

Appendix A

Disappointments

In the main portion of this book I narrate stories and incidents which stand out in my fading memory, inspired in some instances by photographs. In general they display an upbeat tone and happy circumstances - we tend to suppress those disappointments that we would rather forget. However, most lives are not a "bed of roses", and mine has had its share of failures. In this appendix I indicate several of these, in chronological order.

The first disappointment I recognized later in life was our relationship and treatment of two of our classmates. The first was Richard B. in grade school, and the second was Jerry M. in Sunday school. Richard B. was in one of the classes between my brother Doug and me in grade school, and Jerry M. was one grade behind Emmert and me in Sunday school. In grade school, Doug, I, and some of our school mates would "gang up" on Richard and tease him about his less than stellar academic performance or some other completely irrelevant trait.

In Sunday school, Emmert, I, and Jerry were in the same class, and Emmert and I were not the best of colleagues of Jerry. Emmert's behavior was less objectionable than mine, but I recall us both teasing Jerry.

In neither case were we disciplined by higher authority. But in both cases our behavior would probably be classified as "bullying" by modern standards. The insight gained by the passage of years and evolving standards of behavior would certainly argue for this definition. In any case, I am not proud of our relationships.

During grade school Doug and I had become reasonable good baseball players and had done some football. In addition, at 4-H club "wellness days" we had done something like 100 sit-ups and quite a few pushups and chin-ups. So we were pretty proud of our farm boy physiques. By high school I was continually bugging my Dad to let me go out for football and possibly some other sports. He wanted me to stay home to do chores and my homework

By the beginning of my sophomore year I had worn him down enough that he let me try out for football early in the school year. I was thrilled and eagerly joined my prospective school mates for the first tryout one afternoon after school. The coach valued endurance more than physical strength and instructed us to run around the practice field a number of times. After a couple of rounds my endurance was shot, and I was totally pooped. That was the end of my high school sports career.

The lack of camaraderie and adulation which sports would have provided was offset a little by the socialization provided by the debate team. I was accepted and respected by my classmates there, and I looked forward to every debate class.

My disappointing sports career did not end in high school. My senior year, Doug and our friend Robert Johansen, entered Manchester. One of our dorm friends, Henry Chai, formed an intramural team for playing football and basketball. He recruited Doug, Robert, me and several of our friends for the team. We were awful! We lost every single football game and basketball game that season.

My sports career was not a total zero. My friend, Jane Frost, who I met in the Tennis III class during my teaching career, suggested that we join the Racine city league in tennis. We did, and we won first place in the "AB" division for two consecutive years if my trophies are to be believed. I also entered the Racine Triathlon during these years and won third and fifth place in my age group according to my trophies.

Another disappointment occurred during my four years of research at Manchester and the four summers I spent at Argonne National Laboratory. Although I did present a paper on the decay of a tin isotope at the Indiana physics meeting my senior year, I was never listed as a coauthor of any papers resulting from the research I assisted in at Argonne. This was, indeed, appropriate since my level of understanding of physics prevented me from making significant contributions to any of these papers.

As I have already mentioned, my Woodrow Wilson Fellowship was instrumental in my admission to the graduate school physics departments at Columbia, University of Michigan, University of Wisconsin, and the University of Illinois. Mainly out of loyalty I chose Illinois. After graduate school I applied for a more permanent position at Los Alamos National Laboratory, Notre Dame, Iowa State University, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I received offers from all of them - a staff position at Los Alamos and post-doctoral positions at the three universities. Since the Los Alamos staff position involved development and research on a new accelerator and a salary 45% higher than the post docs, we were sorely tempted to accept. However, family considerations and the remote location of Los Alamos persuaded us to accept the University of Wisconsin offer.

My hope in accepting the Wisconsin offer was that it would evolve into a permanent faculty position. I was totally naive, of course, and gradually began to sense an unwritten policy of promotion from within. My disappointment at not being rapidly promoted to assistant professor was alleviated somewhat by the kind attention of the department chairman, Dr. Hugh Richards. He became aware of my interest in teaching and assigned me as lab assistant in the Electricity and Magnetism lab under Dr. Wilmer Anderson and then, in my second year, as lab instructor in the graduate Electronic lab under Dr. Richard Moran. These teaching "apprenticeships" were essential for developing the capabilities that resulted in my first full time position as Assistant Professor of Physics at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside. Dr. Norbert Isenberg, the Chairman of the Science Division at the newly formed UW-P, called Dr. Richards asking for candidates to teach electricity and magnetism at Parkside. Dr. Richards suggested me.

As previously discussed the lions share of my career was devoted to UW-Park-side. I have never regretted my decision to join its faculty. In particular my satisfaction is based on three factors: the accomplishments and success of my many students, the freedom to research in any direction I chose, and the books resulting from this research. However, I must confess a disappointment that grew throughout my career. That was the salary structure of the University of Wisconsin system.

My first salary for the 1959-1960 academic year was approximately \$11,000. This was fairly standard at the time and, in fact, somewhat above my colleagues in the social sciences and arts, a reflection of market conditions. Surprisingly, it was more than my father-in-law, an electrical engineer and recognized expert in shaded pole motors, was making. In the first few years the salary scale was fairly generous, but in the later years of my career, the University of Wisconsin system went through a period of austerity in which annual salary increases were of the order of one to two percent.

My problem became particularly acute in the 1980s, when I switched to the Computer Science Department. New Ph.D.s were being hired into the department at higher salaries than I was making after more than ten years teaching. I had several meetings with the Dean in which I outlined my problem. In fact, I even applied, and was accepted, for a teaching position at another university.

The problem was solved by my somewhat early retirement in 1999. The annual increases in the UW pension system were running five percent or better while the university itself was offering salary increases in the one percent range. I went on full pension and, after three months retirement, requested a half time teaching position as two of my colleagues had previously done. This very remunerative arrangement lasted till 2001 when I retired for good.

A major disappointment of my academic career was the failure of my collaboration with Professor Donald Michie on a second edition of *Artificial Intelligence*. The first edition had been highly successful, and Donald and I were under contract with McGraw-Hill as co-authors of a second edition. I had collaborated successfully with Dr. Lon Ruedisili on *Perspective on Energy* and with Dr. Jack Ohanian on *An Acceptable Future Nuclear Energy System* with never a dispute or harsh word between either. My Uni-co friend, Yong Auh had written appendices for both my *Artificial Intelligence* book and my *Computer Graphics* book, and my Microsoft friend, Dan Knudson wrote an appendix for the graphics book. Again, all these collaborations had been on the most cooperative and cordial terms. So I felt confident in my ability as a collaborator, and a second edition of *Artificial Intelligence* with Dr. Michie as coauthor and former colleague of Alan Turing would have been a dynamite competitor in the computer science market.

Unfortunately, it was not to be. Donald had sent me several of his papers, and I had written several chapters of the new book and sent them on to him at Oxford University. Shortly after this I received a hand written letter from him bowing out of the

collaboration. The reason seemed to be that I had not taken his input adequately into account.

Joyce and I visited Donald and his wife at Oxford University, and the four of us attended *A Midsummer's Night Dream* given by Oxford's drama department. Sadly, he and his second wife were killed in an auto accident in 2007. Our failure to coauthor the second edition was a tremendous disappointment.

For nine years I served on the National Academy of Sciences panel for evaluating post doctoral proposals to the national labs, and three years as its chairman. My brief resume lists five books although two of them are out of print. This causes Google to give over 100,000 references to *Morris W. Firebaugh*, although many of them refer to the city of Firebaugh, CA, or unrelated references. So I had the vain and rather presumptuous hope that I might be listed in Wikipedia. Another disappointment!

I've discussed several disappointments from my professional life. I want to conclude the appendix with a few disappointments from our social and family life.

Our book club has been the closest knit social circle we have. We're been in operation over forty years as the "second Unitarian book club". For the past twenty years our membership has been remarkably constant. However, about twenty years ago, Nancy's husband, Wayne Smith died. So what had been six couples was then down to eleven people. Then, this past couple of years we lost my UW-Parkside colleague, Don Piele, to brain cancer and our librarian friend, Joy Botts to Parkinson's disease. So now we are down to nine.

I have suggested several times that we "add new blood" to our club by inviting other people who we all know and like to join our club. Unfortunately, the response has always been, "No, we're such a close knit group that we want to keep it just the way it is." I guess our club will dwindle away till someone is left as the "last person standing". To me, it's disappointing.

Another disappointment is the loss of our sailboat, *Joy of Racine*. It had, in fact, brought us great joy as we sailed out of the Racine harbor and, twice, completely around Lake Michigan. It was a serious part of our social life, and we offered a sail and dinner at the Racine Yacht Club as an auction item for many years at our church.

Unfortunately, maintaining the boat was a chore. I had to dedicate most of the month of May to sanding and painting the bottom, doing the same to all the teak in the cockpit and cabin, modifying the pump-through toilet to a porta-potti, replace the lexan windows, buying new sails, and on and on and on.

By the early 2000s I decided to move on to a smaller fiberglass sailboat and sell the wooden, 27 foot Thunderbird. I put a photograph of it along with a description up on the Racine Yacht Club bulletin board. There were no bidders.

Then my friend, Charlie Manning, suggested that I donate it to the Sea Scouts, a division of the Boy Scouts for which he was scout master. I agreed, and that was the last we ever saw of *Joy of Racine*. This disappointment was partially overcome by the

purchase of a 19 foot Chrysler Buccaneer. We now keep and sail it on Island Lake. Maintenance is minimal, and I usually beat both Steve and Ray on their windsurfers.

The final disappointment I want to discuss is certainly not earth-shattering but more a matter of personnel pride. Recently Joyce, Max, and I drove to the Tetons to meet up with Steve and Ray who had driven out to climb Gannett Peak, the highest mountain in Wyoming. Steve and I had climbed it when he was in college. The purpose of our meeting was for the four of us, Steve, Ray, Max, and me to climb Mt. St. John. I've already related how Steve and I had climbed it when he was eight.

I had reviewed our climb on Google Earth and had the route firmly in mind. The day before our planned climb, the five of us, Joyce included, had hiked nine miles up and back Cascade Canyon, a scenic tour between the Grand Teton and Mt. St. John. This so exhausted me that I (probably wisely) declined to climb. My disappointment at this concession to old age was partly assuaged by Steve and his boys successful climb of Mt. St. John. We were very proud of them. I'm glad the tradition lives on!

I present these disappointments to assure the reader that I'm not just a "happy fella singing in the rain". Some of them are trivial and inconsequential to our lives. Some are very significant in altering our life's direction. The role of luck must be emphasized, and we consider this in more detail in the next appendix.

Almost all of my photographs were taken to record happy or adventuresome events. As a result, I simply don't have pictures illustrating the disappointments described above. So this appendix has none.