

## CHAPTER V

## UNCERTAINTY AND TRANSITION

Sometimes, in our journey, we can touch the depths and the heights in a single day. For some time there had been only exhilaration, joy in my new position, delight in having found a new home for my family, and anticipation of being with them in a few more days.

Then came the phone call from the police to come immediately and pick up my sons from the Youth Guidance Center. Their mother was in the psychiatric ward of the hospital.

My life seemed about to crash in pieces. I had no hope of ever being rescued from my despair. Weeks passed in which I mechanically performed those functions necessary to avoid total collapse. I enrolled my sons in school and childcare and assumed the dual role of being a mother and a father.

Eventually my wife left the hospital and returned to Canada. She was never again able to accept the responsibilities of their care; our life had taken an unexpected turn.

It was 1958 and the "recession" made itself felt. Bechtel did not have enough work back-log to keep all their employees, and lay-offs began. Those with the least seniority were let go first. I was one of hundreds looking for employment.

Fortunately, International Engineering offered me a position as senior mechanical engineer. My work was professionally demanding, but did not require any guidance or supervision of others. This was probably just as well, for it enabled me to give more time and attention to my sons who were eight and eleven years old.

Before I realized it, I had become involved in the Boy Scout movement and helped in organizing activities and events. At about the same time, my son Richard won a scholarship in creative dance at a school called Peters Wright Creative Arts and I soon became an integral part of the school. Not long after that, I was elected to the Board of Directors, and have served in this capacity for almost fifteen years now. The many problems of such an organization are a challenge to anyone, with or without administrative or business experience. I like to think that not only have I learned a great deal about running such a business, but that my effort has in some measure helped the school to achieve growth and quality of performance.

Five years had passed since I crossed the border to enter the United States as an immigrant; five years of excitement, sorrow, and joy. I had been taking classes in preparation for obtaining American citizenship and learned much about the most significant historical events, the most inspiring documents, like the Declaration of Independence and the Gettysburg Address, and the most inspiring aspects of the democratic process. It was with genuine pride and happiness

that I received my United States citizenship in the fall of 1958.

It would not have been in keeping with my life experience had nothing gone wrong. But the "recession" had not yet run its course, and in spring 1959 International Engineering found itself without sufficient contracts to maintain their staff. There were positions available, but most of them were in other states, or across the bay. My hope was to stay in San Francisco, keep my sons in school and childcare, and maintain a home life as free of disruption as possible.

Rogers Engineering offered the best position in accordance with my requirements. A small consulting engineering company with an exciting variety of projects, it seemed too good to be true. My work demanded an appreciable amount of self-reliance and diversity of work experience. Rogers Engineering required the involvement of their staff in every project from the first contact with a client to completion. I worked on a variety of projects requiring research and development, setting up a laboratory, running scientific experiments, supervising the design of equipment or plant, and the evaluation of economic feasibility.

Never before had I enjoyed the type and variety of work that I did with Rogers Engineering. It required more of the entrepreneurial spirit than the positions I had held with larger organizations.

dren's clothes, and prepared an occasional meal.

Gradually and almost unobtrusively, Livia entered our life and became part of its texture. Her confidence in my capacities helped me find the energy to persist and grow in a new direction.

In the spring of 1961 we were married and life took another turn.

## CHAPTER VI

## ALONG THE WAY

Each turning point in our life is like a new birth. We realize that we have not arrived at any final stage, but that we are merely starting out anew to continue the adventure. There is the remembered sadness about the choices not taken and the dead hopes and wishes of what might have been. With each new birth, there is a renewed strength to recognize problems and deal with them creatively.

Over a period of two years I had received several calls from my former employer, the Bechtel Corporation, asking me to come back. I did not give this any serious thought, since I enjoyed my position with Rogers Engineering.

When, however, in the fall of 1960 Rogers Engineering experienced a serious reduction of work load and suggested that we should feel free to look for other employment, I seriously reconsidered Bechtel, and responded to their invitation to work in their estimating department.

It took me a long time to do more than what I considered fair work for fair pay. There was little enthusiasm in me because deep down I was afraid of being laid off again in the near future, and did not want to form a strong sense of loyalty or belonging.

Gradually, I took a more active role in my work and showed interest and initiative. Soon I was working in a supervisory capacity and found satisfaction in fulfilling my commitments with discipline and skill.

Our new family life was not without a few adjustment problems, but gradually each of us learned to recognize and accept the uniqueness of the other. Our love grew stronger as we felt more secure in this new situation and did not attempt to judge, compare and classify, nor impose our own values and concerns.

When my son Edward started at the university, I became aware of the passage of time.

In 1967 we bought our own home and for a period of time our energies went into remodeling and furnishing. All was well and peaceful. Life was running smoothly.

I felt the urge to widen my horizon, increase my administrative skills, and renew my contact with academic life. Courses offered within the framework of company-sponsored professional development had whetted my intellectual appetite and I decided to pursue a course of study leading to a master's degree in business administration.

My being accepted in the MBA program at the University of San Francisco was a natural sequel to my sustained interest in learning as described in the next chapter; it has also become a turning point.

## CHAPTER VII

## CONTINUED LEARNING

Learning is a life-long experience. We learn something from every situation, every encounter, and every task performed.

My employer, the Bechtel Power Corporation, considers formal learning to be an essential part of personal and professional development and encourages its employees to improve their skills and knowledge and to widen their horizon.

I have participated in seminars and have taken a number of courses offered by my company.

One of the more interesting ones was a seminar given by Dr. Rebstock of the University of California. It was called "Meeting With the Client" and attempted to provide a basis for understanding the interaction of people in order to help one carry out more effectively certain administrative duties and to improve company-client relationship.

The course dealt with the familiar topics of the behavioral sciences: perception; human needs and motivation; stress situations and conflict; values and attitudes, and the problems of changing them. Workshops dealt with perception, communication, role-playing, and debating.

Another course, along more technical lines, was called "Critical Path Method." This is a systematic approach to

planning, scheduling, monitoring, and controlling a project or program. The course involved the preparation of a project and final examination.

A manager's primary task is to direct and coordinate the work of the various groups involved in the project toward one goal. Yet, the complexity of today's operations forces him to divorce himself from matters of detail and deal only with the broader aspect of the problem. He is inclined to think and act only in generalities. Lacking suitable techniques, he is unable to comprehend in detail the whole of an operation and all of its parts. The C.P.M. system constitutes a master plan which provides the manager with an up-to-date picture of the operation at all times. This was one of the few courses of immediate benefit to me.

More in line with my present interests was a "Personnel Policies" seminar dealing with the day-to-day problems of supervisors. Policies on such topics as employee relations, approval authority, employment status, employment grievances and freedom of expression, benefits, salary administration, and questions dealing with promotions, minorities, professional registration, and counseling were discussed.

The exposure to these areas of administrative concern was right in line with my learning and training at the University of San Francisco.

Another very helpful seminar arranged by my employer was one on "Effective Technical Presentation." It involved a workshop and helped me to develop my ability to speak in

public. It also dealt with practical problems encountered in situations having legal implications, such as giving testimony at a hearing.

One of the most delightful courses has been a "Memory Course." I had become aware that my memory was not as keen as I would have liked, so a memory course seemed like a good idea. I was not prepared for some of the demands made upon me, like being introduced to thirty people and having to remember their full names, as well as their occupations and other details.

The course dealt also with social situations such as debating, organizing study material, and public speaking without the benefit of notes.

I won second prize in this course, and a trophy, suitably inscribed, graces the bookshelf in my office.

What has all this to do with this paper? There is a temptation to think that receiving a degree means that a goal has been reached, that the journey has ended.

Yet learning never ends. Like a traveller who has reached many destinations but is always packed, ready to continue the journey, I am always ready to learn anew.

## CHAPTER VIII

### FROM WORK TO CAREER

As a consequence of the Protestant ethic in our society, there are many who seek salvation through the discipline of work. They have the notion that work is a calling, an obligation to one's family, society, and self-respect, if no longer to God. Some spend a lifetime slaving to prove their worth.

This compulsion for self-justification through work has little to do with real material needs or wealth; the affluent executive, although he has the means to spend freely and give generously, may continue to strive as if poverty-stricken. Those, rich or poor, who worship at the altar of their employment seldom pay much attention to family, friends, or leisure.

Am I a slave to work? Is it occupational prestige which provides me with job satisfaction? Do I enjoy the amount of control and responsibility involved in the performance of my work? My work requires a high level of cooperation among the members of my specialty group; does this provide me with satisfaction? Am I enjoying my work more as I grow older?

A fascinating article in the Academy of Management Journal (Gibson and Klein, 1970) on employee attitudes as a

function of age and length of service suggests that there is a positive relationship between employee satisfaction and age. It also suggests that tenure in a firm affects satisfaction in a negative way.

There is good evidence to assume that, as people grow older, their relationship to authority tends to change.

A "mellowing" process appears to take place, people become more philosophical and less critical of their circumstances as they grow older.

On the other hand, length of service may cause people to become disenchanted as some of their expectations are not fulfilled. They may become aware of the two status groups--management and non-management people--and their attitudes may be influenced by the norms of the group to which they belong. As people "age" in the system, they see peers pass them by and they may become aware of favoritism, which is likely to occur in an organization where merit is not the primary criterion for promotions.

I will try to evaluate later in this paper the reasons for my progress in my profession, my advancement or achievement, and my goals for the future, and show how my work has developed into a career.

But whatever the reasons may be, I thoroughly enjoy working as effectively as possible within the limits of my capacities and potentialities.

Although I have no formal training in teaching, I enjoy giving lectures and classes, conducting seminars, and giving presentations.

There is great satisfaction in helping people learn what they need to know to perform their jobs better and helping them with their personal problems and career choices.

Counseling employees under my direction is one way of maintaining a climate of mutual understanding; it is also a good way to spot potential personnel problems in their early stages while I can still do something about them. I believe it is very important to recognize each employee as an individual and to give him all the personal attention I can.

One of the more difficult aspects of my professional career, and one in which I am not always successful, is to help individuals find acceptance of their innovative ideas. Since every change in technique or method affects other groups, be it design engineering, computer programming, or the construction department, it requires infinite patience, perseverance, and diplomacy to bring about acceptance of changes of present methods.

Someone once defined a conservative as a person who never wants to do anything for the first time. This description seems to apply equally well to departments or companies. Yet, no business or organization can long afford to remain outside the stream of innovation. Life demands growth and growth requires change.

Change has been an integral part of my life, and if I can help bring about needed change without disrupting the delicate relationships between the organization and the people in it, I experience a feeling of great satisfaction.

My work has moved from sheer necessity, reward or compulsion, to an activity which enables me to enhance the quality of life for others. It is difficult to decide where duty ends and personal fulfillment begins. My work has developed into a career--a change which is another turning point in my life.

PART II

PERSONALITY ASSESSMENT