

+++++MY LIFE SO FAR
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David Brooks, in his column in the October 28, 2011, New York Times, invites people to send him an essay on their lives. I like Mr. Brooks, although I sometimes find his columns too far to the right for my taste. Whatever, I'm pleased to respond to his invitation, so here goes.

I was born in 1926 in Highland Park, Illinois, a northern suburb of Chicago. I attended Ravinia School and then Highland Park High School. My father was an immigrant from what is now Belarus. My mother was born of immigrant parents in Minneapolis, Minnesota. My father moved his family from the Humboldt Park neighborhood in Chicago to the then mostly non-Jewish suburb- a bold move on his part. I had two older sisters. We were members of a reform synagogue in Glencoe, the adjoining suburb.

I started taking lessons on the piano at an early age. When I was in fifth grade, the music teacher approached my mother and urged her to start me on the cello, since she needed a cellist for her school orchestra. I didn't want to do this at the time but am everlastingly grateful that my mother went along with the suggestion. Although I never became a professional musician, I have always enjoyed playing music- in orchestras and chamber groups- and now, in my mid 80s, I am playing jazz on the cello!

In the summer of 1942 I went to National Music Camp in Interlochen, Michigan. There I greatly improved my skill in playing, and, especially noteworthy, met a young girl who was

in the last stand of the cello section (I started in the fourth stand and worked my way up to second stand.)

I started college in what would have been my fourth year of high school. One of my sisters was a student at the University of Chicago college, and she persuaded me to apply there. The college then was operating under the Robert Maynard Hutchins plan, calling for four years of college after only two years of high school. I enjoyed the college very much. For the B.A. program I had to take 8 one year survey courses. As it turned out, I went to school around the calendar and so completed college in two calendar years. Curiously, this meant that I graduated college the same year I graduated from high school!

Meantime, the girl I met at Interlochen, Paula Adler, by a curious twist of fate, answered a call to play cello in the University of Chicago Symphony. During World War II, the orchestra was hurting for players and advertised around at high schools to find them. Paula was then a senior at Thornton Township High School, in south suburban Harvey, Illinois. She lived in Flossmoor, a south suburb. We met when she came to the orchestra; I was principal cellist and we were stand partners. The way she tells it, when she first set eyes on me in Interlochen, she knew I was the one she wanted as a life partner. I thought she was cute, but it took me several years to realize she was the one for me! When she finished high school she went to Swarthmore College, and we visited each other increasingly during her college years.

As I was nearing the end of my college program, I wondered what I would do next. Since I had no major in college, it wasn't clear what I would be prepared to do in furthering my education and life's work. My father then was president of a

shoe manufacturing company so I thought I might go into that company. I had visited the factory from time to time but exhibited no special talent or interest for business. So I went to see the college professor I most admired, who was a social scientist, I think an anthropologist, although he was also knowledgeable in mathematics. I explained my situation to him, that I was most attracted to the social sciences, and that I might end up in my father's business. He told me there was no money in social science (true then, but not now!) but given my situation he thought I should go to law school, which was sort of the practical form of social science. He said that he knew the people in the Law School and felt sure I would be accepted. I had never before shown an interest in law, but I thought, well if that's what he recommends, why not do it? When I applied they accepted me. My meeting with the faculty member lasted five minutes but it shaped the entire rest of my education and career!

I enjoyed the first year of law school and did fairly well. At that time the University of Chicago Law School didn't recognize the two year Hutchins degree as a real bachelor's degree and required that entering students with only two years of college would have to take four years of Law School. I found the second year of law school a let down, but I continued through to the end. Some of the professors really turned me on but others were dull.

Paula and I were married in June of 1948 at her parents' beautiful home in Flossmoor, Illinois. We stayed in a basement apartment until I graduated from Law School. Then, after living with her parents for a while, both in Flossmoor and later in Chicago, we found an apartment in the Hyde Park section, near the University. The next year I graduated law school. At that time it was hard to find employment (somewhat like now) and

if you didn't graduate at the top of your class- I graduated in the middle of the class- you had to pound the streets for a while.

After about nine months of unemployment, I found a job with Leon Despres, a double graduate of the University of Chicago. He later became an alderman and Mayor Richard J. Daley's gadfly in the Chicago City Council. But when I worked for him he was engaged in general practice with a specialty representing unions. He was also council for the Chicago Civil Liberties Union.

Mr. Despres was a brilliant man and fine lawyer. He taught me all I ever would learn about how to practice law. He even taught me how to write: one day he gave me a book, Rudolf Flesch's Art of Plain Talk. There I learned to write in short sentences, using the active voice. It has helped me all my career that I can write well. After four years with Mr. Despres, through the Law School I learned of an opening for a labor lawyer at Argonne National Laboratory. The Laboratory, located 25 miles southwest of Chicago, was and is managed by the University of Chicago under contract with the Government. It is a most interesting place.

I started at Argonne as a management labor relations lawyer, based on my experience with Mr. Despres. After a few years, I moved to general contract law, or transactional law. They named me chief counsel. In 1962 I worked with the University of Chicago Legal Counsel and the Vice President in charge of Argonne on a sweeping new contract with the Government, then the Atomic Energy Agency. Seeing my work on the contract, they invited me to come to campus to be on the University of Chicago legal staff. I jumped at the chance to work for my alma mater!

On campus I worked under several General Counsels. One of the more interesting jobs was to work on the splitoff of the University of Chicago Hospitals from the University. The University remains in charge- by naming the Hospitals' Board. But it was a very complicated job to turn the hospitals into a Separate legal entity. I take a certain pride in working out the separation agreements, including the affiliation agreement, so they are written in clear, understandable English. I have been often complimented on doing this work so well. Another thing of interest, a law professor worked a bit with me on this project- the same professor who when I graduated from Law School and sought recommendation letters, turned me down, claiming I would never be a lawyer, but perhaps I could find some work with a non-profit organization (I did- the University of Chicago)!

At the University I worked in many fields: intellectual property and technology transfer, business contracts, employee benefits, finance, employee law, etc. My clients have been diverse, covering the whole University, including the library system, University of Chicago Press, business school, even the law school. I finally retired in 2003, but they continued me part time until 2008. So now, at 85, I am retired- I didn't even maintain my license. Aside from a few phone calls, I don't have much contact with my old office. However, there is one project, a building at Argonne that was third-party financed in a most unusual way, that I continue to be consulted about, approving invoices and attending meetings about twice a year. It makes me feel good to still be needed!

My principal avocation has been music. For some years my wife and I ran a chamber orchestra based in Hyde Park, and we still have all the old music from those days. Since 1969 we have

run a chamber music weekend program at a resort in Michigan, where people come from the Chicago area, Detroit, and other places, and play music all weekend long. Until this year I have been the scheduler- or as Paula says the boy scout leader. This year two of my colleagues have taken over the chore of scheduling, enabling me to sleep all night during the weekends. It is great fun, and we have met many friends and fostered chamber music playing by many. I also learned much of my chamber music playing from these sessions, and from playing with other players in Chicago and elsewhere.

My latest craze is playing jazz on the cello. I took a ten week course at a jazz school and have been playing with jazz groups in Chicago and Michigan. It is great fun and I find that I'm a good improviser. Like chamber music, it's great to play with other musicians in a small combo. Interesting new hobby for an octogenarian!

Paula and I had four children. Daniel, the oldest, is a musician, mostly on viola, free lancing and teaching in the Chicago area. His wife Gail, a PhD psychologist, after 25 years of clinical practice in London, Ontario, is now a self employed industrial psychologist, based in Chicago. They have three sons, Joshua, the oldest, runs a computer software business in Chicago, and is married to a Canadian doctor who is completing a fellowship in endocrinology in Toronto, after which they will move to Chicago.

Daniel's second son, Benjamin, works for a strategy company in Chicago. Aaron, Dan's youngest son is in Los Angeles trying to establish himself as a film writer (His first film, in which he collaborated with others, has been showing around the movie festivals and earning acclaim). Joshua and Benjamin received

their bachelor's degrees at the University of Chicago, like their parents and me.

Our second child, Jonathan, is a lawyer with his own small firm in Grand Rapids, Michigan. His wife, Christine, is a violinist in the Grand Rapids Symphony. They have twin sons, Nathan and Simon who graduated college and are pursuing their various interests. Our youngest, Miriam, is a lawyer and vice president of a company that does 1031 exchanges. She has a partner, Susan Borrelli, who is a chiropractor and they own a house on the north side of Chicago.

Our third child, Anne Ruth, was severely retarded from birth. She was very ill as a young child, but was in relatively good health the rest of her life. The last 30 years of her life she lived in a wonderful home, Mount St. Joseph, operated by an order of nuns, and located in Lake Zurich, a north suburb of Chicago. She died last year, at age 54 as a result of kidney failure- she was born with only one kidney and that one began failing a year before she died. Despite her severe limitations, she was the sweetest person and everyone loved her.

Because of Anne, my wife and I became active in support of the Home- I am a board member and past president of the Association that assists the Home with fund raising. Also I became active in an organization called VOR, for Voice of the Retarded (there has been a name change because "retarded" is no longer considered politically correct.) Unfortunately there is a strong movement to do away with large facilities for the retarded (we now call them "intellectually disabled"). This movement attacks both private and state-operated facilities, claiming that only living in community homes of four or less is acceptable. We and others know that community homes, while they may be good for the mildly or moderately retarded,

cannot provide the 24/7 care that larger facilities do. We recently helped thwart a law suit in Illinois against the state, which sought to remove persons from larger facilities. It is a constant battle nation-wide. An organization called “Protection and Advocacy” (known in Illinois as “Equip for Equality”) filed the suit in Illinois and has sought closings elsewhere. Also, sadly, the Department of Justice Civil Rights Office has worked for facility closings or downsizing. I have spent quite a bit of time with the VOR in combating this destructive movement.

My wife and I have been very active in our synagogue, Congregation KAM Isaiah Israel. The Temple is the successor to two congregations that existed near each other in Hyde Park. I was on the team that negotiated the merger of the two, which at the time were the oldest synagogues in Chicago. And I was principal author of the merger agreement and of the other documents for the merged congregation. The merger took effect on the date that I became president of the merged congregation, and I served for three years. During my tenure I had the job of assuring that things went smoothly and people got along. A major activity was seeing to the addition to the site we chose for the merged congregation. We had to beat back efforts to stop the building. As completed, the newer parts of the building as well as the older parts, create a beautiful landmark structure. My children went through religious school at the Temple and were bar and bat mitzvah there. All three of them have remained active as Jews. Jonathan was president of his Grand Rapids synagogue, and Daniel and his wife have been active in synagogues, first in London, Ontario and now in Chicago. Miriam has off and on been a member, and attends some services.

I have been dismayed by synagogue politics at several junctures in our period as Temple members. For the most part I have been very supportive of our clergy. At times I was obliged to beat back attempts to dismiss rabbis and cantors. There are people who never seem satisfied, and our congregation has lost members and been hurt by their efforts. Religion is important to us, but the backbiting one sometimes sees in a congregation is not pleasing.

Mr. Brooks suggests that we comment on things that went well and not so well. I would like to comment on a couple of things. Of course my major good fortune was in marrying Paula. We have had a wonderful life together for over 63 years. We have been blessed with four wonderful children, and now grandchildren. One of the best things we did was, in 1985 we bought a cottage in a subdivision in South Haven. It is located a block from Lake Michigan. The cottage has been a wonderful place for our family to get together. Our grandchildren have gotten to know and like each other as cousins in a way that would not have been possible otherwise. And we have enjoyed the respite from the city. For forty-five years we lived in a small house in a development about thirty blocks south of the University. Now we are in a high-rise apartment overlooking Lake Michigan and the Museum of Science and Industry. I thought we should have moved to Hyde Park sooner, but Paula liked the house with our garden and the birds that visited us each year during migrating season. She was mollified knowing we have a "country house" to repair to most weekends from June through October.

By the way, the house we lived in for 45 years was in a development that became integrated after eight years. In time it became almost totally Afro-American. That didn't bother us, and there was mutual respect between us and our black

neighbors. One problem we encountered was the schools. We had to fight the school system, then headed by an anti-integrationist, Benjamin Willis, to try to get viable high schools for the children in our subdivision and nearby. By the time Daniel was ready for high school the neighborhood school was not viable. He elected to go to the south side technical school and this worked out well for him. We sent our second son, Jonathan, to the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, and that was good for him. Miriam, after going to a magnet school for the primary grades, entered the Laboratory Schools, but didn't like the clubby atmosphere there so she finished at Whitney Young, a newly formed magnet high school. A big bonus for us was that my employer, the University of Chicago, paid the tuition for the three kids' college education.

My two best friends from college and law school days remain my best friends today. Unfortunately they live far away- on the East Coast. But I do get to see them from time to time. Recently I got reacquainted with my best friend from grammar school and high school. I suppose if I have regrets it's that I did not cultivate more good friends. I never became General Counsel at the University, but I know my long service is appreciated, and am fond of my former colleagues in the legal office.

For the most part we have been healthy. Paula has had three unrelated cancers, and had a hysterectomy, but, thanks to God, she is now in pretty good health. Recently she had a hip replacement, which worked very well and she can walk without a cane and with no pain. I had a few setbacks but survived them.

I hope this overly long memoir has shown that I have had an interesting and satisfying life. I'm not ready to give it up. But a

poem that is included in the prayer book for the High Holidays
perhaps sums up my view of life:

Birth is a beginning
And death a destination.
And life is a journey:
From childhood to maturity
And youth to age;
From innocence to awareness
And ignorance to knowing; From foolishness to discretion
 And then perhaps to wisdom;
From weakness to strength
Or strength to weakness-
 And, often, back again;
From health to sickness
 And back, we pray, to health again;
From offense to forgiveness,
From loneliness to love,
From joy to gratitude,
From pain to compassion,
And grief to understanding-
 From fear to faith;
From defeat to defeat to defeat-
Until, looking backward or ahead,
We see that victory lies
Not at some high place along the way,
But in having made the journey, stage by stage,
 A sacred pilgrimage.
Birth is a beginning
And death a destination.
And life is a journey,
A sacred pilgrimage-
 To life everlasting.
Benjamin Fine