with abandon. We went to numerous concerts, including shows by guitarist Gábor Szabó and R&B superstar Etta James, both at the on-campus coffee shop. They each performed intimate shows for small but appreciative crowds. We also saw Loggins and Messina perform on the campus lawn and John Penn sing and play both outside, on campus, and indoors at a local nightspot. We played a lot of pool, snuck into bars in Belmont Shore (I would not turn 21 until the September after college graduation and Ramon was almost a full year younger), and spent quite a bit of time on CSULB's lawns/hills/quads looking up at the clouds wondering if the pot would wear off in time for us to attend class productively (or at all). And although I was actively dating, Ann Raney was still in the background.

After Ann graduated from high school, she chose St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota for undergraduate work. Our relationship continued via long distance phone calls

(running up outrageous bills regularly!), letters, mailed audiocassettes, and photographs. Ann dated college men on her end (I was never sure how many) and I was still dating in Long Beach (and never told Ann about them). Nevertheless, we planned, plotted, and eventually cooked-up the formula for our next get-together.

I was to live in Keokuk over the summer 1974. Ann helped arrange the most important aspects of the plan by finding an apartment that I could afford to rent and lining up a job that enabled me to pay room, board, and other costs. Importantly, the job was not at her father's business; instead, I was to be a shipping clerk at another Keokuk manufacturing plant, *St. Louis Gear*. The only fly in the ointment was that I was still without an automobile: Not only did I not have a way to travel to Iowa; I would be without transportation once there. The solution seemed workable, but weak. I booked a round trip train ticket and brought my ten-speed bike with me. Keokuk is a small town where a car is not required for local transportation. Notwithstanding the heat, humidity, and summer rainstorms, the bike promised to provide local transportation, so the plan went into place, tickets were purchased, and the apartment's security deposit was paid.

And then the deal almost fell apart (probably should have been scuttled). Without warning, Ann announced that because she had been injured in a car accident earlier in the year, she needed to make up some coursework at St. Olaf over most of the summer months. I was furious. Why in gawd's name would I go to all the trouble to move to Keokuk for three months if we were still going to be in a long-distance relationship with her hundreds of miles away in Minnesota? The ensuing argument was fairly moot because the arrangements were in place, tickets purchased, rental deposits made, and Ann had registered for the coursework and arranged housing in Northfield. My anger was assuaged only slightly by the fact that we would see more

of each other with me in Keokuk than we would if I stayed in California. Nevertheless, the summer got off to a very rocky start.

By this time, the married O'Brien cousins Jean Nash, Maureen Creswick, and Patrick had moved their families to Quincy, Illinois, Melbourne, Florida, and Indianapolis, Indiana, respectively. Uncle Jim and aunt Veronica were still in Keokuk as was my buddy and golf partner, Howie Sutlive. Tressa Ralya was still in town, now sans boyfriend Neville. Ann picked me up at the train station and we spent a few weeks together while I got settled in; then she headed off for summer school.

The industrial job provided good experience. The plant was hot and the work was demanding, but the gig served as my first full-time job and I learned a lot about day-to-day responsibilities in a factory work environment. The ride from the apartment was less than a mile; I showed up sweaty but seldom storm-drenched. Learning industrial flow and "shipping" served me well in future jobs. I visited the O'Briens and the Raneys, picking up a free meal now and then. Tressa was interested in starting up a relationship and she was still appealing. But my primary reason for being in town didn't make room for anyone but Ann; especially not for one of her former high school classmates. Tressa and I remained friends and 2nd cousins-in-law, at a distance. I played golf with Howie when I could afford it and volunteered as a youth baseball coach. I remained chagrined over the separation from Ann but made the best of it. However, not far into the summer, I almost didn't get to experience the rest of it, or maybe much of anything else going forward.

One evening, on the way to the apartment after coaching baseball practice, I found myself on the hood of a car virtually eye-to-eye with the terrified driver who ran a stop sign to my left as

we crossed an intersection. I'd seen the motorist just before the impact and was able to leap off my bicycle and onto the hood of the car rather than ending up under her wheels. The driver hit the brakes just prior to my impact and so I was neither splattered all over the windshield nor the road. The bike, however, was damaged. Gratefully, it was still ride-able but bent and more difficult to pace and control. I was fortunate to suffer only modest bruising that did not require medical care. The driver however suffered near terminal shock and fright. This was not the only traffic related close-call that summer. Later, Ann and her folks gave me permission to drive her shiny new (very hot) Firebird coupe to Northfield to visit her over a weekend. I almost did not make it back alive.

Heading north toward Minnesota, on a two-lane Iowa highway, I reached the top of an incline with a quarter-mile gradual dissent ahead. I was traveling along at a comfortable 65 mile-an-hour clip that increased slightly with the downhill grade. A large 18-wheel truck approached coming up the hill in the lane to my left. The truck slowly eased toward the middle of the two-lane road; perhaps the wind or a distracted driver was responsible. As the truck continued up the hill, I became concerned over the truck's approach in my lane so took my foot off the gas. I slowed my dissent gradually and moved slightly to the right in my lane rather than applying the brakes in a haphazard fashion. As the truck got close to me, the driver did not adjust the truck's position, so I moved further toward the right and applied light pressure on the brake, slowing to approximately 50 miles an hour. As the truck passed, close without contact, air pressure shoved me slightly further to the right. My back-right tire clipped the gravel road as I adjusted back toward the middle of my lane and the Firebird went into an uncontrolled spin. I completed three full revolutions as the car careened off the right side of the road heading toward the next

telephone pole down the hill. Luckily, the car stopped just prior to wrapping itself, and me, around said pole.

I was equally pleased at neither having passed out nor wet my pants from sheer terror. I was grateful to be in one piece and to not have damaged the car visibly. Soon, a local farmer in a pickup pulled over and offered to take me to the nearest gas station. From there, a tow-truck driver fetched the Firebird and determined that it had sustained absolutely no damage. Grass, weeds, and branches were embedded in the under-carriage; otherwise, the only damage done was to my nerves. I proceeded north and arrived in Northfield in one piece with a good story to tell.

The almost-accident was not the only detail that we didn't share with Ruth and Jack. The Northfield visit featured some fairly standard college-age antics; climbing in and out of Ann's dormitory window after hours; playing guitar and singing songs; attending a Michael Johnson concert in the Twin Cities; and a scary night in a run-down St. Paul hotel. The visit provided my first view of Minneapolis and was an overall success. Ann and I continued to think of ourselves as a couple with a future; the time together in Northfield assuaged some of the sting of being in Keokuk without her.

Although far outside of the purpose for the stay in Keokuk, the summer of 1974 provided enduring political lessons. Roger and Evangeline had imbued our household with a strong dedication to the Democratic party. In fact, most of our relatives were Democrats. As with many families, especially those with military backgrounds, the social political foment of the 1960s challenged aspects of the traditional Democratic narrative. Even in retirement, Roger and Evangeline were a patriotic veteran family and, notwithstanding the fact that Vietnam was an unpopular war, my folks tended to stand with the administration. They had preferred Roosevelt

and Truman to Eisenhower and adored Kennedy above all. Johnson was an enigma for everybody but, clearly, we did not like Nixon. Although the war stretched across parts of three administrations (two Democratic), Nixon claiming to bring “peace with honor” (while taking half a decade to do it) did not tip the Lamoureux-family-political-scale in favor of the Republicans.

Moving to California injected a problematic aspect into family politics. Aunt Lucille’s family was decidedly Republican. Additionally, her oldest daughter, Elaine, married Jim Grobaty after Jim’s first wife was killed in a tragic car accident. Both Jim’s parents and the parents of his late first wife were rabid Republicans. In those days if one was a right-wing Republican in Southern California they were likely to be accused of being members of the John Birch Society whether or not they carried the appropriate identification card. The Haucks, Grobatys, and Pritchards would have qualified had they applied.

Mom and Dad always took the high road when political conversations threatened to emerge. Okay, maybe it was the timid road or perhaps the “some things are better left unsaid” path. Whichever, my folks avoided political conversations with the Republican wing of the family, like the plague. That is, in fact, an apt analogy as they fully believed that Republican politics were an illness too far gone to be cured in most who carried it. Further, “Birchers” tended to be adamant rather than reasonable such that talking with them did little other than to rile them up into a shouting frenzy. Roger and Evangeline far preferred avoidance to engagement when it came to discussing politics.

I began complaining about the U.S. political situation, especially the war, halfway through the Johnson administration. Young men under the threat of the draft (as I had been) were

easily (and understandably) upset over “the BIG LIE” and LBJ’s role in enlarging the Vietnam conflict. Because of Dad and Mom’s military-life experiences, I was relegated to keeping my opinions on the low-down at home but when asked I was happy to provide a lot of detail as to why our administration should not be trusted. Once Richard Nixon was elected I was freed from the constraints of circumspection. No one that I knew, other than staunch Republicans, liked or trusted Nixon. We’d all hoped that Nixon would keep his promise that we’d “not have Dick Nixon to kick around” after he lost the 1962 California gubernatorial election (to Pat Brown).

By the time I headed for Keokuk, it was pretty clear to me, and virtually everyone I knew, that Nixon’s goose was cooked. There appeared to be little doubt of his guilt in the Watergate scandal. The only questions were how the issues and his status would be resolved.

However, I met an alternate reality upon arriving in southeastern Iowa. For the first time, I was exposed to a culture guarding the assumptive ground at the pole far to the right of my views, but without John Birch-like irrationality. This was Republican country and Nixon was *obviously innocent* of wrong doing and *under attack* by the *liberal media*. Watergate was a blip to be ignored and Nixon’s approach to bringing an end to the war was absolutely the right course of action (rather than the slow, embarrassing, and costly slog to defeat that we liberal Californians knew it to be).

Spending that first month around the Raney residence provided a shocking, detailed, and intimate look at how differently the other half processed the crisis (then did I). I was dumbfounded by the polarization. Well actually, I was dumbfounded by how insular and naïve their points of view struck me as being. I did my best to not break out in a wide smile and victory dance the day that Nixon announced his resignation. I did not say “I told you so” even once.

And yet, I was totally unprepared for the ways that my Midwest Republican friends processed the events. It was if someone had died rather than that justice had been served. First, they went into shock, then denial, then excuse-making and scapegoating, before moving on to ignoring the circumstances and praising the goodness and wisdom of Gerald Ford, especially after he pardoned Nixon. I missed out on the celebratory aspects of getting rid of “tricky Dick.” My local hosts, of course, got past the setback quickly and with as little notice as possible. I suppose this is one reason why it is inevitable that the winners will (and must) write history: The losers can give the appearance of ignoring what just happened while quickly moving on from it.

Before my return to California at the end of the summer, Ann and I took a train trip together to Pueblo Colorado to visit our mutual family friend Annie Cahill and her second husband, Vic Kline (Annie’s first husband, the late Burke Cahill, had been a dear friend of Evangeline and the O’Briens). The trip was delightful in every way imaginable; both Ann and I love trains and we adored Annie Cahill. Annie lavished attention on us and we all told numerous family stories that highlighted the interconnections of our lives through Keokuk.

When I boarded the train, at Fort Madison, Iowa, for my return trip to California, I left the bike behind as it was damaged badly enough that bringing it home wasn’t worth the trouble. That presented a significant difficulty on my return: I had been using the bicycle to get back and forth from work at the *Signal Companies*. Gratefully, I had earned and saved enough money from the gig at *St. Louis Gear* that I could afford the down payment for a car; returning to the *Signal Companies* job ensured adequate money for gas and maintenance. Roger allowed me to continue on the family insurance policy and co-signed the loan for a new icky-green *Fiat* four-door sedan. All-in-all, the summer in Keokuk Iowa turned out more-or-less ok.

Social life, time wasting, and bad note-taking aside, I thrived as a Speech major at Cal State Long Beach. Each day I either walked up the hill or rode a new bike; regardless, the trip was less than 12 minutes door-to-door. I took 18 hours of coursework each semester; almost all of it within the Speech major. Departmental faculty members were highly competent and, in some cases, cutting edge. Ron Applebaum, Karl Anatol, and Richard Porter were well known in the discipline; other professors were very accomplished if less well-known. The classes were interesting and challenging.

Attending college during the final years of the Vietnam War presented numerous opportunities for in-class argument and out-of-class event attendance. We listened to H. Rap Brown, Bobby Seale, and other civil rights leaders on the quad. Often, students challenged authority and expertise within the classroom. But the argumentation was always civil and orderly: there were no violent protests at Long Beach State during that period. The BA degree did not provide exhaustive coverage of the discipline; Speech Communication is very broad. Nevertheless, the coursework provided adequate orientation to most of the important sub-disciplines within the major.

I was particularly enthralled by two courses that were new to the school and were outside the Speech major and department. Offered to all students (regardless of major) through the College of Business (an outfit in which I had little interest), Public Relations I and Public Relations II were presented by Jerome Halprin, a part-time teacher who was President of the California branch of the multinational PR firm, *Ruder & Finn*. The coursework interested me almost as much as did his “PR-war stories,” historic tales about changing the *Marlboro* brand cigarette from its original position as a women’s brand to its eventual “he-man” profile as well as

his role in the later development of *Virginia Slims* and its promotional vehicle, the *Virginia Slims Women's Tennis Tour*. I was, for a time, pretty convinced that public relations and I would be perfect for each other.

However, the teacher and I sometimes surfaced significant disagreements during class. I was learning a lot about communication science and was developing an understanding of empirical methods. Although public relations firms often used various forms of applied research to learn about audiences and buying behavior (market research), they seldom used scientific techniques to inform important decisions. Apparently, at least as our super-star teacher described it, most decisions were made by experienced professionals who came to conclusions (that became action plans) based on gut feelings. I'd say something like:

"You know, they could have run scientific marketing analysis before spending all that money rolling out *Marlboros* to women and failing miserably."

Halprin responded with something like:

"Well, sometimes we made mistakes, but look how it turned out. *Marlboro* became the best-selling brand on the market and then we hit a real home run with *Virginia Slims*.

That's why we pay those guys the big bucks; they know how business works."

I soon came to realize that there were good reasons I avoided the College of Business and PR looked less and less like it was for me.

But what was next? As I approached college graduation, I did not have much of an idea as to what I should do. As late as the December before June graduation, I had made no job applications and had no graduate school plans. However, I did know someone who might be able to help me. Aunt Lucille's youngest daughter, Mary Lou, was married to Neil Anderson. They

lived in Portland raising six children. Mary Lou worked as a nurse while Neil was a sports reporter. Earlier, Neil had covered Portland's minor league professional hockey team, the Buckaroos, for the *Portland Journal*. By 1970, Neil covered the NBA's Portland Trailblazers for *The Oregonian*. I wrote to Neil and reminded him about my high school sports reporting, the short fling with sports journalism at UNR as well as my time in public relations courses at CSULB. I wondered if he had contacts in the sports information business. Neil offered to forward my name and resume to Rod Commons who was then the sports information director at Washington State University in Pullman. Much to my surprise, by February, Mr. Commons contacted me and offered an interview for a job in his office. Over the spring 1975 Easter break I packed Ramon into the Fiat and we headed for Pullman.

Just after I had heard from Mr. Commons, I complicated the WSU situation that wasn't even yet in place. There were not many graduate students in Speech at CSULB, but I met one, James Saucedo, who I really liked. James not only earned his MA at "the Beach," he went on to a long and illustrious career as a professor there. I was very impressed with James and he spoke highly of his time in graduate studies. I figured that maybe I should look into graduate school at WSU. I was headed for a job interview in Pullman anyway; why not apply to graduate school?

I applied for the graduate program in Speech Communication at WSU. By the time Ramon and I made our trip over Easter break, I had received an acceptance letter from the WSU graduate school as well as an offer for a graduate teaching assistantship from the Speech Communication Department. I arranged for an interview with the department chairman the day before the scheduled interview with sports information. After a successful interview in the academic department, I decided that it would be better to stay in school as long as someone was

willing to pay me to do so. I figured that I could always fall back on the job in sports information and so the next day I explained the situation to Mr. Commons; he said that he understood and supported my decision. I would eventually work as a writer in the WSU Sports Information Office over a summer session.

Even though Ramon and I agreed that Pullman was about as far “into the boonies” as either could ever imagine being, I was thrilled to have settled on the direction for my life’s next phase. Further, I was especially pleased that I might be able to make the transition to the life of the mind. Since being taken out of the college preparation program at SAHS I had harbored hurt feelings and worries about the accuracy of my self-evaluation as “smart.” High grades at CSULB had not completely over-written the bad work that I did in high school and junior college. But my new position in graduate school reinforced an important part of my self-concept. Unfortunately, my overall behavior did not come around as quickly as did my sense of self-importance. My time in Pullman was tumultuous and, in some cases, irresponsible. In the end, things worked out ok, but they did so in opposition to my strenuous efforts to screw up my life, big time. And before too long, we’ll explore another name change.



BA Graduation Day, CSULB, 1975