

Reflections of Gary R. Wooley

Throughout my life I have been blessed to be surrounded by people that allowed me, encouraged me and enabled me to pursue my dreams. That is a luxury not many have. Mentioned here are a few of those special people, particularly in my early years, but there are many others.

I was born in the United States of America with its inherent freedom, and in the vibrant, exciting city of New Orleans in 1946 with its rich heritage and extensive natural resources. I had the good fortune to be born into a wonderful large family that was close and remains that way today. I had loving, supportive and encouraging parents and a big brother that has been a lifelong friend.

As I grew up there were frequent family gatherings for birthdays, Mardi Gras, crab boils, days at Pontchartrain Beach, evenings at the seawall, visits to the Audubon Park zoo, picnics in City Park, family football games, riding bikes through Lakeview, flying kites on West End Boulevard, sailing on Lake Pontchartrain, dressing up for shopping and movie theaters on Canal Street, dinner with cousins, eating at neighborhood bars with fabulous food, French Quarter shops and restaurants, Jack-son Square artists, Mississippi River ferry boat rides, beignets at Café Du Monde, large groups for Thanksgiving turkey, New Year's day football, and the epic Herman family

Christmas Eve parties. I was blessed to have been born into such a wonderful environment.

My early years were part of a different era, the post WWII period when life was uncomplicated and adults celebrated not be-ing at war. All that changed in the 1960's.

When I was in ninth grade supportive teachers surprised me by recommending that I apply to a special new public high school in New Orleans with high academic standards. Ben Franklin High School exposed me to an entirely new environment of academic competition and encouragement. Ben Franklin is still one of the best public high schools in the country.

There was little college experience in our family. Dad taught me many important lessons, but did not finish high school. Mom did finish high school, but was told "girls don't go to college." Both Mom and Dad encouraged me and provided financial support for LSU, for which I am eternally grateful. There is a brick in front of the Lod Cook alumni center with my name and degrees, and below that a second brick that reads "To Althea and Harold Wooley, Thank You for the Gift of LSU."

Fortunately my East Jefferson High School physics teacher Mr.

Myers took me aside and urged me to study mechanical engineering. He said with that degree I could get a better job than high school physics teacher. What might I have done without his insistence that I study something I knew nothing about?

When I entered LSU in 1965 the only entrance requirement was a Louisiana high school diploma, but the freshman failure rate was very high. I remember an LSU freshman orientation meet-ing in an auditorium where we were told to look to our left and right because only one of those three people would return for their sophomore year. I was the one. I loved the large campus and the excitement of LSU, Saturday nights in Tiger stadium and “showtime” at the Cow Palace featuring the magician Pete Maravich, intramural sports, and the challenge of physics, calculus and engineering. There were many Professors and graduate students that taught, challenged and mentored me.

Social upheaval continued during my eight years at LSU. I had many “hippie” friends, music had changed dramatically, the drug culture was in full bloom, and the Viet Nam war was raging. Following the assassinations of John F. Kennedy in 1963, his brother Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King were assassinated in 1968. Campus protests were common, and traditional values prevalent in the 1950's were disappearing. I remember war protesters at LSU and a young David Duke in his khaki uniform speaking passionately at free speech alley in front of the union.

I also remember wondering how these people had time for such activities. I had my hands full with the likes of Physics, Calculus and Statics, which had a failure rate of 30%. Those that survived Statics were given the privilege of taking Dynamics, which had a similar failure rate. Fear of failure was an excellent motivator for me.

In the summers I was fortunate to land good jobs in the petroleum industry, once with Shell and twice with Chevron. I learned the basics

of petroleum engineering and made good money that helped with college expenses.

Lynn and I got married in 1967. We added Tanya in 1968 and Tamara in 1970. Meanwhile I obtained a BSME in 1969. Mr. Myers would have been pleased. Then I was fortunate to have another significant person take an interest in me.

Dr. Dale Carver was the head of the Engineering Mechanics department and he stopped me in the hall to ask if I would be interested in graduate school. I had considered engineering and business graduate schools and law school, but I couldn't afford the tuition much less living expenses. Dr. Carver offered me a research assistantship which got me through one semester but wasn't enough money to support our family, so I accepted a permanent position with Humble (Exxon) in New Orleans.

In the middle of the summer of 1969 Dr. Carver called to say he had good news and asked if I could come to Baton Rouge for a visit? Dr. Carver had nominated me for an NSF Traineeship and it had been granted with dependents stipend. Also, Dr. Carver wanted me to teach Statics, Dynamics and Strength of Materials, and offered me a teaching assistantship. Married student housing had an opening at the new apartments on West Roosevelt, so Lynn, Tanya and I were Tigers again! What might I have done if Dr. Carver had not taken an interest? Life would have been different.

I enjoyed graduate school even more than being an LSU undergraduate. The classes were more challenging and I became a better student. The experience of teaching made me a better engineer and speaker. Dr. Carver and I developed a teaching rivalry. He challenged me to see if my students could outperform his students on group mid-term and final exams. When they did he declared it was because I had an age advantage.

About the same time I joined the Engineering Mechanics department as a graduate student, Dr. Dan Yannitell arrived from Cornell as a new faculty member. He was recently married to Cyril and neither knew anyone in Baton Rouge. Lynn and Cyril became friends and Dr. Yannitell became my dissertation advisor. We are still friends. It took me 10 years to stop addressing him as Dr. Yanitell.

After taking my Ph.D. written exam and defending my dissertation orally, I was anxious while the committee decided my fate, but I had a class to teach. Dr. Carver found a unique way to give me the results. He interrupted my class, but did not speak to me. Instead he told my students that it would now be appropriate to address me as Dr. Wooley, then smiled at me as he left the room. The only thing missing was a wink. I laughed in relief and celebration as the class applauded.

I left LSU in December 1972 and began a long career in the petroleum industry as employee, then technical and business consultant and independent producer. In later years I used business skills developed in the petroleum industry to get involved in other businesses, and to help civic, religious and educational groups. LSU challenged me and made me a better person, and provided me with not only the technical tools, but the work ethic and critical thinking skills that served me well my whole life. What would I have done without LSU? Life would have been less interesting and less exciting.

Technical and communication skills learned at LSU and prior experience with Shell, Chevron and Humble (Exxon) allowed me to be immediately effective at ARCo after I left LSU. The six years at ARCo were spent developing expertise and industry contacts and building reputation. I joined a group of engineers with Ph.D. degrees from Michigan, Princeton, MIT, Stanford and other prestigious schools across the country. My LSU training proved to be technically competi-

tive with any, provided communication skills from 3 years of teaching, offered an unusual engineering diversity and had instilled a work ethic and that was well suited for the petroleum industry.

In 1978 friends and relatives advised against my decision to leave the "security" of a major oil company for a new business start-up, particularly when ARCo was making attractive promotion offers. Of course that "security" disappeared a few years later when many of my colleagues at ARCo and other companies in the petroleum industry were laid off following the dramatic drop in oil prices in 1986.

The freedom of building a growing consulting business allowed pursuit of other business interests, such as developing and licensing petroleum engineering software and exploring, drilling and producing oil and gas wells. Success in the petroleum industry led to business opportunities in other industries including banking and nanotechnology.

Professional skills developed in business activities were of value to civic, educational and religious organizations. There were many opportunities to serve the community, testing my time management skills and forcing evaluation of priorities.

My Dad used to tell me I left home at age 17 and never returned. Of course I returned and stayed in touch, but his point was understood. I had grown up at LSU and doors were opened that led to places I knew nothing about a few years earlier.

In a family of athletes I was the 98 pound weakling. Yet as a child I played all the major sports and was a competitive bowler. In 1963 a good high school friend and I surprised every-one by winning the city doubles junior bowling championship. At LSU I was fortunate to play on intramural champion teams, and I had a chance to play pick-up basketball with Pistol Pete Maravich. Even after LSU there were many tournaments and leagues. Still today there are senior tennis leagues

and tournaments. Competitive athletics has provided me with so much enjoyment and great memories, and has produced many diverse friendships, both at LSU and later. I am blessed to have been physically able to compete for so many years.

People tend to assess and classify others, then give them labels or fit them in a group or "box." I never quite fit in boxes. It has made life more interesting to have diverse interests, most of which developed while at LSU.

Three very important people in my life have been our children, Tanya, Tamara and Todd. Lynn and I had children at the young age of 21. We grew up while we raised our children. I especially enjoyed spending time with each, and have many great memories. But there were times my busy schedule limited time with one or the other. I think about missed opportunities, and appreciate their understanding when business demands interfered. They too allowed me to do what I do, and I love them for that and for being who they are. My reward has been seeing them grow into caring, loving people, and of course our daughters have given us three wonderful grandchildren.

Finally, the most significant person has been Lynn, my high school girl friend, wife, family partner and one who has shared all the good and bad. It has been a long, exciting journey that has much more to come. I especially appreciate and love her willingness to come along for the ride, and allow me to do what I do. There were many times I committed myself to a role that implicated her. We met at age 17 and have been together ever since. She is still my girl friend and so much more. Few have lifelong partners and I have had that privilege.

What an honor it is for me to have the LSU College of Engineering, which equipped me to lead such a full and exciting life, to now add me to its Hall of Distinction. I was blessed to attend LSU and now am honored to join such distinguished alumni in the Hall of Distinction.

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