

Bending to the Light



Musings On Issues of
Citizenship

by:
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Bending to the Light

Musings on Issues of Citizenship

and Other Matters

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Introduction

On occasion, I am motivated to write. Subjects vary but increasingly over the last few years I have written about social and political observations. I've assembled this collection of essays, some of which have been previously published, that are focused on a civics theme. A few personal writings are also included to provide some of the background that colors my perspective.

I have a sense that we are presently immersed in a living history that others will write about in the future with the benefits of hindsight and a broad lens. But I am mindful that it is we who must live this history now as it comes to us and as we create it. The choices we make, whether inert or proactive, will define us. They always have. Awareness makes the difference.

To Whom It May Concern.

For the last few years, I have been inundated with email requests from Democratic candidates and organizations far and wide seeking my opinion on surveys, my signature on petitions, and, of course, donations. I get at least a dozen every day and the pace is picking up. So, I thought it might be helpful to declare my various positions in the hope that a non-digital intelligence can reduce the need to ask the same questions.

1. I am a senior citizen located in a Philadelphia suburb.
2. I always vote.
3. I am a registered Democrat and plan to vote that way in the next election.
4. I have read the Constitution, the Mueller Report, the Citizen's United Decision, the Nuremberg Principles, IPCC Reports and the Bible, among many other works to maintain my civic awareness.

5. As a general rule, I haven't signed petitions during this administration because I consider it a fruitless effort. An administration that doesn't obey the law is unlikely to be swayed by a list of names from people that it has no interest in.
6. I have written to my congressman more times than I can count and so far, also consider that a fruitless effort. See above.
7. I have joined protests and marched in the streets.
8. I have volunteered in the community and will continue to do so.
9. I have already signed up for a mail-in ballot.

I will vote this fall as will every member of my family. If you really want to know my opinions, I take the trouble of writing them down, and you can find them here.

On Race and Politics

I live in Levittown Pennsylvania which is a suburb of Philadelphia built in the 1950s. The creation of this community was considered a marvel at the time but in its early years embodied racial discrimination through its sales practices and policies that were driven by widely held racial fear and prejudice. One black family, William and Daisy Meyers, purchased a home and were harassed and threatened until they eventually moved away. This case garnered national attention at the time and remains a shameful part of Levittown's history.

Although I lay my head down on a suburban bed, I have travelled and worked all over this country, like many others in this community, and have had the privilege of working with and getting to know people from every walk of life. Suburbs are no longer the "bubble" they were presumed to be in the '50s. The world has grown smaller and we now have the ability to touch, interact with, and learn from every culture on Earth, if we choose. Many of us choose.

The current civil unrest has grown from past and ongoing injustices that were never addressed which were punctuated by the George Floyd killing. I was horrified to watch the account of a police officer, slowly and with deliberation, take the life of a bound and restrained black man. This was literally dehumanizing and shameful and the outrage and non-violent protest it spawned were justified. The

Black Lives Matter movement is right to protest this and other deaths of its kind.

Some have insidiously used protests to stoke division and fear even to the point of dog whistling to residents (and voters) of suburbs to rekindle the memories of past strife. I believe this political strategy will fail. There are a few points that are worth considering.

- Although the suburbs are still located in the same places, the world has moved beneath their feet. They are no longer the suburbs of a generation ago. That does not mean that racism doesn't exist, it does. But we are aware now and capable of facing the issues before us. We are coming to understand that the only way forward is through – together.
- Barack Obama's presidency brought a new paradigm to the country. We all witnessed, unfiltered, what a good man he was and is. He and his family put a face on the "other" and we all saw that the characterizations of racism were false.

For those who are inclined to respond to the whistle, it is important to remember that it is called a dog whistle for a reason. I will not heel to such a call.

He Ain't Heavy: Current Resonance

Those of us who are old enough to be familiar with the quote “He Ain't Heavy. He's my Brother”, popularized in the late 1960s, may still be moved by it. At the time, I was familiar with the use of the phrase which was adopted in the 1940s to represent the spirit of Boy's Town, an orphanage founded in Nebraska in 1917. I was surprised to learn, thanks to Wikipedia, of much earlier roots that date back to a young Scottish girl carrying her brother, who when asked of her burden replied, "He's na heavy. He's mi brither”.

There is a lot of meaning packed into that reply. It came from a young girl, a child herself, who carried the burden of her brother – selflessly. The present adaptation of the phrase resonated globally in 1969 in a popular song. This was a time of significant events; Richard Nixon became the 37th President, the Beatles broke up as a group, Apollo 11 landed men on the moon, the Boeing 747 entered into commercial service, Woodstock occurred in New York, the Cuyahoga River in Ohio caught fire again, EPA was envisioned, the precursor of the Internet was developed as ARPANET for military use, and the

Vietnam War, with related protests, raged on while peace negotiations were actively underway. This period was a tumultuous and yet promising period in American history, just as it is today. It took determination and many selfless acts, yet we were able to meet our responsibilities then as I'm sure we will now.

Looking back at that time, I believe there was a reason the example of that selfless act and the song that popularized it, took hold; we needed to be reminded that we have a responsibility, one to another. What better example than from a child's selfless act?

The lyrics of the song written by Bob Russell and Bobby Scott reminds us that, "The road is long, with many a winding turn..."

We will find our way again.

Proactive Ignorance

I think we have all experienced situations when someone, including ourselves, sets out to actively avoid knowing something. We've all done it occasionally like when we avoid looking under the hood of our car to find the source of the terrible screeching noise. We know that it must be a \$500 problem at least and we would rather not know even though at some point, that bill will come due. And when it does come due, it's usually at the most inconvenient time, and often with a higher price tag. When I catch myself doing this, I refer to it as Proactive Ignorance because I am actively trying hard to ignore a problem.

Unlike our personal lives, at a government level, we can't afford proactive ignorance on essential matters because at that level there is a responsibility to serve society. Objectivity is a fundamental requirement of government, and because a government represents the interests of communities large and small, there can be severe societal consequences if personal ideology hinders the execution of that responsibility. I fear that this is the case with the issue of climate change. Few things loom as large and consequential

as climate change, and the government's role in assessing and preparing us is crucial.

Climate change impacts will be felt across all borders and in all societies – an all-hands-on-deck approach to understanding and responding to climate change impacts is a fundamental requirement. However, I was deeply concerned when our government leadership proposed Proactive Ignorance as a matter of policy when it comes to climate change. The proposed deep cuts to climate change programs in many science agencies with a declaration that “we will not spend any money on that” ensure that we will not have the scientific and technical resources that we will need to adapt.

Tension has existed in the past between science and ideology – indeed, despite the measurements of astronomers and countless observations from seamen circumnavigating the earth, the Flat Earth Society continued to espouse a belief in a flat earth until observations from space became irrefutable. The denial of the basic geometry of the earth lasted centuries for some. However, that belief, if held today, would be inconsequential and perhaps even quaint if espoused by a dotty old uncle. No amount of "belief" would change the known geometry of the earth. Climate change is a different issue entirely because it is so consequential. Individual beliefs matter because individual actions matter and there is a proven (yet often denied) link between what we do as humans and what we experience as climate.

No place on earth is expected to be unaffected by climate change – the impacts of these changes will not be limited to some remote Pacific atoll. We can expect changes in many areas – population migration, desertification, rainfall frequency, intensity and duration, disease and pest propagation, agriculture, infrastructure design, coastal housing risk, insurance coverage and premiums, naval facilities, fishing, ocean currents, reef vitality, water, and wastewater treatment and security among many others. None of these impacts can be ignored, and all will require a response. Our choice will be to mitigate as much as we can and adapt wisely or respond in crisis mode. No matter what, the bill will come due.

Climate change is consequential – lives will change, and we will be required to adapt our society to an untold number of changing conditions. There is no place in our governing policies for Proactive Ignorance.

[Author's note – This was written before the pandemic and I am certain that we could substitute the term 'coronavirus' for 'climate change' and arrive at the same conclusion.]

Rights and Responsibilities

It is appropriate to think about our hard-fought freedoms on July 4th and celebrate a time when we decided, as a body of people, to no longer kneel before a king. We charted our own course and formed a nation which declares our rights and responsibilities as citizens, all of which would be equal under the law.

As we come forward in time from our first day of independence to this, it is important to remember that freedom is not free – it was paid for by the lives and sacrifices of those who came before. It is a price we continue to pay even to this day.

In the midst of the current pandemic we have been reminded of our responsibilities to one another as citizens. We have been asked to wear a piece of clothing so that others may live. This, at most, is an inconvenience, but is a powerful life-saving tool. Some have objected to this inconvenience on the basis that it infringes on their First Amendment Right of Free Expression; in essence arguing that they cannot be compelled to protect the lives of

themselves or others if doing so inhibits their free expression. I don't agree.

None of our rights as citizens are boundless; they are bracketed by the concept of the common good. We are not permitted to falsely yell "Fire" in a crowded theater because of the harm it could cause others; we are required to wear seatbelts or face fines, we are not permitted to express ourselves by running naked through the streets due to the offense it may cause; and we are not permitted to publicly divulge military secrets because of risk to our troops and nation. There are indeed limits to our free expression impulses intended to serve the common good of society.

The reliance on the Constitution or the broader legal system to proscribe a code of conduct, one to another, will never be enough. Words alone will not define our mutual respect and caring that must be at the root of any community. This cannot come from without, no matter how elegant the legal prose. We have to care and that uniquely comes from within.

Wear the damn mask.

Bending to the Light

We have all watched trees grow with roots that reach deep into the soil for life sustaining nutrients, massive trunks that stand fast in the torrent, and leaf-filled branches that reach into the air in their search for the sun. And where an obstacle exists that limits its access to life-giving rays, it shifts its woody density and bends to the light. The image of such a tree, mere yards from where I sit, is an apt analogy for this moment in history.

Although there is much to be anxious about in our current political climate, I have been heartened to see the quality of the people this country attracted to government service. Sadly, I only became aware of them as they left our service. I have been humbled by the examples they set; their faithfulness to an ideal and an oath. I marveled at the courage and professionalism of an ambassador who served our country faithfully, at the courage of a colonel who served our country honorably and well, and for the lawyers who pursued justice for our democracy. These men and women have all been moved to serve. It is my hope that I will be worthy of the sacrifices they made on behalf of all of us.

There are many parallels currently being drawn to dark times in our recent history. These are serious challenges which require serious civil response. And for these challenges to come in the midst of a pandemic only heightens the peril. Yet, I am encouraged by the examples of those who have stood and delivered when it was necessary. Just like that tree I contemplate in the morning sun, we too will need to stand firm, lean in, and bend to the light.

Dereliction

We've heard the word 'dereliction' used a lot recently and I assumed that I understood the full meaning of it. I was most familiar with the word when used in the phrase 'dereliction of duty' as has been prominently used in current discourse. I assumed it referred to a failure to carry out a duty or responsibility. As it turns out, I didn't have this quite right.

My well-worn Webster's dictionary defines 'dereliction' as: "deliberate or conscious neglect; negligence." The important aspect of the meaning that I had not fully grasped is that the negligence is deliberate; it is a conscious act. Use of the term 'dereliction of duty' indicates therefore that the failure of duty to which it refers is intentional. A parallel in law would characterize such as willful or gross negligence which itself is defined as: "A lack of care that demonstrates reckless disregard for the safety or lives of others..."

Is it accurate to say that an intentional failure to act in the face of a pandemic constitutes 'dereliction of duty'? Yes, I believe it is. Is it also fair to say that a

conscious failure to act to protect troops in a battlefield is also a 'dereliction of duty'? There too, I believe the answer is yes. Yet what recourse is there when a high government official is derelict in their duty?

Sovereign immunity in English common law was established to protect the King and his administration of government. The concept is reported to date back to the Romans with the maxim *rex non potest peccare* which translates to 'The King can do no wrong'. This concept forms the basis of governmental immunity that exists in the United States today. It has no place in our democracy.

All holders of high office in the US must first and foremost be citizens. It is our citizenship, not our bloodline, that affords any of us the opportunity to aspire to high office. One of the primary tenants of citizenship is that we are subject to the laws of this country. Citizenship is not deferred when one attains high office; it is in fact foundational.

The concept of Sovereign Immunity must be purged to permit timely legal protections from those in high office whose 'Dereliction of Duty' has resulted in harm to our democracy and the citizens therein. No citizen is above the law. We have no Kings here.

“You Should Be Ashamed”

Last week I attended a rally, a protest of sorts, that came up suddenly in response to the firing of Jeff Sessions as Attorney General and the appointment of a replacement out of the defined order of succession. This is not something I regularly do. I had expressed concerns in emails to my elected officials but given their tepid responses, I decided it was time to do more than write my Congressman and Senator. Clearly, they are not listening to my singular voice. When my wife and daughter decided it was time to protest, I agreed, and together we went in search of the rally.

The gathering took place in the parking lot of an office building that contained my Congressman’s office. I was surprised at the number of people there and was further amazed at the number of senior citizens like me. Perhaps the shared memory of the abuse of power during the Nixon administration was a driving force for many of us. Yet, I was equally pleased to see the number of energetic younger people who, absent the Nixon experience, felt compelled by present circumstances to engage civically.

The gathering was peaceful and energetic. Young and old, we enjoyed each other's company and carried placards urging, among other things, that the Mueller investigation be protected and allowed to run unhindered to completion. Several speakers addressed the group – all focused on a peaceful protest. The rise in hate crimes and incivility was noted, and one theme above all was emphasized; that the rule of law should be followed. As I stood there with my wife and daughter, I was pleased that this protest had no comparison with those of the '60s – after all we were arguing for the rule of law not against it.

We spent some time alongside a curb that lined a nearby highway, placards raised, cheering when a car drove by and honked in support. My wife pointed out to me that there was one woman in a car driving by who shouted to the crowd, "You should be ashamed of yourselves." This heckling hadn't registered with me, but after my wife and daughter both recounted it to me, it caused me to ask myself, why would any of this be shameful and how could someone driving past in a car have knowledge of the character of any of these people who were gathered in peaceful protest?

As I later mulled this experience over, I reached for my dictionary and learned that Webster defines "ashamed" as:

"feeling shame: distressed or embarrassed by feelings of guilt, foolishness or disgrace."

I admit that there are many things I could have done better in my life, but gathering in peaceful protest and listening to neighbors and fellow citizens speak for the rule of law and the rights we all share is not one of them.

So, after giving this some thought, I've concluded that an invective shouted from a passing car merits all the consideration that the heckler gave to others. "Shame" is a personal judgment arrived at following reflection. There is none here.

Playing the Long Game -

A Personal Reflection

I have stopped worrying about trying to accumulate personal accomplishments. When I was young, I was an ass, driven to survive chaos and dysfunction. By the time I was a teenager, I had realized that I would never reach the goals that religion defined for me. I was by that set of standards, already unworthy, or so I had been told. I spent a great deal of time striving to be worthy and failing in the effort.

In time I learned not to accept that verdict and relied on my own judgment instead. In the process, it became necessary for me to know myself, to do a personal inventory in a 12-Step sense, and get to work at making the most of this life. I have learned a lot, often in small lessons that seemed insignificant at the time. I have been fortunate to have had many teachers and mentors, not the least of which are my wife and children. And I have become a better man having watched my father become a better man in his struggle to sobriety.

To be sure, I screw things up and get things wrong, but I am now aware. I try, reassess, and try again to push against my personal limitations – there are so

many. I am chipping away at them, and I find myself in a constant state of change. I've asked as I have grown older "What is the point of all of this introspection at this stage of my life?" and my answer came quickly to mind; much about me is not yet done. I need to be a better husband, father, brother, and friend – and more broadly to become a better person more engaged in other's lives than my own. I am working on that. I also find that I am still wildly curious about the world near and far and I am determined to know as much as I can.

I am in the fall of my life with many more years behind than ahead, but I am not melancholy about that reality – I love this season. I have hiked along this trail for a while now, sometimes stumbling and veering off the path, or circumnavigating obstacles too often of my own making. I have taken a moment now to pause and look back over the ground I've covered and have seen that the path has been on a gentle rise up out of the valley. From this perspective I had come to understand that my worthiness, which I fretted about in my youth, was established long before I got here; it was not determined by my parents, a boss, or a religious functionary. I have learned to consider myself from the inside-out and not from the outside-in.

As I turn again to contemplate the path ahead, it is encouraging to look as far forward as possible to what may be, all the while appreciating how important it is to be mindful of the small steps that lead to that better self. And I know that if I get

caught in the bindings of my limitations and fail to reach the goal, I will reassess and try again. I am in this for the long game.

Health Insurance - An Opinion

I've never really understood how we got where we are with health care in this country. It always surprised me that the primary conduit for the provision of health care was an employer. Really – what does an employer have to do with healthcare? When I was a kid, I thought perhaps this was based on some civil policy that required us to merit health care and work was the measure of merit. That didn't make sense to me either – the coal miner's widow, orphans, retirees, and the disabled were among the many exceptions that came to mind. So, I struggled with the question that as a society, how do you deal with the basic human need for health care that we all have? I lost touch with this question as I moved through life. I guess I assumed we would evolve to a place where there would be an answer to this question in my lifetime. So far, it's not looking so good.

In my early years, I was surprised to learn that provision of health care through employers was not the result of some deeply thought through social policy, but came about because companies such as General Motors wanted to attract and retain skilled

workers and offered health insurance as an employment incentive. Other employers soon followed suit either through a desire to compete for labor or the result of union pressure and the practice quickly became the custom in the United States. What resulted was the provision of health insurance that varied widely in coverage based on the contract terms negotiated between thousands of individual employers and their providers. Health insurance benefits were entirely voluntary, and many small businesses could not carry the cost. So, if you were not employed or employed by a company that did not provide this benefit, health insurance for you and your family was not yet a reality. This reality was the status of health care as I came to know it as an adult.

When my wife and I had our first child, we had no health insurance, but the cost was manageable – less than a semester at Penn State in the 70s. We paid our doctor and hospital bills out-of-pocket on a monthly payment plan until they were paid in full. We often joked with our daughter that we got her on an installment plan. By the time our second daughter came to us, we had insurance coverage through an employer, and it was fortunate indeed since she was born with a small hole in her heart that would eventually require surgery. However, when I changed jobs, health insurance ended with the old employer and began with a different provider through the new employer and the pre-existing condition clause kicked in. We were again fortunate that surgery occurred shortly after the pre-existing condition clause timed out.

Throughout this period, even with insurance coverage, my wife became a gladiator who did battle with insurance company representatives who would deny payment or coverage without reason or logic. This patchwork of health care coverage and at times arbitrary interpretation was exasperating. This system didn't seem to me to correspond with the world-class view we have of American institutions.

Medical and insurance costs increased dramatically throughout much of my lifetime. Employers responded by changing providers and joining larger consortiums in the hope of gaining some negotiating leverage, but cost increases continued beyond their control. Employers don't typically have any direct control over medical costs – they deal with the insurance company and not the doctors, hospitals or pharmaceutical companies. Their ability to control health care cost drivers essentially doesn't exist at the employer level, and it comes as no surprise that many employers just stopped trying – after all, they are in the business of baking bread, building houses, or manufacturing furniture and health care is not their focus. The inevitable result is that their capacity to absorb costs topped out and were passed on to the employees in the form of shared premiums, co-pays, and reduced coverage.

That incentive GM nurtured long ago has now become a burden for many businesses, and the trend seems to be to push more and more of the cost onward to the employee. The handwriting is on the wall. When it comes to the provision of health

insurance, it seems that employers are in a race to the bottom where the employee will entirely bear health insurance costs. And then where will we be? At that point, employers will become no more than an administrative conduit. Imagine that – thousands upon thousands of employers, with little or no capacity or incentive for cost control, acting as purchasers and providers of health insurance who may each have different contract and coverage terms. Individuals will continue to have fewer options as long as the employer remains the “provider”.

I believe that it is time to de-couple the provision of health insurance from employers. Their hearts are no longer in it, and it is a distraction from their core business mission. Instead, I believe it is time, indeed past time, for universal coverage through a single-payer system – like every other advanced nation has put in place.

We also must get past the ideological disruptions associated with this issue. Whether it is as the result of a masterful public relations strategy or happenstance, we have been fighting among ourselves rather than focusing on the root problem: our health care costs are out of control. Our fight should not be about who gets health care coverage, but about why the coverage costs so much.

We should be wondering why the cost of some medical procedures vary widely among hospitals in the same region or why the price of pharmaceuticals

is so high in the US compared with other countries. It is to me unconscionable that a cost control strategy proposed by some is to deny coverage to fellow citizens. We can certainly debate the details, but at present, I fear that we have no goal – we argue and push/pull health care coverage and conditions in an ideological tug of war. But if we are at war ideologically, what is it we are fighting for? What is the stated goal?

In my view, if we are to live up to the promise and responsibility of a compassionate society, we should define a simple goal:

All citizens of the United States will have health care.

We can and should work from there.

Plain Spoken

I guess I've always wondered why God isn't plain spoken. I wasn't around when Moses or Jesus walked the earth and I have not been a witness to a burning bush or to a man walking on water. It has been 2,000+ years since God or his (or her) son have spoken. I am left with accounts of these events written by men, often in parables that are interpreted by other men. Why the silence? For God, surely communication would not be a problem; a brief visit to Times Square would do the trick and I am certain that access to cell phone numbers for a world-wide text message or tweet would not be that difficult. I'm also certain that God's Facebook page would be awesome.

If God chose to talk with us after returning from a 2,000+ year hiatus, what would she have to say; what questions would she ask of us? Perhaps: "What have you done with the place?" or "Where is that cute little sparrow that I left living in the Florida woodlands?" or "Why is it so hot here?" In frustration she might also exclaim, "Why are you squabbling like children? We have work to do and clearly you are not yet ready."

In considering this fanciful conversation with God, I realized that I am not in a position to answer her questions. Silence might just be OK for now; perhaps she can check back in another 1,000 years.

Pendulum

A pendulum can be a soothing thing to watch as the rhythm of the back and forth motion sets a pace that we resonate with. And if it is accompanied by a 'tick-tock' from an old grandfather's clock, the effect is almost hypnotic. If the length of the rod or wire is long enough and the bob at the end heavy enough, we can also get a sense of the rotation of the earth we all live on, because the pendulum does not return to the same point – the earth has moved beneath it. Many of us have seen this at the four-story Foucault pendulum at the Franklin Institute. That seemingly simple movement of a pendulum can sometimes be used to illuminate hidden realities.

We often use the analogy of a pendulum when we discuss change – like a pendulum, societies are always in motion and ever-changing. Many pundits use this analogy to describe the swing in voter's preferences to a conservative or liberal direction as if their individual ideals are at opposite ends of the pendulum's arc. They are quick to note that a swing to one direction will often be followed by a swing to the opposite direction; sooner or later. I've used this same analogy myself, but I think I'm selling it short.

Truth-be-told, I don't want the pendulum to swing back to the same place. Like Foucault's pendulum, I want it to turn back to a different place, a better place, I want the earth to move beneath it. I want my neighbors to have secure jobs, reliable and affordable medical care and access to affordable education for themselves and their children. I want to be able to face our challenges confidently and arrive at a better place – together. There is no better time than now. In this, I am reminded of the quote from Mother Teresa:

Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin.

Laughter

I am a father, grandfather, and officially a senior citizen. Yet even at this age, I still hold memories of my own father who passed many years ago. I've noticed when I think of him, the first thing that comes to mind is his laugh. I can still hear it today. It was, as I've come to define it, a 'real' laugh – unconstrained by circumstance. When I would hear him laugh, there was never a question of its authenticity; I knew he was enjoying the moment. And if he happened to be teasing you at the time, his laugh would be accompanied by a devilish twinkle in his eye.

We have long known that laughter is good for you; physically and mentally. The benefits of laughter have now been well studied – it relieves stress, relaxes muscles, boosts the immune system, releases endorphins, increases blood flow, and more. Although the science of laughter is becoming better defined, it is the practice of it that eludes me too often.

I do not have my father's sense of humor; mine is what I would consider dry. Although my funny bone

appears to be connected in all the right places, I suffer from the disease of 'Analysis' – an affliction known to take things too seriously. I would like to believe this disease is work related, resulting from my profession as an engineer, but on reflection, I think it is the reverse; I chose my profession having already been so afflicted.

In my search for a cure, I've made a bit of a study of laughter. In my father's case, his laughter was completely natural – organic if you will. It required no artificial ingredients, no prompts or prodding and it knew no limits. That laugh could be the carrier for withering criticism, self-deprecation, or a simple reaction to absurdity. It was quite genuine. Another source that I find genuine is with children at play. They laugh continuously - sometimes punctuated by high pitched screaming while laughing. The genesis of this laughter seems to be pure delight in being alive and cavorting friends.

Laughter at social gatherings doesn't have the same 'feel' to it; it is either constrained by social circumstances or prompted by the same. Social laughing often originates in the chest or worse yet, in the head. It doesn't engage the gut. I am not fooled by this laughter.

I have spent many nights working at my desk as the house becomes quiet and lights blink on one-by-one. It is inevitable that my wife and daughter will eventually seek to un-wind from the day and find a comedy to watch for a while. When they do, I find

myself pushing back from the keyboard to just listen to them laugh. They know the secret like my father did! They laugh from the gut and it doesn't take much to get them going. From my vantage point, it is very much like the sounds from the playground – joyful.

Pardon me, please. I hear laughter and I need to see what's so funny. I hope it's a cure.

It Matters

There are certain traits we look for in our leaders at all levels of society. We expect leaders, particularly those that seek high office, to be the best of us and to exhibit a code of conduct that we can all look to for inspiration. History has shown that it is difficult for leaders to live up to our expectations. Indeed, it is difficult for any of us, as citizens, to live up to some expectations ourselves. Even so, what we seek in our leaders are ideals that have defined, and will continue to define, the character of our society. There are many good and talented people among us and as we seek leadership, we need to be mindful that a good person is not necessarily a perfect person when viewed through the lens of our individual life experiences. We do the best we can; we make imperfect choices, but choose we must. And as we make choices, what are the attributes that matter to us?

What matters to me are many of the traits that I have seen in neighbors, friends, and family. The mechanic who has worked on my cars for decades has always been honest and fair in our dealings. The contractor who has worked on my house has always

been hard-working, competent, and on time. The nurse practitioner who helps guide me through the travails of aging has always been respectful. Men and women who have served in the military to stand on the wall and protect the rest of us have always been courageous. These, and so many more, are the things that matter to me.

Honesty Matters

Integrity Matters

Competence Matters

Fairness Matters

Respect Matters

Honor Matters

Trust Matters

Empathy Matters

In the Trenches

Some people come into and out of our lives making faint impressions. Others, we never know, yet so many of them contribute to our lives in ways we may give little thought to.

When I was a newbie just out of college on my first large-scale construction site, all of the activity seemed complicated and somewhat overwhelming. I spent a great deal of time admiring the skill of the men who ran the big machines, built the reinforced concrete structures, or installed and connected the miles of wiring to the systems that controlled it all. I was humbled by what I did not know and strived to learn everything I could.

During that project, I came upon a man digging a trench; he was a big muscular man who labored all day long and appeared, at least to me, to be indefatigable. I watched this man work day after day; he kept to himself a lot, took his scheduled breaks, and stepped back into his work with remarkable stoicism, - unconcerned about the length of the task before him. Shovelful by shovelful, he

worked his way along and at the end of the day, that trench laid true.

I admit that I was curious about this man and I finally got up the courage to talk with him. I admired his work and asked him how he could do this work all day, and do it so well. He smiled and perhaps thought that I was pulling his leg, but I think he recognized my earnestness. He told me that he had been doing this work for a long time and learned a few things. He spun his shovel into position effortlessly, as if it was a matchstick, and explained that he learned to set a rhythm and with each bite of the shovel he would always take the same amount of soil; if it was too full and heavy, he would burn out too soon, and his body would pay the price the next day. And if the shovel was not full enough, it would be wasted effort. So, every time he had to dig, he set a pace and got on with the work.

I have thought about that moment time and again. I considered then that this man's approach to his work was remarkable and inspiring. I also felt that it was rare, but I have been proven wrong about that assumption.

Throughout a 40+ year career, I have traveled to many places and worked with many people. I have been in awe of crane operators who pick and set loads of tremendous weight with high precision, - sometimes blindly with no more than hand signals to guide their response on the controls. I've watched the shaking hands of an environmental technician

while she extracted samples from an abandoned chemical reactor known to have manufactured Agent Orange and contaminated with Dioxin. I have worked through the night with crews to keep systems running for a paper mill coming to life and at military bases to extract and treat groundwater. I am fascinated with millwrights who set equipment with exacting precision and I admire the work of operators who come to know their systems intimately, - not only by the readouts from their controls, but also by their senses through the hum of a powerful blower, the unloading pulse of a compressor, the glaze on a drive belt, or the color of a chemical reaction.

As a society, we lament the loss of manufacturing jobs and the export of our technology away from the people who built it. Those people still exist, their skills still exist, but I fear that we have not planned well for our future or theirs. The old ones are passing and with them go the skills and experience of wonderful craftsmen and women. Perhaps this is how it's always been with the passing of one generation to the next. I am concerned and hopeful at the same time.

The hope stems from the aftermath of a recent storm that took down trees and power lines around my home. The crew of a nearby tree service company made short work of the fallen trees. They worked as a team, skillfully and professionally. Hours later a crew from the power company (PECO) showed up in the cold night, scaled ladders in the

dark, and illuminated only by flashlights, worked to repair the storm-damaged wiring. Their work too was done professionally, and they moved on through the night to the next neighbor and the next task – unseen by most of us. I admired their work ethic.

I was grateful decades ago for the lesson the laborer in the trench taught me as a wide-eyed college kid. I am grateful still. At the end of the day, your work speaks for you and of you.

Humanness

What is consciousness really? Is it merely the function of the brain that has its origins in the organic processes of that organ? Is there something spiritual about the nature of consciousness? If so, how do we characterize the awareness of the less advanced creatures – our faithful pets, whales traversing the seas, or foraging animals in search of their next meal? Is consciousness meted out in degrees according to the size of our brain or is there some other factor to consider? There are apparent differences in how consciousness is expressed by creatures of the earth and similarities too. And if intelligence is a metric used to characterize consciousness, humans sit atop the ranking – for now.

One expression of consciousness is the ability to think and reason; to take in information, evaluate it with the aid of our accumulated experience and knowledge and decide a course of action or inaction. Other creatures are also capable of reasoning on some level which has helped them navigate the pathways of evolution. However, Man is believed to be the only creature with the ability to think

abstractly – to ponder and consider possibilities; in a word, to imagine. Why is this so?

Imagination and its cohort curiosity, are among the greatest attributes of our humanness. To be curious, to think abstractly and to imagine set us apart from other creatures and lead us to places beyond ourselves; into art, exploration, and compassion. Absent these aspects of our consciousness, we are earth-bound, unable to touch the stars.

To see curiosity and imagination in full bloom one needs only to watch a child explore life. At some point in our lives, we've all witnessed a child in the process of discovery, propelled by its curiosity. And I imagine that when we had that experience, it brought with it a smile of recognition and remembrance. We too once looked at the world in awe.

As we mature and set aside our childhood, the press of life can turn our attention to the mundane – the hunting and gathering necessary to maintain our existence. We hardly take notice as a falling star skips across the night sky or as a young, fresh-faced student finds her voice in citizenship. To be true to our humanness is to be aware and as a small child in the process of discovery, to stand in awe of the world and to be curious about why we are here.

A Fiction by Any Other Name Is Still A Fiction – An Opinion

The concept of legal personhood for an organization reportedly dates to Roman law. In our present experience, we often think of a fictitious person (in Latin, *Persona ficta*) as it applies to corporations, but it can also refer to governments and other institutions. Merriam Webster defines a fictitious person as;

“A supposed but in fact nonexistent person referred to in some legal documents or proceedings.”

It further defines a corporation as;

“A body formed and authorized by law to act as a single person...”

This concept serves as a convenience for society when it interacts with an institution and as such, establishes rights and responsibilities associated with the actions of such a fictitious ‘person’ within society. Legal rulings have gone so far as to extend the concept of citizenship to corporations under some circumstances. The term ‘Corporate Citizen’ has been in our common usage for some time and

we seldom think deeply about it when we hear the term or use it ourselves. In our communities, we often refer to a “Good Corporate Citizen” as one that donates to a charitable cause, sponsors a Little League team, or encourages its employees to participate in community service projects.

Many institutions belong to associations formed in common cause. This may be true of corporations, governments, unions, or almost any collection of like-minded entities you can imagine. Often, their purpose is to help and support one another, but it is also true that they act politically within our society, and as such represent a special interest skewed toward the beliefs or expectations of their membership. Legal rulings have affirmed the right of free speech to corporations, and one of the most recent and impactful decisions, *Citizens United*, judged that the expenditure of money by a corporation in political activity is free speech. This, I believe, is where the logic train has come off the rails and has so skewed our democracy as to be extremely harmful.

In our consideration of the rights of a corporation, it should be remembered that corporate personhood is a fiction; which as Merriam Webster defines it is: ***“a useful illusion or pretense.”*** I would argue that illusions don’t have free speech rights. The only such rights that a corporation, union, or institution of any kind should have, would flow from the citizens who are represented by the institution. Thus, if persons of the corporation wish the corporation to speak for

them on issues of common cause, they are free to lend their voices to the corporation, (or union, trade association, government, etc.). Such a use of a person's right requires consent. The same concept should apply to money associated with that speech; individual contributions from citizens within the organization can be used by the organization to underwrite the cost of the "speech". However, the institution should not undertake speech that is not authorized or funded by the citizens it represents.

The problem arises, as is the present case when the institution acts on its own and produces or underwrites "speech". Activities and associated costs are controlled by a few individuals within the institution who may or may not be citizens as would be the case for a company with foreign investors or ownership. Thus, we are giving a voice to foreign influence in our political process. Additionally, institutional costs are internalized in the organization, spread throughout the organizational structure and are underwritten by the membership, whether or not each agrees with and wants to contribute to the speech. In the case of institutions providing goods or services to the public, the cost of speech becomes integrated into the price of its products and services and is thus underwritten by the non-consenting public as a pass-through cost. In this manner, relatively few individuals, in control of institutional revenue streams, speak through a megaphone while the voices of individual citizens are relegated to background noise. And it is often the case that the megaphone is paid for by the same

non-consenting citizens whose own views have been rendered mute.

This once-useful illusion is killing our democracy.

Fields of Stone

My father was an alcoholic from whom I learned many lessons. In some cases, they were lessons about what not to do or what not to be; the negative example of an alcoholic's life stood before me in clear view. In other cases, the example and the lessons were positive, and in my later years, I've come to realize that in many ways, I was lucky to have had the experience. When I've mentioned this to friends in conversation, a quizzical expression and an unspoken question soon follow; How could someone be fortunate to have had an alcoholic father? Let me explain.

There is not much that I can point to that was fun about growing up as a son to an alcoholic father. The social and psychological pitfalls have been well documented by others. And yet, it taught me much that I needed to learn. Alcoholism, like all addictions, has broad impacts well beyond the addicted individual. For my mother and us seven children, the effects were deep and ever-present as we grew up. But I remember the day that it began to change which required me to do one of the hardest things

that I had done in my life to that point – I said no to my father.

Like many who had (or have) a family member struggling with addiction, life was filled with promises of change that are never kept. It is exhausting to care so much, hope so much, and despair so much. One day, when I was perhaps 17 years old, my father said he wanted to try again. He just needed a ride, he said, when I went to the bar to meet him.

This was a story I heard so many times before and I was tired of the heartache and more than a little angry. I left the bar while he finished his beer not knowing what I should do and wondered where I could go for advice. A friend recalled a place he drove by where the “drunks” met and I put the car in gear in search of the meeting. I pulled into the parking lot of an Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meeting place with no ideas and no plan. I got out of my car just as a man was crossing to the building and I stopped him to ask questions.

There in the parking lot, I told him my story and asked that stranger for advice. As he took a moment to reply, I watched as a deep and knowing sadness washed over him and, as compassionately as he could, said to me, “Son, as long as your father is sitting on a bar stool, he doesn’t want to be sober yet. When he wants it, he will find the way.” Although this wasn’t the advice I expected, it rang true to me. I returned to the bar to tell my father no

and faced the shouting and cursing that followed. Three days later he entered rehab, and to this day, I don't know how he got there.

Dad fought his way back to life slowly, in small steps – it is difficult to plow a field of stones. That place I stopped at for advice became his daily meeting place where he received the support from others on the road to recovery. In time, he became a help to others and would talk at gatherings and high school assemblies whenever he could. I attended open AA meetings with him to hear the stories of others in recovery and on one occasion heard him tell his story from the back row in the audience. It was hard, but it was good. When he suffered a stroke that took his speech and movement away, he fought again, confronted the challenge, trained himself to speak and walk and continued to live his life.

When my father passed, he had been sober for twenty years. A eulogy by one of his friends succinctly put it; “The SOB made it.” I knew what he meant and considered it high praise. I was able to spend all of those years with him getting to know him in his sobriety. As I have acknowledged before, I became a better man watching him become a better man. I realize that I have my own fields of stone to plow, but I am indeed fortunate that my father showed me how.

I have decided now to set this memory aside for a time and let my father rest in my thoughts. I will see

him again soon enough, and I expect we will talk well into the night.

Familiar Echoes

If you live long enough, you may catch up to history plodding along around the next bend, perhaps dressed in new garb, but offering the same lessons.

Men, in the human sense and not the gender sense, are interesting creatures. We have the ability to contemplate, think abstractly, look back into memory and project forward into the future. But we also forget and find comfort in proactive ignorance. We often fail to recognize the lessons of our human experience even as their familiar echoes wash over us.

Although I was born after WWII, I have recently thought about the legacy of the Nuremberg and related trials that occurred in its aftermath. The atrocities that occurred during the war characterize one of the darkest periods in all of human history. The rise to power of Adolf Hitler occurred throughout civil institutions and in large and small towns alike. Old and existing grievances were re-kindled, scapegoats identified, laws were passed to restrict the rights of citizens, and civil norms were ignored or swept away. I imagine it was frightening

for those who continued to live by civilized norms while those very norms were swept away. Hitler was a popular figure and the newsreels of the time captured the throngs of cheering people enthralled with his oratory as the march to war and human depravity gained momentum.

This period in our history has been well studied not only as a world-wide military conflict but also as a deep dive into our human nature. What led ordinary human beings to support or commit such atrocities to fellow human beings? When I think about that history, I am well aware that Hitler did not rise to power on his own; he had a lot of help. That is perhaps what surprises me most about that era. At some level, I can understand how an individual can be devoid of empathy and live a life of hubris. That loss of a moral center is an attribute of a dark and chilling soul. But what of all the people who existed around Hitler through which he acted? How could otherwise conscionable people condone or commit such unconscionable acts? Each of these people were links in a chain; words were spoken, calls were made, orders were given, and salutes returned crisply down the line until bullets and gas chambers sprang into life to carry out the deadly intent of the spoken word. Every act along this chain of events was carried out by a person passing the deadly intent onward. Many would later claim that they were just following orders.

When the chaos and dread of this war finally settled, an attempt was made to hold people accountable.

The effects of this downward spiral into inhumanity permeated all of German social structures and many awoke from this evil fever with guilt and shame that would last a lifetime and beyond. Trials were held at the end of the war to bring justice to the worst of the worst and a common defense strategy emerged; ‘We were following the orders of a superior.’ It is a position that argues that an individual is free to suspend his or her own moral and ethical responsibilities to carry out the immoral or unethical acts dictated by a superior. It proved to be a failed argument. From these trials, multiple principles were defined which are now known as the Nuremberg Principles. They are worth recalling, slightly re-cast for our time.

Principle I Any person who commits a criminal act is responsible and liable.

Principle II Lack of a criminal penalty does not release a person of responsibility.

Principle III A person’s status as a Head of State or responsible government official does not release them from responsibility under the law.

Principle IV Following orders from a government or superior does not release a person from responsibility under the law.

- Principle V** Any person has a right to a fair trial based on facts and law.
- Principle VI** Unlawful crimes include; Crimes Against Peace, War Crimes, and Crimes Against Humanity.
- Principle VII** Complicity in crime is a crime itself.

Although these events took place at a different time and place or that the participants spoke a different language, it makes little difference. This was a human experience. This is our human history.

As our experience rushes head-long down our present path, I can now see the trailing edges of these past events; I can see the banners waving and hear the roar of the crowds as a megaphoned voice urges the frenzy higher. My now urgent question is; Will we merge into this past having forgotten its lessons, or will we awaken to acknowledge it, confront it, and learn from it as we evolve to a different future?

Evolution of Evolution

Charles Darwin taught us much about evolution. His voyages, research, and observations provided the bases for his conviction of the common origins of man with other species and brought 'natural selection' into our thinking about evolution.

Much of the force of evolution derives from environmental pressure as can be discerned for example for some species of birds which develop strong short beaks ideal for the cracking of tough seeds found in their habitat while others developed long pointed beaks to allow them to pursue fish as their food source. These birds adapted to their environment physically to enable them to survive. This process of adaptation to natural conditions 'selects' a species that is capable of adaptation for survival and is thus the meaning behind the term 'survival of the fittest.' Examples of the process of natural selection are innumerable and are the result of a continuous requirement for all species for food, shelter, and safety to survive.

Current human evolution is chronicled by the African excavations in the Olduvai Gorge from *Homo habilis*

through *Homo erectus* to our present state as *Homo sapien*. It is the size of our brain, among other features, that distinguishes us from our predecessors. That evolution, from *Homo habilis* to *Homo sapien*, took over a million years to unfold.

Since man arrived at the top of the food chain, there has been another force competing with natural selection to influence the pace and direction of evolution. Man's practice of cultivation and cross-breeding of animals has influenced the dominance of some plants and animals that are now the basis of modern agriculture. Our use of tools and technology has kept us at the top of the food chain and continues to define, not natural selection, but anthropomorphic selection. And this selection process is occurring at a different time scale entirely – spanning generations compared with hundreds of thousands of years for some natural processes.

We have stood erect for hundreds of thousands of years and are at a point where many are insulated from the daily pressures of the pursuit for food, shelter, and safety. Absent these pressures, what now guides our current development and evolution?

In a world that has grown so much smaller, everything we do creates ripples that expand well beyond our initial intent. All our work and creation are evolutionary in a sense too, - it builds on the work and experience of those that have come before. The pace and expansion of change increase with each new wave of creativity and development.

It seems we are limited only by our ignorance; by those things, we don't yet know or have not yet considered.

The rapid pace of our present development has led to the point where a human body can be modified at will through rigorous training, nutritional support, and medical procedures to achieve Olympic physical mastery or a desired concept of beauty in a single lifetime. And the knowledge that took centuries to emerge from the human crucible can now be shared globally in milliseconds. What does all this mean with respect to our evolution? Is there a goal to this development; an intention we are following to bring us further along in our evolution?

Our focus on the rapid expansion of technology intended to ease the burdens of life and reduce the natural pressures for survival seems to have rushed past a key pathway - the evolution of the mind-body connection. I have always been fascinated with the Placebo Effect and how it has long confirmed that the nature of our beliefs influences the function of our bodies. This oft-mentioned, but poorly developed aspect of our humanness has profound potential; what we think has physical impacts and by extension influences our development and can influence our evolution. To my knowledge, we are the only species that can choose to evolve through the application of our will - our intention.

The question has always been, what will we choose?

Conviction and Responsibility

I believe we understand when a general makes a decision with honest conviction on the field of battle that puts lives at risk. None wish for the loss of life, but in life and death struggles, risks of winning and losing are high. Conviction has always been important in a leader who should hold a strong belief in the cause he or she pursues. Yet conviction alone is not enough, responsibility to those you lead must temper the hubris that unfettered authority spawns.

This tension between conviction and responsibility has come to mind recently as our society struggles to develop a path forward through the pandemic. In the midst of a battle such as this, there may be initial chaos, but when the smoke dissipates and the path ahead is clearly defined, a leader protects his charges and sees them through.

In every crisis, some rise to the challenge and become leaders, while others falter and take their place as living examples of the Peter Principle. Failure, while trying to do your best, is understandable. We have all failed at something. But

what is there to say of a leader who wraps himself in the cloak of religious righteousness and lies to a nation in the throes of battle? Such is a deep breach of faith to those served and is a failure in leadership.

In the end, there will be no marble monuments on sun lit hillsides to hold the memory of this man. Memorials will be reserved for those he failed to serve faithfully. Perhaps, if he is fortunate, he will come to understand the value of lives his truth could have saved.

Change

Change is hard. We work throughout our lives to put the pieces together that allow us to get through the day, week, month, or year with the hope that at the end of the period we will be at least a little better off than when we started. We all hope that no calamity or crisis occurs that sets us back and causes us to start all over again. It can be difficult, and it is understandable that as our lives become stable, we will resist changing the status quo, because the future is unknown and at least to some degree, we have conquered the past. As much as we would like to put our feet up, remote in hand, and enjoy the respite, the future continues to unfold and we risk becoming spectators instead of participants in events evolving around us.

I get it. Change is exhausting, but it can also be exhilarating. All of my career, I've worked in public utilities and factories throughout the U.S. applying science. Inevitably, when a problem is identified and a solution is proposed, the first reaction is almost universally stated, "We have been doing it this way for ___ (fill in the blank) years and we are not going to change it now." I know that when that statement

is made, my job changes from an engineer to a teacher. It is perhaps the hardest part of my job because I have to convince hard-working, seasoned, and experienced adults to change something they may have spent their careers building. I have frequently been successful in doing so, but I have had my fair share of failures too. I long ago adopted the perspective that every day holds a lesson in humility, - I don't solve every problem I set out to. However, I do engage the issue acknowledging the hard work and accomplishments that got to that point and build on that effort.

I am reminded of a meeting I had with a manager in a chemical factory many years ago. His first words to me upon introduction were, "Another god-damned consultant! What are you going to do for me?" I understood his skepticism and didn't run and hide. I explained to him what needed to be done and got to work. He checked my work daily with grunts and stern looks that eventually gave way to conversations. The work resulted in a breakthrough and the changes they implemented saved them millions and simultaneously brought them into environmental compliance. The experience confirmed for me the value of facing an issue head-on, trusting my training and experience, and not flinching in the face of skepticism.

I admit to having tunnel vision with my nose buried in projects and spreadsheets far too much which limits my view of the broader world. I have assumed that while I was busy doing my job, others we placed

into leadership positions were doing their jobs too. It was my expectation that their work would offer the guidance we seek to discern the future and help us build on past accomplishments to meet it. Their guidance, it was hoped, would make productive use of our effort and resources. Their task too would be to teach hard working, seasoned, and experienced adults about the changes our future demands of us so that we can begin that journey. I am disappointed; that has not been the case.

If it is true that we will be judged by our fruits, it appears that our harvest will be meager. Leaders have been afraid to speak of hard and inconvenient truths. We face daunting challenges ahead and it now appears that any hope of principled, courageous leadership will come from our children. Our present leaders have abdicated the responsibilities of their positions through meekness, timidity, stubbornness, and lack of vision. It is time to sweep away those who seek to lead from behind the barricade and place into those positions people who will work at least as hard as those in my neighborhood. As we prepare to consider our future leaders, I propose the following attributes to consider:

- **Veracity** – to tell the truth, no matter how difficult the issue. We are a tough and resilient people and can manage the truth of our circumstances.

- **Respect** – the work and efforts of others must be acknowledged and respected. No one in this world accomplishes meaningful goals by themselves.
- **Vision** – have a clear-eyed vision of our issues, problems, and potential solutions based on fact.
- **Trust** – uphold the public trust of the office; ethically.

Change is hard. It always has been and always will be. Change is necessary to adapt and thrive, - the future comes no matter what. If we are going to build something with our lives that is worth passing on to our children, we must seek worthy leadership.

A Classic Dilemma

Being a car guy has always been in tension with my profession as an environmental engineer. It is difficult to resolve this internal conflict and I have given it some thought recently.

Although I mainly work with chemistry, biology, and processes associated with water-based issues, I am familiar with the work associated with defining the problems we face with climate change. I have read publicly available reports (back to the '70s) and reviewed source data to satisfy my own curiosity and am convinced that climate change is not only real, but is on-going, gaining momentum, and requires urgent attention. And yet, I have a '57 Chevy parked in my garage that I am reluctant to part with. In some ways, the conflict I have also exists in our society.

In many ways, cars saved me. As a teenager, cars were the 'tech' of our time and I spent countless hours trying to understand how they worked. Long before the internet, I spent many hours at the library scouring service manuals and feeding stacks of dimes into the copy machine to take home relevant

instructions on how to tune an engine, adjust a clutch, or change a wheel bearing. My focus on cars helped to keep me from other, less productive pursuits and eventually my curiosity about how things work caused me to look beyond to college. I left for college in a beat up '57 Chevy whose engine I finished re-assembling the day before. It caught fire on the off-ramp from the interstate, but I was able to snuff it out, put the spark plug wire back where it belonged and go on to campus. Thereafter, that car served me well throughout my years in college.

The '57 that had served me so well is now long gone but years later I acquired another '57 and held on to it. The demands of a traveling profession and a growing family eventually necessitated putting the car aside for many years. Yet, it remained a nagging reminder of unfinished business. Decades later, the priorities of family and profession eased somewhat and I began to breathe life back into it. It took years to get it back to be road worthy. Along the way I developed a deep respect for the skill of its designers and builders who knew then how to make things that would endure. People such as these built the house and the community I now live in. Although I have taken many steps to make my house from the same era much more energy efficient, I am less certain about what to do about the car.

This dilemma of mine, I believe, is shared by many who are reluctant to set aside the things in which we invested our time and attention. We are comfortable

with the technology of our time and learning new stuff can be, well, exhausting.

As a car guy and environmental engineer, I've watched the development of electric car technology from a distance and have long believed that it will be needed to transition away from fossil fuel quickly to blunt the impacts of climate change – despite having a classic car in the garage. The issue is of course much larger than me and my attachment to this car.

I believe the deployment of electric car technology has nearly reached critical mass. It is our future – perhaps our immediate future. This is a good thing and the sooner we get this technology in the hands of tinkerers and racers; the sooner acceptance and exponential innovation will take place. From a personal perspective, it offers hope for me and my dilemma. Shops are now emerging that can convert classic cars to electric power and if Chevy's debut of their twin motor, 750 hp, tire smoking, electric Camaro portends the future, our hotrods may well survive the transition. I will embrace the future.

However, when it comes to self-driving car technology, I am resolved not to go down that road. I will not let a computer drive my '57 Chevy. You have to draw the line somewhere.



About the Author

Kevin Deeny is a life-long resident of Levittown Pennsylvania where he has lived since the 1950s and where, with his wife Marcia, raised four daughters. He is an environmental engineer, amateur photographer, and a tinkerer – curious about most things.

Other Publications:

A Patch of Light: Reflections from Levittown

Snow Pictures: A Novel