

VOLUME 02

My Life Stories And Reflections

Phil Paquette

My Life Stories/Reflections Phil Paquette Vol 2

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What are the most important lessons you learned from your parents?

Beginning of Volume Two



This is a question that I have thought about over the years, especially after I became a parent and tried to consciously understand what parenting meant to me. As with many of my other stories, I did some on-line research by googling “What did I learn from my parents”. Not unexpectedly, there is a fair amount written on this subject. I developed a list of 10 lessons that deeply resonate with me and the household I grew up in. I enumerated them in the order (youngest to oldest) that I most probably learned when growing up. I’m not sure all my siblings will agree with this list, but here goes:

1. LEARN TO SHARE. When growing up in a smaller house with a total of 9 people you pretty much had to share most everything. This goes for the food during meals, to the use of the bathroom and, in many cases, the clothes that we wore. Certainly, there was a fair amount of disagreement at times about whose as what. However, in the final analysis, we did a pretty good job sharing our relatively scarce resources.

2. CLEAN UP YOUR MESS. This was something we learned very early on and there were no exceptions. My mother was a very good and strict housekeeper and she made sure that we cleaned up after ourselves. There were no piles of clothes on the floor or a pile of dirty dishes in our house growing up. From about the age of 6 we all had weekly chores to do—usually on Saturday morning.

3. BE HUMBLE. If you thought that you were the most important person in the family, that notion was quickly disabused. Our collective family was what was most important to us and each of us had a special place in the family. I, perhaps, am not the most humble person in the world and whenever I got to proclaiming how special I was my mom would say "Philip, self praise stinketh." That would pretty much put an end to that.

4. BE RESPECTFUL. This was a huge one. We learned early on (for sure by the age of 7) to respect our father and mother and that carried over to our grandparents, teachers, neighbors, spiritual leaders, the police, people's property, other children

etc. As I reflect on the importance of learning this early on and think of today's society and widespread lack of respect, it's no surprise we have the crime issues we have today.

5. GO TO CHURCH. Mom and Dad both went to church every Sunday. I don't recall a Sunday that they missed Mass and usually they had all the kids in tow with them. We were pretty well behaved at Mass and that's what you get when you learn to be humble and respectful early on. My mom had a deep faith life. Outside of attending Mass, she would pray the rosary and say a Novena often. (Maybe she was praying that I would become more humble.)

6. BE HONEST. One thing for sure that neither my mom nor dad would put up with was lying. In our house, it was pretty tough to get away with a lie because there were so many eyes always watching; and someone knew the truth. I remember a time when I was, perhaps, 7 and stole a dime from my mom's coin purse. She knew I had taken it and I continued to deny it. Finally, she told me the issue wasn't necessarily that I took the dime, but the fact I continued to lie about it. For some reason, I have never forgotten that. To her credit, she didn't yell at me or get angry, she just wanted the truth. I can't say I never took any money again from her coin purse but, for sure, each time that I did my conscience would drive me crazy for doing something wrong.....

7. LAUGH OFTEN. This is one lesson that I have recently spoken with my siblings about. We all remember the laughs we had

growing up. Our dad was probably the reason that laughter was so prevalent. I recall times we would get together with his parents (our grandparents) and siblings. There was very little room for anything but laughter and that probably got them through some of the tough times. Dad enjoyed talking with us kids and sharing stories about our week at school or out with friends. For the most part he was an affable man and I think that was one of the things my mom liked best about him. All of my siblings enjoy laughter to this day. I'm probably the Grinch of the group but, even I, at times can laugh.

8. INDEPENDENCE AND SELF RELIANCE. I am grouping these two together as they seem to go hand in hand. We learned early on that our parents were in no way what is today described as "helicopter" parents. We gained our independence fairly early in life as demonstrated by our free time away from home. Part of being independent from our parents was possible because we had a pretty tight knit and safe neighborhood with lots of friends (and parents of those friends) who knew us. The more independent we became we also became more self reliant. Our parents were in a position to only do so much for each of us. That was true financially as well as their time available to help us with school work etc. (I don't think I ever got a ride to a sporting activity or to school by either of my parents. For the most part, it was by bike or foot.) The other thing that independence and self reliance taught us was to look beyond our parents for support

and begin to rely (in a healthy way) on each other. I think it is safe to say that we siblings are as close as we are because of the independence and self reliance we learned from our parents. We all learned our own way in life.....

9. DISCIPLINE. With the exception of a "few" bad habits, we learned the virtue of discipline from our parents. I think this is especially true of our mother. I define discipline as " the practice of training people to obey rules or a code of behavior and, at times, using punishment to correct disobedience. " In our case, our mother would show strong disapproval for our lack of discipline but we were very seldom physically punished. More often, it would be grounding or not being able to go outside to play. The fact is discipline in a household our size was essential for survival if nothing else.

10. LIVE WITHIN YOUR MEANS AND TRACK YOUR SPENDING. This was most definitely a lesson I learned from my mother. I have spoken about this previously and won't go into it too much here but suffice it to say that she lived a life of financial frugality by necessity.

How do you like to spend a lazy day?



This is a question that can tell a lot about a person. I have been officially retired for less than a year and ,before that, I would say I worked mostly part time for 6 or 7 years. Over the course of that time, I have been fairly consistent in how I spend "a lazy day".

I think the meaning of a lazy day might mean something different to many people so I did a little research and came up with this definition: "A lazy day is when you do NOT do anything that is on your to do list, such as work, chores, errands or obligations. Instead, you spend the day doing things that you ENJOY such as sleeping, reading, watching TV, playing games or indulging in your hobbies." My guess is this definition would be what most people would agree with. However, I would amend the definition to CHOOSE and ENJOY...., not just enjoy.

I am very fortunate since most of my days now could qualify as lazy days as defined by " doing things that you choose and enjoy". So I will speak to that.

Most days I have something planned that will get me OUT OF THE HOUSE. One thing I don't like is spending all day feeling like I'm cooped up. Many times that will include a walk, visiting the University Club- where I am now- or going to my office at the Firm (I do that maybe once or twice a week.) I also like to have breakfast or lunch " meetings" at least 3 times a week with a wide variety of my family, friends and people I work with on the numerous charitable activities in which I am involved.

I PRAY every day. Usually, I spend anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour in daily prayer and reflection. I also try to find time to just be quiet. Part of that happens when I walk because I don't listen to music or have ear buds in.

I am an avid and daily READER . I read books for enjoyment and probably, on average, read 2-4 hours a day. I used to read the St. Paul paper daily, but I cut back to just the Thursday and Sunday editions. For the most part, I enjoy reading the paper but much less so than I used to because the Pioneer Press is now owned by a large conglomerate and has changed noticeably over the past 10 years; and not particularly to my liking.

I enjoy WATCHING baseball and football on TV. When the Twins play in the evening, I usually watch about half the game. Many times I am reading or doing something else during that time as

well. I have a hard time staying “glued” to the TV, regardless of what I’m watching. Probably a little ADHD lingering in my brain somewhere.

I enjoy WATCHING old western reruns on the TV. Some of my favorites are Gunsmoke, The Rifleman and Tales of Wells Fargo.

I also enjoy LISTENING to relaxing (SPA channel) and classical music. Much of the time I spend reading I’m also listening to music.

I like to WRITE usually 4 times a week for one to two hours. Writing is an exercise in reflection for me as well and I spend a fair amount of time, not just doing the writing, but also in quiet thought about what I’m going to write.

I like to LEARN new things and do a lot of research on many different subjects. One of those, and this will be of no surprise for those who know me, is medical research. I have had ample opportunity over my many years to become well acquainted with all of my health issues starting way back in 1976 with my blood clotting disorder.

I TAKE naps. Usually, I will nap anywhere from 10 to 30 minutes a day in the afternoon. When I was working we used to call these “power naps”. Now, they call them “old people ” naps. 😁

One other daily activity for me is trying to find that specific day’s PURPOSE. Maybe it’s brightening someone’s day who is ill, writing a short note to some of my elderly friends and family or just enjoying the weather. I think we can look at every “lazy day”

with purpose and choose to do something we enjoy and possibly help someone else in the process.

What places have you lived, and when?

This is the simplest of questions to answer that I have had so far and, potentially, could be the shortest. I have lived in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota my entire life! But let's dive a little deeper into where in the Twin Cities I have lived all those 72 years.

From birth until about 2 1/2 years old I lived on Thomas Avenue in north Minneapolis. In 1953, my mom and dad built a house in St. Anthony Village in northeast Minneapolis. I lived there through college.(I went to college in St. Paul and lived at home the whole time.) When Connie and I got married in 1974, we moved into an apartment in Roseville and stayed there for about 2 years. In 1976 we bought our first home in Maplewood and lived there until 1993 when we built our current home in Woodbury.

I don't remember much about the house in north Minneapolis (other than its specific location) since I was so young when we moved. Interestingly, I am drawn to that neighborhood and try to visit it at once or twice a year. There is a connectedness with the older houses and maybe to a time of simpler living, at least as I imagine it. I've always liked the style and more intimate feel of those older homes that were built between about 1910 and 1935.....

I've written a fair amount already about our house in the Village and living with 6 other siblings, our mom and dad in a pretty small house with one bathroom. I also drive around that old neighborhood from time to time to check out how much it has changed, or not, and think back to the late 1950's and 1960's and growing up there.

My one big recollection of our apartment in Roseville was of being "on my own" and out of the family home for the first time. I also recall a restriction we had because we were on the third floor and our small deck was made of a very flammable wood. We could NOT use our grill. Period. That didn't stop us from trying to barbecue a hamburger every now and then but, invariably, we would be caught and chastised by the building superintendent.

Our move to Maplewood and our first home is memorable because we had only been in the house a few months before I ended up in the hospital for 18 days with a pulmonary embolism. It's also the home where we lived when both Tony and Christina

were born and there are a lot of fond memories of our time in that home and their early years growing up.

Our Woodbury home is the one that is really “ours”. By that I mean we bought the raw land in 1992 and then built the house in 1993. It’s truly our house since we planned and designed it ourselves. I also like the area and street we live on as it is a little more quiet than any of the other places I have lived and it has been a very safe and secure neighborhood.

I’m not sure what the future holds or how long we will be in our Woodbury home. Time will tell, but for now it’s 30 plus years and counting.

How did you manage periods in your life when you had the least money?



This is a question that I selected myself. I wanted to write about it because the “financial management” lessons and practices I learned very early on (and most of it from my mother) have stayed with me my entire life. They have helped us, Connie and me, live our lives confident that we would have enough money to raise and educate our kids, have the housing we want, retire comfortably and do those other things that are important to us.

I believe that the most important thing about money is to have a good awareness of what your expected income and expenses are at any one point in time. In my case, I always focus on the short term, monthly, and long term as in the next 12 month period. Preparing a detailed annual budget that shows your income and expenses on a monthly basis puts that awareness on paper and

allows you to measure and monitor your income and expenses.
Another important item you need is discipline when it comes to not spending money on unbudgeted items. I was fortunate because, other than smoking for 9 years until I was 24, I didn't develop a lot of bad habits or excesses in my daily living. It seems that a lot of people get sidetracked in life by drinking too much, gambling, or just living above their means.
The time in my life that I had the least amount of money was during my late high school years (especially after I learned my mom and dad were unable to help me with my college tuition or expenses) and all of my college years. I was very, very fortunate to have found well paying continuous employment, especially during college. Knowing that I had the opportunity to—and was making—enough money to cover my tuition, books, car and other living expenses while in college took a lot of pressure off me. (Thanks to my parents, I was also able to live at home and commuted to school every day. St. Thomas was only about 12 miles from my house which was great.)
When Connie and I first got married, I was making $900 a month just out of college. Connie graduated from college just a few weeks before we were married and didn't find a job until the end of July if my memory serves me right. I think my take home pay was about $700 a month. We were paying $195 a month in apartment rent, $119 a month for my car and $25 monthly for a life insurance policy I took out as soon as I began working. The

truth is I never felt we were short of money after we got married because I continued to apply the financial management principles and discipline I had learned in my college years. As we got older I applied what I had learned early on about budgeting and discipline to planning for retirement. For the most part, Connie and I were able to save at least 10% of our gross earnings every year for retirement and we were most fortunate to be in a position to never have to "dip" into it.

So going back to the question of how did we "manage" and, without minimizing what I said above; I was also able to manage because both Connie and I had confidence and a positive attitude that we could do what was necessary to be successful. I always felt, and I trust that Connie does as well, that we truly had each others backs. I can say that I never really worried (although that IS my nature) about not having enough money during most of my post college days.

What is one of the most expensive things that you've ever bought?

I will expand on this question and talk about some of the most expensive items or things (plural) that I have bought. I will also modify the meaning of "bought" to include items that I have spent money on, or invested in others, rather than just tangible items purchased.

As with the majority of Americans, our house in Woodbury has been one of the most expensive things we bought. We bought the land in 1992 and built our house in 1993. Additionally, we did a major remodeling in 2015. All in, I think we have about $750,000, our cost, in the house. This amount, of course, does not include any of the costs to maintain the property etc. As a point of interest, the first home that Connie and I bought in 1976 at 1772 East Shore Drive in Maplewood was $62,900. Oh how prices have risen!

The second most expensive thing we invested in was a private education for Tony and Christina —from Kindergarten through College. In my mind, and I believe Connie agrees with this, that education was worth every penny we paid. Both Tony and Christina chose to go to college out of state. As a result the cost for their education was more than just tuition, room and board etc. because of all the travel costs over of each of their 4 years.

Another investment we made were the wedding receptions, wedding rehearsal dinners and other related wedding costs for the kids. These were expenditures that both Connie and I agreed were important for us to do as a family. I've said this before, but Christina's wedding at the Landmark Center in 2010 in St. Paul was one of the most fun and spectacular events I have ever attended. (Thanks almost exclusively to Connie's efforts).

From a business/investment standpoint the amount I paid to buy into Scruples Professional Salon Products in 2009 was the most expensive. Over the years, I have been given the opportunity and bought into many private businesses and real estate ventures. Fortunately, I made investments that grew in value and I was able to sell them at a profit. Ultimately, these earlier investment successes allowed me to buy into more expensive ventures like Scruples.

Another "expensive" thing I have bought or invested in are private school scholarships for our most needy kids to go to Catholic K-8 schools. I won't talk about a specific amount we

have contributed over the past 35 years but it dwarfs the cost of our home for sure.

I can't pass up the opportunity to talk about my 2014 Lexus, which I think cost about $80,000. I recall the first new car I ever bought in 1973. It was a Ford Fairlane and cost $3,300. Oh how prices have risen!

I'm not sure I answered the question above as the asker had intended. But, for me, it's never been about things I have bought for my own satisfaction or use. I could very well have purchased beautiful boats or wonderful vacation homes that cost over a million dollars instead of paying for private education, wedding celebrations or scholarships for our needy children. In the final analysis, if we are blessed with a modicum of wealth we need to prudently spend a portion of that wealth on others that have greater needs.

How do you maintain social connections in your later years?

It's Friday, May 17 2024. I'm getting a late start on this week's question. I had hernia repair surgery three days ago and am now just getting back to some semblance of normal . The hernia was a result of the abdominal surgery a year ago to remove the carcinoma. Unfortunately, I tore some of the internal stitches (soon after the surgery) from that operation which caused the hernia. Oh well, just one more thing to deal with.....

The question above about maintaining social connections in your later years is a good one. I have given some thought to it and tried to reduce the answer down to some simple elements. (As a point of reference, I have never been known as a "social butterfly". In fact, if anything, I am just the opposite in that I don't care for large social gatherings. I consider myself an introvert.)

I did a little research on the internet to see what the "pundits" have to say about maintaining social connections and their advice was neither unexpected nor all that enlightening. Essentially, they gave tactical advice like join a club, do volunteer work, or have a coffee date weekly with friends. Now these are all good ideas but in my mind they don't get to the essence, or the most required element, which is a DESIRE to want to maintain social connections in later life.

Taking the question a step deeper, I have maintained many relationships and social connections because I do have a desire to do that. I have a lot of relationships with good people that are important to me. I have been and still am involved in many organizations. I continue to have a passion for supporting Organizations that aid Catholic education in the Twin Cities area and expect I will continue to do so as long as my health allows it.

From a "tactical" standpoint, I am a big breakfast meeting, and some lunches, sort of person. On average, I have three breakfasts a week with many different people from many different organizations and areas. I know the owners at most of the restaurants I frequent and it's also great to see and talk with them when I am there. It's almost like a "twofer" in one.

I have many former work associates and some clients that I maintain connections. Having an office at the firm helps me in that regard. Generally, I am in the office or at the University Club at least twice a week and spend much of that time connecting

with people.

I have 6 siblings and we are all on speaking terms. That may not seem like a big deal but I can tell you from my 50 years of experience dealing with people's finances, that many brothers and sisters (and of course their spouses) don't get along. Having 5 sisters, especially, who are all pretty social helps me stay connected with them. I think if you asked my brother Rich he would agree with that.

One final thought on the "how have I maintained" and that is I make it a priority. It's always easier to just let things go and don't make that connecting phone call, send a text or an email. In other words, you need to be purposeful to maintain deep and enduring connections. It's definitely not always easy. But the effort is worth the reward especially when the connection is with someone who may need a little more of you than you do of them.

Tell me about the Week of May 12, 2024 and Your Hernia Repair Surgery

I'm writing this story/answer on Thursday May 23, 2024. I posed the above question as a followup to all that went on a year ago (with my health) and to describe another related surgery that I had on May 14.

One of the reasons I am writing about this is because there are many questions that can be asked and answered that talk about somewhat inane things (in my opinion), like my favorite trips, foods, wine, music, restaurants and the list goes on. For me, I believe a book such as this, written as a memorial or legacy, should include topics that delve more deeply into one's inner thoughts during times of stress in their life. For example, if I had a Storyworth book written by my great grandfather Zephrin Paquette (1857-1936 ?) I would really want to know what was going on in his head when his first wife, and mother of his 13

children, died in 1905. At that time at least 5 of those kids would have been under 10 years of age. The only thing I know for sure is that he remarried in 1906 or 1907 and didn't have any additional children .

This past year has been a challenging one from a health standpoint. I have written earlier about those challenges at the time they were going on.

Unfortunately for me, I developed a fairly large ventral (upper abdominal) hernia after the small intestine resection surgery early last June. Over the course of the past year the hernia has been getting larger as confirmed by the MRI's I've had related to the Neuroendocrine cancer. (The MRI's cover an area that includes the entire abdomen.) While hernias are generally not life threatening they are uncomfortable and can lead to serious health problems if not taken care of in a timely manner.

I decided to have "robotically assisted laparoscopic ventral hernia repair" surgery done on May 14. From all accounts, and the way I feel today, the surgery was very successful. That's not to say that I didn't have a fair amount of pain for at least the first 4 days after the surgery. I think anytime one has any type of "gut" surgery there is always going to be a fair amount of pain. The surgery was done on a same day basis. I went into the hospital early in the morning and was home by about 2:30pm. Again, thankfully, there were no problems or surprises. I was sent home with Tylenol and OxyContin pills to be used as

necessary for pain. I'm happy to report that I only needed to take a total of 4 OxyContin pills the first few days home. I have been taking the Tylenol regularly but have been able to cut back significantly on those the past few days.

The Ventral hernia surgery requires some post operative restrictions. They include no heavy lifting, pulling or pushing heavy objects and no significant physical activity for a number of weeks. It also requires that I wear an abdominal compression binder at all times for up to 5 weeks. I have been compliant with all the requirements and restrictions, although I don't wear the compression binder at night when sleeping.

I am most grateful that I am on the road to recovery. However, I will admit to being very nervous the day before surgery as I relived all my experiences a year ago with the heart attack and the discovery of the Neuroendocrine cancer. I have been reminded these past 10 days of my mortality and how fragile life really is. My prayer life and the prayers and support of my family and friends has been a great help to me and continues to affirm that the good Lord is "not done with me yet". And I hope and trust that's a good thing.....

How is your life changing now that you have been fully retired for a year?

This is a question I posed to myself. I feel a need to examine the past year giving more thought to the changes in my life and how "deliberate" those changes have, or should have been. Deliberate is defined as " doing something consciously and intentionally" i.e. "engage in long and careful consideration" before doing it.

First, I need to lay a little foundation (before all of my health related events that occurred starting in May, 2023). I had been progressively less active work- wise since the sale of Scruples Professional Salon Products Company in the fall of 2017 and, before that, at the Firm because of our mandatory "retirement" policy at age 65. I turned 65 in 2016 and consequently was required to retire from the Partnership effective December 31, 2016. I did, however, continue to work at the Firm on an

employee basis, after 2016, due to a request by the Firm following the unexpected death of one of our partners in February 2017.

I continued to work almost full time at the Firm for the next 3 years and then began to cut back my time. By January of 2023, I was working perhaps 30% time at the firm and planning to be "done" on June 30, 2023. So by the definition above of "deliberate", I was deliberate about retiring on June 30, 2023.

When I had the heart attack in late May, 2023 and then the subsequent discovery of the Neuroendocrine cancer, my duties at the Firm were pretty much done and I had transitioned most of my client base and administrative duties. In a sense I was fortunate to be in a position of almost being fully retired when everything went down.

As you might expect, the cancer diagnosis put me into a world of uncertainty. And I really don't do well with uncertainty. Most of the summer and fall of last year was spent trying to regain my health and figure out what my prospects were to live a fairly normal life, with a life expectancy of, say, at least 10 years. At this point, and with God's grace, I feel like I can live a pretty normal and healthy life.

So now the questions before me are " what DO I want to do?" and "what does being retired allow me to do?"

The not working and earning an income was a big change for me. That was one of the hardest things I've had to come to grips

with. Don't misunderstand, we live a comfortable retired lifestyle with very little monetary restrictions. We are not in a position to have to make money. So it's not really about NEEDING the money. Rather, it's a psychological issue for me. I do feel better now about not working, compared to last summer, and have made good progress in that regard—but please read on. I'm going to make a shift at this point as I finalize this answer and circle back to the "deliberate" discussion and do a bit of a turnaround. One change I have made this year is in my spiritual and prayer life. I have been very deliberate about praying daily and contemplating God's hand in all I am meant to do. The irony is that the more I listen to the word of God and try to discern his Will, the more I am called to follow Him WITHOUT deliberation, that being where and when and how He calls. So my concern about being purposeful and deliberate is perhaps for naught as long as I listen for God's call in a deliberate manner and have the courage to answer His call. Perhaps that's the whole point of my angst about not being deliberate. It's really more about my courage to do His work in a deliberate and prayerful way.

What are your reflections after just celebrating 50 years of marriage?



This is a question I posed to myself. Connie and I celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary on June 1, 2024. I thought it would make sense to write about my thoughts on this subject since I have been thinking about the past 50 years a lot these past few weeks. I have a number of reflections that I will speak about in no particular order of priority.

ALL THINGS CONSIDERED, we have been extremely fortunate in our marriage. I have seen many marriages come and go for a variety of reasons. In my career as a financial advisor, I have probably seen more than my share of marriages fail because of financial issues—one of the leading causes of divorce for sure.

I went online and looked up " what is the secret to a long and happy marriage." There is a lot written on the subject. Maybe too much.....But I found many good reasons that resonated with me

such being an active listener, communicating often and honestly, working together on financial matters, showing respect to each other and learning to negotiate conflict. This last one is something I've been talking about for some time as a key to a long marriage. In order to negotiate truthfully one has to understand their own needs, as well as the needs of your spouse, which may in fact change over time. (As a point of reference, I was 22 years and 8 months old and Connie had just turned 22 when we got married. That's pretty young and change is inevitable during 50 years together)

For my part the vows I took when we got married were very important to me. Essentially, the vows come down to staying together through thick and thin. As Catholics, Connie and I were joined together in the Sacrament of Marriage which takes our union out of the strictly secular arena and puts it into the spiritual.

When things got rough I always asked the question, "Why did God bring Connie and me together?" That was always the focus of my thoughts as I was working through issues that, invariably, come up in all marriages.

Put in a little different way, I would always ask WHY should we STAY together rather than hypothesize about WHY should we NOT STAY together. This always helped me look beyond the current problem, whatever it was, and stay grounded in the sacramental nature of our union.

Having said all of the above there is something else I learned a while ago. I don't recall the exact context, but I asked Connie point blank about 10 years ago why she stayed married to me. She gave me an answer that both surprised me and made a lot of sense. She said I made her feel safe. It took me a while to process that response but the more I thought of Connie and her family background and the insecurity her maternal grandmother had about being homeless the more it made sense. Perhaps there is, in every one of us, that one compelling reason we stay in our marriage. I can't articulate my reason as well as Connie did but I sense feeling safe is also an element for me.....especially the older I get.

Who have been your closest friends throughout the years?

I have been very fortunate to have many close friends throughout my lifetime. But before I talk about who they are, I looked up a definition of “close friend” and here is what it said:
“ A close friend is someone who you have a close connection with and you like a lot.” Also, “Someone who makes you feel happy, comfortable and amazing around them” and “ Someone who makes you feel comfortable without fear of judgment.” I’m not sure any of these three definitions are the perfect description , but the three combined include important elements of a close friend.
I also looked up a definition of “true friend”. “ A true friend is someone who stands by you in good times and bad, who accepts you for who you are, and who genuinely cares about your well being”.

Given the definition of true friendships— which I like—I'm going to speak to what I consider my true and close friendships. Connie, Tony and Christina, in addition to being my immediate family are also, by definition, true friends. I'm very fortunate to say that my wife and children have stood by me, accept me with (all/most) of my flaws and genuinely care about me. At least, that's how I view them.....

In that same category, I include, especially, my sister Karen and all my other siblings as well. I have written about this before, but I am most fortunate to have 6 brothers and sisters who not only get along but also cherish our relationship as family and friends. I must give a shout out to my mom and dad for raising and nurturing us in such a way that we are as close as we are today. It truly is something special.

Denny Felicetta is probably my closest and truest friend outside of my family. Our friendship goes back almost 60 years and continues to strengthen each year. For whatever reason, we have maintained our bond of friendship through all our difficult times of life. To this day we usually have breakfast weekly. There is little doubt that Denny is my big brother from another mother.

Father Mike Anderson is a true friend who I have known for about 25 years. Having a close friendship with a Catholic priest like Fr. Mike is special given how our very different life paths have converged into a relationship of caring, challenging and accepting each other for who we are.

Joe McHugh is probably my most unlikely close and true friend. I met Joe about 32 years ago when he was the President of Hill Murray High School and, even though he has not lived in Minnesota for a number of years, we continue to share a judgement free close connection. He is a man that I can speak openly and honestly with about my spiritual life and I cherish our almost weekly conversations.

Mark Murlowski is a close and true friend. I know, as does Mark, that if there was ever a need that either of us might have we would be there for the other. I met Mark when I was in kindergarten over 66 years ago and we have stayed connected throughout our lifetime.

John Schroepfer has been a close friend for over 45 years. Our families have been close friends as well over those years. Much has happened health wise in John's life that has precluded us from enjoying much time together, but I still feel a strong bond with John and a strong friendship.

Tom Margarit, a former business partner of mine, is a close and true friend. I have known Tom for more than 35 years and have had the pleasure of working closely with him for most of the past 20 years. Tom and I have had similar paths in life as far as our profession, family life, siblings and religion. He is someone I have had a strong connection with for these past 20 years and I trust Tom explicitly.

I will add one more person (a lady) to this "list" of close and true friends. I have known Jean Houghton for over 20 years. She was the President of the AIM Higher Foundation for a number of years and is now the Director of the Office of Advancement for the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. I have worked closely with Jean for the past 10 years and, during that time, we have formed a strong friendship around our collective goal of promoting Catholic education.

I said above that I have been most fortunate to have had many close friends in my lifetime. There are many more people I have not listed above who are also close friends. For my part, I look forward to continuing my current friendships and, perhaps, developing more in the years to come……

What stands out as one of your most meaningful projects?

As is my custom, I researched the definition of " meaningful project" and came up with: "Something that you care deeply about. And, ideally, it's also something that provides value to others or solves a problem for someone else."

My first thought, and the one that made the most sense to me, was raising my children. Especially given the definition above. Having children was a very conscious choice that Connie and I made and discussed before we were married. We were married young and there was never a doubt that we wanted children. As most people with children will agree, raising kids is a lot of trial and error. What works for one child may not work for another. I say this because I have worked on many projects, both personally and professionally, over my lifetime and usually there has been a project "plan" in place at the very start. Not so for

raising kids……However, as long as you love your kids unconditionally things seem to work out.

Even though it's probably impossible to have a "project plan" in place, I believe parents need to be in agreement on the basics of HOW they want to raise the kids. (Hopefully, this is something that would be discussed before they are born.) My experience is that the more similar the upbringing of both parents the easier it is to agree on the HOW. For Connie and I, we were both raised in two parent families, we had siblings, we were Catholic, we went to Catholic School, we were expected to contribute to getting the chores done, respect and obey our parents and the list goes on. I believe the good and loving model our parents provided us was the foundation of our HOW.

I do know that Connie and I, over the years, had many discussions about the kids and, honestly, not a lot of disagreement. Children have varying needs and wants and no amount of project planning can anticipate those with any certainty. The one thing, however, we did know is that we loved our kids unconditionally; and we wanted what was right for them. You might call that the core value of our "Plan". Loving unconditionally does not mean letting them do whatever they like. Indeed, sometimes love must put on the stern face of tough love. But through it all I think we did a pretty good job.

The other meaningful project I will talk about is my current transition from work and career to retirement. I have been in the

midst of this transition for a few years, but it wasn't until a year ago with all my health issues that I really transitioned. Like raising the children, there is no prescribed formula or plan to follow. But like the project of raising the kids, there are some things I know that are important to me. Continuing to be involved in my kids and grandkids lives, continuing to embrace my prayer life and spirituality, writing, engaging with my siblings and friends on a not too infrequent basis, volunteering where I am needed and wanted, and continuing to get to know Connie better are a few of the elements I have identified as part of this meaningful project.

I will probably never know if my "retirement" project was successful. That will need to be determined by others after I'm gone. I hope it will be successful or, at least, not judged too harshly by others.

A final thought. Any God fearing person will look at "getting to Heaven" as a meaningful life project. In the end, I suppose that's ultimately the goal of all of us. Like my success in retirement, I just hope that the Good Lord doesn't judge me too harshly!

What is one of the best shows you've ever attended?



Since this question asked about shows ever ATTENDED I am making the assumption that this means live shows attended as opposed to movies.

I have attended many shows over the years, some professional and some amateur productions. I will speak to both below.

As crazy as it may sound, the show I probably enjoyed the most was Tony's eighth grade play Oklahoma. And it certainly wasn't because it had the best acting, singing, staging or anything else close to what the "professionals" can do. Rather, it was watching the kids that Tony had grown up with really put their heart and soul into the production and do a credible job of entertaining the audience. It was, indeed, memorable.

Now onto other "professional" live shows that I really enjoyed. Two that stand out in my mind are Les Miserables and Phantom

of the Opera.

Connie and I went to New York City in 1990 or 1991 for a short holiday and we saw the Les Miserables production on Broadway. The show was a big hit and met with much critical acclaim. The best part for me was the singing, especially performed in the role of Jean Valjean.

We went to a production of Phantom of the Opera in Minneapolis in the early to mid 2000's, I believe. I really enjoyed the staging and the casting. In addition, of course, the music was phenomenal. Thank you Andrew Lloyd Webber!

I have seen a few productions of A Christmas Carol over the years, that wonderful play written by Charles Dickens. While the acting in all of the plays I've seen has been good, as well as the costuming and staging, it's the story itself around the redemption of Ebenezer Scrooge that always speaks to me. I can't really say why that is, but I know that I rejoice along with Scrooge when he "wakes up" after having been visited by the Ghost of Christmas Future to find out that he has NOT missed Christmas Day and immediately starts his journey of redemption. I think one would have to be completely lacking a soul to not find at least a little joy in that scene.

I'm not sure if this qualifies as a "show", but I am most partial to attending symphony orchestra performances. I would rather go to a live performance by a good orchestra playing Beethoven, Mozart or Johan Strauss II than to a live play. For me it's almost

totally about the music. Connie and I went to a symphony put on by the Minnesota Orchestra a number of years back of Beethoven's 6th, better known as his Pastoral symphony. It was sublime! We had awesome seats, a little to the right of center, in about row 5. To say I was mesmerized during that symphony would be an understatement.

So there you have it. I must say that writing this week's answer was a lot of fun for me thinking back to all the wonderful memories of attending live shows.

How did you choose where to go to college?

Making my choice of where to go to college was probably one of the easiest choices I ever made.

I really had only two viable options. The College of St. Thomas and The University of Minnesota. My sister Therese went to the U of M for a short time after she graduated from high school and my sense was that she didn't think it was all that great— at least not for her. That may have influenced my decision to not go there. One other reason I decided against the U of M was because of the sheer size of the place. I was fortunate to know myself well enough at that time to know I wanted to go to a much smaller school.

I became familiar with St. Thomas when I was in high school. I would occasionally join some friends who were older than me who went to school there and spend time on the campus. I liked the size and feel of the school. I also liked the setting in St. Paul

close to the Mississippi River. The school was easy for me to get to and was only about a 15 minute drive from my house. (I was a "day" student and lived at home for the 4 years I went to St. Thomas.)

Unlike my kids and so many others now a days, I really had only the two options. Going out of state was financially impossible. I was not getting any financial assistance from my parents and I never really considered taking loans out for my education. Unlike today, there wasn't the "easily borrowed" money available to go to college; and I am actually thankful for that. I knew I needed to work in order to pay for my tuition and expenses.

In retrospect, I also think that going to a Catholic school was important to me. There were many schools in Minneapolis and St. Paul that are small, private and located near where I lived. Hamline University, Macalester , and Augsburg were all very close to my home and an easy daily commute by car. But I never truly considered going to any of those. I was comfortable going to Catholic Schools and, in that regard, St. Thomas was an easy choice.

Another reason I chose St. Thomas was because I had a number of high school classmates and good friends that were planning to go to there. I have heard it said many times, from recent high school graduates, that a reason to go out of state to college "was to get away from home and make new friends". That type of reasoning didn't make sense to me since I needed to be focused

on getting an education and doing it in 4 years. Also, I knew that living at home, studying, going to classes, and working almost full time would not leave time for a lot of social activities. Certainly, I met people at St. Thomas and enjoyed my 4 years there, but one of my goals in going to college was not to necessarily make new friends.

As I write this 55 years after starting my freshman year at St Thomas, I can honestly say that going to school there turned out to be one of the BEST decisions I ever made as well as one of the easiest. I truly enjoyed my time there and, as further evidence, I began teaching there 8 years after graduation. All things considered, I am most grateful for the education and opportunities I received from going to school at St. Thomas.

What do you consider one of the best days you can remember?

There have certainly been more than one “best days” over my 72 plus years that I will discuss below. But one could argue that the best day might be today and there is some truth in that, especially if you have a positive outlook on life and can live each day with passion and fulfillment. Perhaps that’s not possible since we are, after all, human. The description “best” for me may be better asked: What are some of the most “positively notable” days I can remember ? My writing below will better reflect that question. Some of these experiences I have written about in other questions in this book. But they are worth repeating here.

The day I received notification that I had been granted a scholarship for my final semester of school at St. Thomas College was a spectacular day! It meant I could graduate with NO debt

and I had “clear sailing” to my college graduation. Graduation day was certainly happy as well, but truly did not compare to the scholarship award. In hindsight, I think getting the scholarship was an affirmation of the focused/ hard work I had put in the previous 4 years both academically and working/ paying for my car, all my tuition, books and other college related costs. I also believe that there was a certain redemption for what I have described as my misspent high school years. The fact is, however, non of that would have been possible without the hand of God on my shoulder guiding me along the way and clearing the path ahead.

Being hired in my first professional accounting job by Ernst & Ernst post college graduation was remarkable. I have vivid memories of the joy I felt in getting an offer of employment and then the first day starting on the job.

The births of Tony and Christina are special days and fit into the “ best” category. The thing about bringing children into this world is that you never quite know how it’s all going to work out. We can hope and pray that the kids are born healthy and grow to adulthood without too much trauma.....(for the kids and the parents!) But like I said above, it’s really by the Grace of God that it all works out. And, so far at least, it has....I must also add that the day of the birth of each of my grandchildren was a “best day”. Aside from the fact I am pleased to have six grandchildren, a big part of the joy of those days was being with Connie to

celebrate the births. There's nothing like becoming a grandmother for an Italian matriarch and Connie is proud to be one of those— six times over.

Another best day that probably goes without saying is the day we were married. Couple that with our 50th anniversary just a month ago and the fact is we can say that, all in all, it's "worked out" pretty well.

The last " best day" I will write about , is that one fate filled night last June (2023) when I had a spiritual epiphany a few nights after being discharged from the hospital. I will define spiritual epiphany as " An appearance or manifestation of a Divine Being or asudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something." I've thought much about that day and its impact this past year on my life especially in the context of all that has changed over this past year.

I have had many remarkable and memorable days in my life. There are many more that I thought about this week in preparing to answer this question. In the final analysis perhaps, and not to be macabre, but if I am a true believer in the redemption of my soul and living a Christian life, then the day I die should, in fact, be the very best day of my life, as I will have been gifted my soul's salvation.

Have you ever received an unusual compliment that you actually quite appreciated?

I've never thought about a question like this, especially the second part about actually appreciating the compliment.

I have been fortunate to receive my fair share of compliments over my lifetime in addition to well earned criticisms. As I reflected on this question, I remembered an instance of what seemed (at the time) to be more of a criticism that was "quite appreciated".

My little league baseball coach, who I had for a few seasons, was a guy by the name of Jerry Bennek. (His son, also named Jerry, coached and taught at Presentation school while Tony and Christina were there.) My coach was a man, devoted to his family, and he enjoyed coaching baseball. The criticism I got

from Mr. Bennek was “given to me” a number of years after I played baseball for him. It was after I graduated from high school and had been accepted at St. Thomas. I saw him at some function, I really don’t remember where, and after saying hellos he indicated that he somehow knew I was going to St. Thomas. And then he added “ I never would have thought that you were smart enough to get into St. Thomas.”It wasn’t said in a vindictive way but more as matter of fact. I don’t remember my immediate reaction after he said that but I do know I have NEVER forgotten it.

I thought about his comment over the years and came to the conclusion that, just like you can’t judge a book by its cover, you can’t judge a person by their looks. In fact, you can seriously MISJUDGE someone. I have recalled that criticism/ statement many times when I had self doubts about my, and others, abilities. Remembering that comment always helped to give me a little confidence boost when I needed it and to try to reserve my judgment of others.

What would you save if your house was on fire?

I've been asked this question before in my younger years. I'm not sure what I answered then, but it's probably not the same answer I will give today. Time and innovation have a way of changing us and therefore, perhaps, the answer. I will speak a little to that below and how time and innovation have influenced my current answer.

Had I been asked that question before I was married, and still in school, I may have answered that the only thing I would save would be myself. Back in my college years I kept the items that were "near and dear to me" in my car, which was usually parked in the driveway. Those items were my school books, class notes and my cigarettes. I also kept my wallet under the seat of my car with my drivers license and whatever little money I had.

(As an FYI. I'm sitting at the Lexis dealership getting my car serviced as I write this. There are two ladies sitting in the waiting

room with me; one who is about 70 and the other early 50's. I have a great desire to ask them this question but I just can't get myself to do it.) (FOOTNOTE—-It's now an hour later and the older woman is still here. I courageously asked her the question and she said she would take her deceased husband's ashes. I didn't see that one coming!)

So moving on. After I was married and had kids and before the era of cell phones and all things digital, I suspect the items I would have saved besides myself would be Connie, Tony , Christina and my wallet. I might have also tried to get my car out of the garage if that were possible.

About 20 years ago I got a gift from Tony and Christina (they were, by then, young adults and out of the house). It was a small folding locket with a picture of each them when they were young children. If there is one thing I would have saved at that time, in addition to myself and Connie, it would be that locket. In fact, I have asked them to bury that little locket with me when I die.

So now we come to the current day and all things digital. I have, for better or worse, become dependent on my cell phone, iPad and Kindle. Fortunately for me these are relatively small items and would be easy for me to grab if threatened by fire in the house. I would make a strong attempt to do that. In addition, I would save that little locket AND my Jobst stockings as strange as that may sound. With age and poor legs I have become dependent on those custom made knee high support

stockings.....Oh, and one more thing; my car.

As I said in the first paragraph, time and innovation have changed my answer to this question. Let's hope I'm never in the situation posed by this question. But just in case I am, and the absolute truth be told, I would just be happy if all humans, including me, could get out of the house alive.

Do you prefer summer or winter?

Neither! I actually prefer Spring and Fall but I will write a little about my thoughts on summer and winter.

Being a life long Minnesotan with our distinctive changes in weather, I have a large amount of experience with the change of seasons. Unlike living in Florida, for example, we experience very definite changes in temperature from -20 degree lows in the winter to highs in the summer of 95+. I have actually come to enjoy the change in seasons here in Minnesota and the "periods" that those changes take place are spring and fall.

Winter is a season that I enjoy, at times, like when it's snowing. There aren't many things in nature that can compare to the serenity of a snowfall on a quiet winter night. Also, I
never really minded the cold weather associated with Minnesota winters. Maybe it has something to do with the fact that I really HATE hot weather.

I have never been big into winter outside activities like downhill skiing, ice skating, cross country skiing or ice fishing. That's partially due to the fact that our family never participated in those type of activities—for the most part. My preferred form of exercise is good old fashioned walking which can be very treacherous due to poorly shoveled and icy sidewalks in the winter. As a result, and the older I get, I find it necessary to seek indoor facilities like a shopping mall or our treadmill at home to get my exercise.

Summers in Minnesota can be very hot and humid. That's definitely not for me. I have never been a "sun worshiper" that enjoys spending my day at the beach or a golfer who spends 3 or more days a week on the course. Admittedly, walking outside can be much easier in the summer except when it gets above 85 degrees. Couple that with high humidity and my outside walks become pretty uncomfortable.

That brings me back to spring and fall. Suffice it to say that September, October, April and May are my favorite months from a climate standpoint. There's usually no ice or snow, the temperatures are in a moderate range with low humidity, there are NO mosquitoes and the trees coming back to life in the spring and changing colors in the fall are great to see.

There's also something a little spiritual for me about these changing seasons. It's all about new life, new beginnings and being reborn in springtime and the anticipation of Thanksgiving

and Christmas in the fall.

What was your relationship like with your Aunts and Uncles on your Mother's Side of the Family?

A little foundation information before I talk about my relationship with them.

I call them "The Torborg Clan". My mom had seven brothers and sisters. They were Marie born in 1918, Leora 1919, Adrian(Sonny)1920, Richard 1923, (My mom Elaine, 1926), Jean 1928, Charles 1932 and Peggy 1936.

Sonny died at the age of 2 from Influenza and Richard passed away while in Navy boot camp in 1943 of a pulmonary embolism. All of the remaining siblings lived long lives well into their late 80's and 90's in Minneapolis with the exception of Peggy (Sister Mary Cecilia-A Sister of Christian Charity) who has spent most

of her life in the service of the Church in Illinois. Peggy is 88 and the last surviving sibling.

I had a very close relationship with the Torborg Clan. I viewed Marie as my surrogate mother (as she was for many of the Torborg cousins) She had no biological children of her own and, my guess is, because of that she had a special place in her heart for her many nephews and nieces. Marie was one of the most kind and welcoming people I ever knew with a heart of gold and an ability to listen and interact without being judgmental. Marie was very bright and a little ahead of her time having graduated in 1939 with a degree in English from St. Benedict's college. She was widowed in 1977 at the age of 59 and lived to be 95. She never remarried and probably didn't have time to because one or more of her nephews and nieces were at her home at least 5 evenings a week. I spent many evenings visiting her and Uncle Charlie-who lived across the street from her, but would always make his way over if she had company.

Leora was my Godmother. She had 9 children of her own and was an amazing mother and wife. Leora and Marie were best friends having been born only 13 months apart. I think Leora had a special place in her heart for me as well. After she was widowed at the age of 81 she spent most of her weekends at Marie's house and I had the opportunity to get to know her well in the final years of her life. She died at the age of 95. Leora was one of the most fiercely loyal women to her family of my acquaintance. She

also had a lot of grit and was not one to complain. I admired her greatly.

Charles became a very good friend of mine and we spent a lot of time at Marie's in conversation on many things. Charlie was an Engineer at Honeywell and had a 46 year career with them. He loved to drill down on any subject (as most engineers are want to do) and so you needed to have your facts lined up before engaging. Charlie was also very bright and especially knowledgeable of technology. He helped me a lot in the early years of my own business.

Jean became the father I lost when my dad died in 1986. He also had 9 children (I believe) and I got to know him very well when I rented space in the building owned by Jean's company. Jean and I had many lunches together. He was easy to respect. He worked hard, was a great husband and father and a good Catholic. He volunteered much of his time to the Church using the gift of a beautiful tenor voice from God to sing at many funerals, weddings and other special occasions. I found Jean to be the most like me in his beliefs, values and approach to others. He was a strict employer but never held others to a higher standard than himself. He was also self aware of himself and his own weaknesses and I was able to have deep conversations from which I learned a lot from Jean.

I am most grateful for the Torborg Clan. They were Faith filled and strong practicing Catholics. They taught me the unlimited

bounds of a true and abiding familial love that wasn't sugar coated. They talked about everything, disagreed loudly, and loved each other unconditionally. As a group they were the best role model for all the cousins, and especially my siblings, on what family truly can be. I am most grateful for having the chance to get to know them as I did and for them allowing me to do so.

What have you learned from the wisest person you've known?

The overriding attribute I have learned from the wisest people in my life is to be humble. The question asks who the wisest person (singular) is but, in fact, I have learned humility from many people at different times (and as needed) in my life. The following is a bit of a ramble but, hopefully, you can make some sense out of it!

I have always had difficulty practicing humility. Perhaps it's a result of my upbringing where, admittedly, I had some insecurities growing up.

As a place to start I looked up two definitions of a "humble person" They are: "1. Someone able to listen to and accept others while coming into their own power and success. They don't feel the need to control others. And, 2. Someone who doesn't think of themselves as better than anyone else."

I'm not sure a person can be truly wise without being humble. From my experience, there are many smart people out there who are happy to tell you what's what. But it's only the people who I first perceive as humble that I can truly listen to and hear. I was fortunate to have a number of teachers in college who were both wise and humble. One was Dr. Fred Flynn, my philosophy and ethics teacher at St. Thomas.

Dr. Flynn had his doctorate in philosophy and taught at St. Thomas for many years. He was a pretty straightforward guy who didn't use a textbook but rather taught all his classes using only his own notes, life experience and writings. Sure, we had various reading assignments from some of the famous Greek scholars like Aristotle, Plato and Socrates but no formal textbook. If you missed a day of class it put you at a real disadvantage because there was no book to refer to and you needed to scamper to find someone who took good notes for you to copy. BUT I digress.

Dr. Flynn had many experiences in his life that taught him true humility. He was a fighter pilot in WW2 which undoubtedly put him in touch with his own mortality at a very young age and then went on to study philosophy. His thoughts on life and the ability to share those thoughts were a great insight to me.

As I think of other wise people that I have known, it's not so much what they say but rather that they live a true, humble and authentic life. So when they speak, or give advice, it's not

something that “society” claims to be wise but rather their words from their own thoughtful lived experience.

The words of wisdom I have received have come at many different moments in my lifetime— and, thankfully,when I needed them. It’s almost as if I listen to many people give good advice but I am only able to truly hear words of wisdom when I’M ready to hear them. It might be a case of “selected listening”. On the other hand it might be the Holy spirit opening my heart, soul AND ears to hear.....

What Habits have You Changed or Adopted Over the Years



There have been a number of habits that I have changed or adopted over the years. Most of them were good. In other words , I didn't pick up the habit of chewing tobacco or gambling for example. Here are 12 habits, not necessarily in any order of importance or priority worth noting.

I QUIT SMOKING FOR GOOD in July of 1976. I think I've written about this before. Smoking is a nasty and expensive habit and I am really happy I was able to break it. It's interesting that after almost 50 years being smoking free, all my health charts indicate I'm a former smoker. I guess it's one of those bad habits that you can never forget.

I BEGAN A REGULAR WALKING PROGRAM about 25 years ago and have kept at it. Walking, as exercise, does become habitual but you need to planfully work it into your daily schedule. This is

much easier, of course, when you're retired or working part time and don't have nightly activities with your kids.

While I was never a big drinker when compared to my peers, I pretty much GAVE UP ALL ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION about 35 years ago when I went on the blood thinner warfarin. I've written about my father's drinking habits before and I know it was easy for me to give up any alcohol drinking because of the toll it took on him.

I LEARNED TO NOT PROCRASTINATE when I went to College. Up to then, I liked to "put some things off" and that's a really bad habit to get into. I remember starting my first semester at St. Thomas and consciously deciding to not put things off and, for the most part, I have been successful.

I ADOPTED THE HABIT OF BEING FRUGAL as soon as I began working and earning my own living. This was about the time I started college as well. It was done out of sheer necessity since I needed to save money to go to school. Getting in the habit of saving money is a great thing and it's a very difficult habit to break later in life. Ask any financial planner about their wealthy older clients and they are likely to tell you that.

I DEVELOPED THE HABIT OF HARD WORK after my high school days. As part of that habit I developed my ability to multi task. I think that trait showed itself over the years when I had my own accounting firm, was teaching a full load of classes at St. Thomas, was involved in charitable activities and raising a

family. It's probably by the Grace of God that I was/am able to switch from one thing to another pretty much without missing a beat.

Another habit that goes along with multitasking is BEING ORGANIZED. I took some time management classes when I was a Supervisor at KPMG many years ago and learned much about setting the right priorities and keeping yourself and your work environment organized. I'm not saying that everything has to be neat and clean. Rather you must know what tasks need to be done and when; and where the information is that you need.

I developed a habit of a GOOD DAILY PRAYER LIFE last year after my significant health issues. I guess I can call it a habit now since I've been dutiful in praying 3 times daily with the aid of the Give Us This Day prayer guide. Prior to last year, I would occasionally pray during the day but without any structure and focus. I would rate this habit as one of the best I've developed in my lifetime.

I have always been in the habit of ONGOING PERSONAL FINANCIAL PLANNING. I know I got into this habit when I was in high school and needed to plan my finances down to the Penney. My sisters still talk about watching the young me count the money from my paycheck every week and organize it into "spending buckets" like so much for gas, cigarettes etc. Unfortunately over the years this habit has become more of an obsession with me as I spend too much time on a daily basis

watching our investments and planning our household budget costs for the upcoming month.

I am in the habit of SPENDING ALONE TIME IN CONTEMPLATION. I do some of this while I'm walking since I walk with no distractions like ear phones playing music etc. I also consciously take time when I can to sit in a park area or overlook a lake just thinking and reflecting. Some people would call this spiritual reflection time and communing with the Lord and so it is with me some of the time. This habit is one of those I highly cherish.....

Perhaps a bad habit I have is READING TOO MUCH. I can spend up to 6 hours a day reading. I do enjoy reading books and newspapers. Another ancillary habit like this is reading information on the web. This is especially true of new medical research and looking up biographies of not so famous people. On the other side, I have reduced the amount of time I actually watch TV shows. This is compared to, say, 20 years ago when I had a lot of "favorite" shows I liked to watch.

The final habit I have adopted which I will speak to is my HABIT OF WRITING LETTERS WEEKLY AND MY STORYWORTH WRITINGS. I have been writing letters primarily to Tony and Christina for the past 28 years or so and usually get a letter off, more so now to Tony, about every 2 weeks. While I write weekly, I normally don't have enough to cobble together a letter but once every couple of weeks. The Storyworth writing is done every

week and is a good habit to have.

I believe that's enough for now. There is more I could have written about but the above are definitely my habitual highlights.

Are you same person you were as an adolescent, or very different?

A question like this probably requires a fair amount of self reflection. On the one hand, I have my thoughts on how different I am now compared to my youth. On the other hand, I'm not sure how my answer might compare with someone who has known me since my early days. In other words, my reality may be very different from others. I'll do the best I can to answer the question, but for those future readers of this who have known me for over 60 years, I recognize that you may have a very different perspective.

I would like to think that I am more wise now than in my adolescence. In my mind, wisdom usually comes with age, maturity and experience. I did a little research on wisdom and the conventional definition is " the ability to use knowledge and experience to make good judgements and decisions."

I view my older self as more wise because I tend to listen harder and not act as quickly as I used to. Unfortunately for those people who know me well know I can also can become very impatient and get easily frustrated with what I view as the inane. The point is that while I think I have become more wise, wisdom is a life long pursuit and I know I have a long way to go.

I am much more charitably minded and philanthropic now. This was a gradual process that began in 1976 when I became involved at Presentation Parish in Maplewood. I was asked to join their Finance Committee and got to know the pastor, Fr. Bill Kenney well. My personal involvement with the Presentation community opened up a piece of me that I never knew existed or had witnessed in any other family members; that being philanthropy and significant volunteering

Connie and I were like many other young couples in the 1970's. We were certainly not "struggling" financially but we didn't have extra money or Trust funds from our families. Tony was born in 1977 and we were both working and establishing careers. We bought our first house in 1976 and Christina was born in 1983. As our careers and earning capacity expanded, we were able to contribute more and more to our parish. It was the first Capital campaigns in the late 80's for Presentation and then at Hill Murray where I recognized the joy I received in giving to those less fortunate than me. And since then it has continued and expanded to more Archdiocesan wide needs, especially

primary education for those children less fortunate than ours.

The last difference I will speak to is how I view my spiritual self. When I was in my adolescence, I was a 100% product of Catholic education and sacramental training. If asked then, what do I believe I would probably say " I believe what the Catholic Church teaches and believes". The nice thing back then is it seemed so much easier to be a "good Catholic", as long as I meticulously followed the rules and obligations.

As I matured into adulthood my viewing lens through which I saw the entirety of the Church also matured. I learned through first hand experience that the church had, and has, issues that need to be addressed. I continually needed to ask myself if I really do believe what the church believes. And the answer to that is yes, maybe, sort of, sometimes, perhaps and it depends. In other words, I have many doubts around my spirituality and beliefs that I never had as a kid. But, I think that's the price we pay for maturing and not simply accepting the status quo. In the final analysis, it's actually the uncertainty that challenges and strengthens my belief in God in a much different way compared to 55 years ago.

Have You Had Any “ You can’t Judge a Book by Its Cover” Experiences?

I have had a number of “ you can’t judge a book by its cover experiences” in my lifetime and I will speak to a recent one below. But first I want to define what “you can’t judge a book by its cover” means. According to my research it means: [You shouldn’t judge someone or something based only on what you see on the outside or only on what you perceive without knowing the full situation.]

The truth is I judge too many people and too many situations way too quickly. I have to fight against the urge to do so and consciously tell myself not to.

Case in point. Last week I went to get my drivers license renewed at the Washington County license center in Woodbury. I dread doing this every four years because of my fear of failing the vision screening test without using corrective lenses. (But that’s

a whole different story). Since I was at the Firm the day before my visit, I went online as instructed to fill out the online questionnaire before making my in person visit. I decided to go for the enhanced ID license which requires proof of ID, a Passport, proof of social security number and proof of residence. I filled out all the information and downloaded (with the help of an age 20 something staff accountant) the verification documents.

Upon visiting the license center the next day, I was called by number to counter # 2. A person assigned as female at birth , I can only assume, wearing a Hijab and a protective face mask (even though there was a plexiglass screen between us) greeted me. I kept saying to myself " Don't judge a book by its cover, don't Judge a Book....." As we got into the work at hand she informed me that my social security card that I have kept on my person (since issuance 61 years ago) is not a valid proof of my social security number. WHAT!

She could tell I was confused and a little dismayed. She did tell me that as of July 1 (This was August 12) there was no longer a requirement to prove your social security number. WHAT! That's another story for another time, perhaps, but in this case I was happy to get the pass. She then asked me for the documentation to prove my residency in Minnesota. I showed her the latest paid bill from our utility carrier of 31 years in Woodbury, that being Xcel Energy, and was told that was not acceptable. WHAT! Turns

out they have been spelling my first name Philip wrong for 32 years. They spell it Phillip.

At this point I did what any guy from a few generations past would do and politely asked for her first name. She told me it was Mary. I said, go figure, that's the name of my dearly departed mother..... (Not true, but I wanted to get on her good side)

Now Mary was actually a very nice person and very helpful. She asked if I owned the home where I have paid the utility bill with the misspelled name for 31 years. When I said yes, she told me that she could go online herself and verify my residency by accessing the property tax records. AWESOME!

But I digress. The case in point is that I seriously misjudged Mary for a variety of reasons that speak to my own beliefs and perhaps prejudice's. As it turned out, I couldn't have asked for a better and more courteous person to help me that day. And by the way, I passed the vision screening without the use of any eyeglasses. OUTSTANDING!

In what ways are you more like your mother? How are you more like your father?

I think the answer to this question has changed as I've gotten older. I used to think that I took after my mother and her family much more than my dad and his family. I think I am still more of a "Torborg" when compared to the Paquette side and will discuss this more below.

There is no question that I have a strong physical resemblance to my dad. My build is much more that of a Paquette both in height and weight. I also take after my dad in that I do not like loud noises or surprises (my mom used to refer to this as my delicate Paquette nervous system and I certainly can't disagree with her.) My dad was very good with numbers and I must take after him in that regard. The other area that I am like my dad is in his love and caring for his brother and sisters. The death of his sister Phyllis (I think she was maybe 40 years old when she died back

in the mid 1960's) was very painful for him and it was the first time I really saw him grieve. It demonstrated to me the depth of his love and caring and the closeness of the rest of his siblings. But with all that said I believe I am much more like my mom.

Most of what I speak to here is also true of me, at least in varying degrees. My mom was a constant worrier, devoted to her family, a strong practicing and prayerful Catholic, financially very frugal and conservative, very connected to her brothers and sisters, and loved her home of 60 plus years until the day she died. She was also fairly emotional, very structured in her daily life and well organized. There were times that she was more emotionally " charged" but more so in her younger years. (But who can judge her when you think about having 6 children in 11 years and a husband who most agree had a habit of drinking too much and financial issues later in his life.)

One unfortunate area that I take after my mom is that I'm a worrier. To his credit, my dad seemed to be able to shake off potential (or sometimes real) problems without a second thought. Like my mom, I worry about too many things which ultimately takes a toll on my general wellbeing.

My mother was a devoted Catholic who was guided by the principles and precepts of the church when it came to living her daily life. She had a strong prayer life and a strong faith in God. She relied on the wisdom of the Holy Spirit and called on Him often to help her through many of her daily struggles. For the

most part, she was not active at her Parish other than weekly Mass and sacraments. In that regard we are different in that I have been very active in voluntary positions with the parishes, Catholic grade school education and at the Archdiocesan level.

The final area I will speak to, and which I have written about before, is her frugal and conservative financial nature. I don't think there was one dime spent on the household that my mom wasn't aware of. She would track expenses weekly like a hawk and did ongoing cash flow planning. By emulating her and having an innate interest in finances I learned sound principles of financial management long before I went to college and studied accounting.

I'm sure there are many more areas of similarity I could write about. In the final analysis, one can only hope to emulate the positive "likenesses" of both parents which, hopefully, I did.

What is one of your favorite memories of your mother?

I don't have what I would consider one "favorite" specific memory of my mom but rather a number of memories of her during the times she worked outside the house. I'll talk more about that later but first a little foundation.

My mom was a true "stay at home housewife and mother" for about the first 18 years of her married life. That would be from before 1949 when Therese was born until about 1966. She took a job as a receptionist with the old S&M Tire Company— at least I think that was the name- when I was a sophomore in high school in about 1966. That time period would coincide with Rich having started grade school. She worked there until Marie was born in 1970. She went back to work when Marie was school age, probably in about 1976 or so, and worked until about 1991 when she married Fred. (My dad died in 1986).

I say all of the above because my favorite memories of her, and perhaps somewhat strangely, were when she was out of the house working her receptionist jobs. Don't get me wrong, my mom was a great mother to all of us kids. However, she had a very effusive and lively personality and, I believe, she was at her happiest and her truest self in the workforce.

Elaine loved being a receptionist. I remember visiting her at her various work places over the years. She was always "dolled up" and looked great. Her hair was done nicely and her makeup was always fresh. Couple that with the fact that she was a smart and well organized person and it all added up to her being a fantastic (if not under paid) receptionist. Something else I remember about my mom is that she was a little bit of a perfectionist and that was evident in her punctuality and never missing a day of work.

A couple times a month I would drive over to her place of work and take her out to lunch. She had one hour- EXACTLY. No more and no less. To say she was precise would be an understatement.

I recall a number of times when I teaching at St. Thomas and working in Roseville at my CPA firm, (this would be after my dad died in 1986.) she would call me for a ride to work. My mom was not a good driver and she wouldn't drive in any snowy weather for sure, so she would call me at home early in the morning and ask if I could pick her up at home and get her to her receptionist job no later than 8:00am. And then pick her up precisely at

5:00pm to take her home. I don't think I was the only one of my siblings that she expected to drop everything to get her to her $12,000 a year job……

I need to be honest at this point and tell you that I was not sure where this answer was going to take me as I began writing. All of my memories about my mom leading up to the start of the "pen to paper" phase this week was about her pre outside the home work life. It wasn't until I got to the third paragraph that I had the epiphany about how much she enjoyed her job, how important it was to her and the "who she was" when she was at her outside job. My guess is I will be thinking about this for a while and coming to a deeper understanding of the complex personality of Elaine Torborg Paquette, my mother.

What have been some of your life's greatest surprises?

This question is a challenging one for me to answer without being too negative. For those of you that know me well, you know I DON'T LIKE SURPRISES! In fact I hate them.

I went online and did some research about people and being surprised. It came as no surprise to me (pun intended) that people who really hate surprises are those who interpret the surprise as a threat, heightening anxiety levels. I can totally relate to that. I also believe I come by it honestly in that both my mom and dad did not like surprises. This was especially true of my dad. A quick story about that.

The year Connie and I got engaged (1973) she and her dad came up to the lake for a few days where my family stayed at a resort for a few weeks. We were all down at the dock having a good time and out of the blue Ted pushed my dad into the water. The only

thing worse would have need if he would have pushed my mom in too. To say that my dad was surprised is a gross understatement. I can still vividly remember the look on his face when he surfaced. I honestly don't think he knew what happened. Truth be told, this was a little later in the afternoon and I think the adults had already had a few cocktails by then. But it was all done in good fun, no harm and no foul.

I have had a few surprises in my life and I will start with my health.

Finding out in July of 1976 that I had a massive pulmonary embolism caused by a blood clot in my leg was a huge surprise. I knew my mom's side of the family had a propensity for blood clots but back then there hadn't yet been a definitive genetic connection made. The surprise was so unexpected for me because I had been a pretty good athlete and took a lot of "hits" and injuries during my sports years that could have caused a blood clot. The clot I experienced had nothing to do with my athletic days and came on due to my job related traveling and sitting for long times at my desk. (And, of course, because genetically I am homozygous for the blood clotting Factor V Leiden disorder ——which was discovered in 1993 .)

The second large health surprise was last year in May of 2023 (which I have written about previously) when I had a myocardial infarction and was diagnosed with Neuroendocrine cancer both within 5 days. I truly believed, up until then, that I had inherited

my mom's genes when it came to good heart health and lower risk of cancer until very late in life. I also took fairly good care of myself: No smoking, no drinking, regular moderate exercise and regular doctor visits and screenings. Ergo, the surprise.😲

On a more upbeat note I have had many positive surprises, albeit not as earth shattering as the health ones. Connie finding out that she was pregnant with Tony was a very welcome surprise. Finding out she was pregnant with Christina was less of a surprise only in that Connie had more difficulty getting pregnant and we had to " work a little harder" at it.

The birth experience for both of them, however, was a BIG surprise. Like most couples back then we took birth classes and tried to learn all we could about the actual birth event. Part of that was being " conditioned" by the nurse instructors to anticipate labor lasting , generally, at least 3 and up to 24 hours. Both Tony and Christina were delivered within an hour of our arrival at the hospital. They were born so fast that Connie was asked " not to push" when she had her contractions because we had to wait for the doctor. But all's well that ends well.

The last great surprise I will write about is the financial gain from the 401 Building sale. This was the investment that I made with three other partners in the 1990's which ended up giving us over a 25% year over year capital gain return during the time we held the building, which I think was a little less than 15 years. For every dollar invested to buy the building we received about

$140 in return!

The old saying “ life is full of surprises” is certainly true. The longer one lives the more surprises there are, at least in my case. I have lived, on balance, a very happy life and I think part of the reason for that is I was able to “manage” most of the surprises, good and bad, as they came along.

What advice would you give to future generations in your family?

As I normally do, I researched this questions online and, as you might expect, there is a ton written on this topic.

Here are some AREAS of advice for future generations of family I thought of just sitting quietly and thinking about it over the past few days: Career, Educational, Spiritual, Financial, Keys to a happy life, Health, How to get rich, and lastly -Successfully raising a family and staying married. There certainly are other areas, but I will use the above as my outline for this question.

1. Career- Everybody I know says " pick a career that you love" and if you do you will never have to work another day in your life. Sounds great to me. However, I would add that you need to pick a career that will provide the income to support you and your family. Many people might like to be a career master gardener because who, besides me, doesn't like gardening? The

problem is you can't make any money at it.

2. Education- This is an area where my advice given today is not the same as it was 30 years ago. Back then I was a "get at least a 4 year college degree" kind of guy. Not so anymore. Colleges have changed as well as the cost to attend them. Today I say get the best possible education you can at the most affordable institution. Also, college is not for everyone and a trade school or vocational school education is something that should be seriously considered. Beyond formal schooling, I am a strong advocate of life long learning in any area that interests you. In my case I am an avid reader and researcher of medical science, especially those that affect me, my family and friends.

3-Spiritual. I believe that there is a God. However, there are times in my life where that belief does waiver and I try to recognize it when that happens. Sometimes it's hard to believe what is beyond our 5 senses of see, touch, smell, hear and taste. Faith is not perfect but just knowing that it's OK to have doubts helps me to reconnect with God in a meaningful way and draw me closer to Him.

4-Financial. I've devoted a good portion of my life giving financial advice as both a CPA and a CFP. Here are two basic pieces of advice I give to most people. Know your personal finances intimately and have a budget that you live by. Secondly, save and invest at least 10% of your household annual income. (And it needs to be a part of the budget you prepare above.)

5-Keys to a happy life. I could probably write about this forever but will limit myself to a few keys.....Be grateful for what and who you are. Incorporate gratitude in everything that you do and truly understand that many others are not as fortunate as you. Seek to grow in wisdom every day of your life. I have found that recognizing I am not the smartest person in the room, so to speak, allows wisdom to grow.

6-Health. I learned the hard way that you need to take care of your God given body and mind every day. Each of us has a unique body that we were born with and we can learn through experience what our body needs to stay healthy. The healthier your lifestyle is in your 20's, 30's and 40's the healthier you will probably be in your 60's and 70's. This may be obvious but don't smoke, and drink alcohol sparingly. Get regular exercise and spend some time alone every day without distractions. For me, that's the daily walks I try to do which has been a big help to me over the years.

7- How to Get Rich. See 4 above! And avoid divorce and vices such as alcohol abuse, illicit drug use and gambling.

8- Successfully raising a family and staying married. Maybe I should rename this successfully raising a family and being ABLE to stay married at the same time. For those of you reading this who do not have children or are not married there is always the need in our lives to stay connected in a meaningful way with friends and family. For those of us who have children, and are in

a marriage, we must focus on the kids as a priority without ignoring our spouse. I think the operative word there is FOCUS. There is an old saying that the greatest predictor of success is time spent on task and I believe this to be absolutely true when it comes to children. Be present in their life. Regarding marriage, and as I have said before, communication is wonderful but in every marriage there come times that you need to "negotiate" with your spouse to make sure BOTH of your needs are being met.

I will add one final piece of advice. Consider writing. I don't mean short text message responses but rather write for yourself. Some people find that keeping a journal is very helpful. For me it's writing like I have done the past many years both in the form of hand written letters and this Storyworth book.....

What things do you think you couldn't live without?



I will start with the obvious answer to this question and then branch out from there. Not exactly sure where I will end up but let's give it a shot!

There are many things that one MUST have to be able to live. Oxygen, food, shelter and water are essential for the human body to exist and therefore I couldn't live without. Add to that a sufficient income to afford the food and shelter and we pretty much have the physiological needs shown on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs covered. The other basic need we have as noted by Maslow is safety. Without being safe on a day to day basis, life would be not only difficult to sustain but also very scary. That would be a tough way to live.

Moving on to the more metaphysical, there are a number of things that I wouldn't WANT to live without. These come under the heading "what's the point of life".....

I'll start with FAMILY. If it's not apparent by now in my previous writings, family is very important to me. I might also add my friends as a close second especially those that I have known for 50 plus years. Even though I am a self proclaimed introvert, I know that I would be horribly lonely and depressed in my life without family and friends.

FAITH and SPIRITUALLY. This has become an increasingly important part of my life and helps sustain me during those "not so great" periods. I spend more time now than ever in spiritual thought contemplating someone or something greater than the human me. I had an experience last week as an example. While I was leaving Incarnation Church and visiting the Pastor, who I have known for over 35 years, a younger women approached us who I can only describe visually as a female St John the Baptist complete with a substantial 6 foot tall staff. She had a complaint about the outside of the rectory facade which the Pastor politely addressed. I didn't think much about that until the next day when I asked myself "Why did God put that person and experience before me?". I haven't reached any conclusions yet and perhaps I never will, but it's the time spent in thought (some might say prayer) on the question that seems to give me a deeper insight into my spiritual self.

PURPOSE. Seeking continuous purpose in life is very important to me. This has become much more real since we no longer have children at home and I am no longer working. I need a

meaningful reason to get up in the morning. For me it has become my ability to donate my time and, to a lesser degree, money to Catholic K-8 education and the Archdiocese. Another purpose in life, as Connie and I get older and are now grandparents, is our life together and being supportive of our grandchildren. In addition to that, there is the purposeful interdependence that Connie and I share that (I hope) makes both our lives better.

A HEALTHY MIND and ABILITY TO WRITE. Perhaps if I did not have a healthy and active mind I really wouldn't care. However, I have grown to really cherish my continuing mental acuity, to learn new things and my ability to write effectively. The last few years have been a surprise to me in the sense that I didn't know I enjoyed writing like I do.

Like so many of these open ended questions, I could go on writing about those things I wouldn't want to live without. But I think for now I have captured those items at the top of my list.

What are your favorite animals, and why?

I have always been interested in animals from the perspective of someone who really never had any pets growing up; or is a big hunting enthusiast- like so many of my friends and cousins.

Interestingly, this question might be viewed a few different ways. For example, “What are my favorite animals to eat?” “Or what are my favorite animals to hunt? and etc. I will answer this question, however, from the standpoint of what are my favorite animals to observe and learn about.

Some of my favorite cable TV shows to watch are about animal husbandry. If I’m sitting around looking for something to watch on TV, I invariably turn on the stations that have shows about animals. Currently, there are many shows about some of the country’s best zoos and veterinary clinics. I’m not exactly sure why I enjoy watching these shows. Perhaps it’s because there’s an element of realism and education in these types of shows that

you don't otherwise see on TV all that much. Or maybe the fact we were NEVER allowed by my parents to have any pets at home while I was growing up led me to want to learn more about them. My favorite animals are in the large animal category. Horses, cows, bison, lions, tigers and elephants are some of them. I also enjoy watching and learning about large birds of prey like eagles and hawks. I'm not sure if ocean dwelling creatures are to be included in this answer but whales and sharks are also a favorite of mine.

I don't mind dogs and cats and, other than when we co-parented Christina's dog Buster, I have never owned either a dog or cat. (It should be noted that I really did like Buster. He was a BIG dog with a GENTLE "soul" and really did become a part of our family. I was very sad when he died. But I also know he was treated like a king for his 12 years and lived a wonderful life. Let's just say that what Buster wanted Buster got.)

I have a particularly soft spot in my heart for the American bison. In 1800 it's estimated that there were 50 to 60 million bison roaming the plains in America and by 1900 there were fewer than 1,000!! There were no hunting regulations back then and buffalo "hunters", who peddled the pelts of the bison, slaughtered them with impunity. I have read much and seen old pictures from about 1870 that show thousands of bison remains in huge piles—the aftermath of the bison destruction. The information I read states that 5,000 bison were being killed daily

back in 1870! The ignorance and cruelty of some of the non indigenous “settlers and hunters” is mind boggling.

Both Christina and Tony will hopefully remember that one of my favorite things to do with each of them, when they were about 3 to 7 years old, was to take them to Como Zoo and just walk around looking at the large animals. I was much younger then and able to walk around carrying them on my shoulders for long periods of time. That was 40 some years ago now but still one of my fondest recollections with each of them. So in the end I was able to combine my love of large animals and my love of my children into an activity whose memory today always warms MY soul.

What was the first real date you ever went on?



It's a little hard to define what a "first real date is." And so, as I am want to do, I researched the definition of what is a "real date" online and came up with this definition: "A real date is when both people are all about the other person. The focus is on them and solely them." I might also add that it's probably good for both persons to understand that they are going out on a date.
My first date was in the summer of 1967 when I was 16. I didn't have a driver's license yet and so we walked about a mile (and back) to the old Hollywood Theater on Johnson Street just off of 29th Avenue in Minneapolis. The girl I went with was Charlene Keefer who, as it turned out, would become my first love. She was a year older than me and lived only about a block from my house.
I first met Charlene when I was probably no older than 3 years old. We were fast friends, even though she was a year older, and

we played a lot together with the other kids in the neighborhood where we grew up.

She was a good old fashioned Catholic Italian German girl. (It's interesting that Connie, my wife and second love, is also a Catholic Italian German girl, although I don't really consider her old fashioned.) Charlene had a very lively spirit and personality but was pretty conservative by nature and fairly religious. (Not unlike many of the girls that age back then.) She didn't smoke or drink, went to church every Sunday and taught religion classes on Saturday morning at St. Charles Borromeo Parish.

But back to the first date. We walked to the theater since neither of us had a drivers license. (I didn't get mine until the late spring of 1968.) The price of a movie ticket back in 1967 was about $1.50 and a soft drink was about 20 cents. Back then the boys almost always paid for the date and, fortunately, I made enough money to afford to go to the movies.

As I think back to that experience it was probably the first time either one of us thought about moving our relationship from friend to boyfriend/girlfriend. I don't remember the specifics about that date other than we talked a lot. It was pretty clear before this first date that we knew each other very well and were fond of each other. We both grew up Catholic, lived in the same neighborhood, went to the same school and church, knew each other's parents and siblings and friends. In other words, at the time of this first date we were on a mission to see if we were a

“couple”. As it turned out we were and dated exclusively for about a year and a half.

Charlene died of heart disease in October of 2022 at the age of 72. I went to her wake and met her four adult sons for the first time. When I introduced myself to them they knew who I was since, apparently, their mom had spoken about me and had pictures of our prom dates that she showed them. I was able to tell them about my friendship with her and how I still held a special place in my heart for her. She was, undoubtedly, my best female friend growing up as well as my “first real date”.

Have you ever had a "supernatural" experience, or an experience you can't explain?

I have written (maybe 16 months ago) about one supernatural experience in a previous answer to the question: “How did the Good Lord get Your Further Attention in the Summer of 2023?” That experience was, to say the least, extraordinarily unusual for me and I have not had that type of overt experience since. It was a “one and done”, at least for now.

I will talk about other experiences that seem to be supernatural and/or I can’t explain. But first a quick definition of a supernatural experience. According to AI on Google: A supernatural experience is an event that a person describes as being beyond scientific explanation and involving the

supernatural, such as ghosts, spirits, or magic.

I had a followup MRI this week for my Neuroendocrine cancer. I have these every six months as part of the "active monitoring" program I am on. I have had a total of 4 MRI's over the past 17 months. The MRI I had six months ago showed a small increase in the size of the one mesenteric lymph node containing Neuroendocrine cancer cells that was not taken during surgery (and still has cancer cells present in it.) As a result, I expected that there would be a progression of the growth evident in this scan. To my very happy surprise this latest scan showed NO increase in size. I don't know if this necessarily qualifies as supernatural, but it certainly is something I can't explain.....Perhaps my Oncologist can.

Another item that may not be Supernatural, but I cannot explain, is the ease in which words have always come to me both in my public speaking and now in my writings. I believe the Good Lord has had a hand "inspiring me" in ways that are beyond my comprehension and I have always thought of this as a gift that I cannot explain. Put another way more spiritually, I truly believe that this is God's Grace—or unmerited favor -that He has bestowed on me and so in that context could certainly be considered Supernatural.....

The last item I will write about is God's answers to our prayers. Many of my prayers, and those of other people of prayer that I know, are requests made of God for a specific need we or our

families might have. Most of these I would consider prayers of good intentions. And I have a lot of them! But the Supernatural and unexpected comes for me WHEN God answers these prayers. He chooses the timing and place to answer my prayers and those answers many times are not what I expected. When this happens I believe that the Good Lord is inviting me into a dialogue with Him seeking my deeper understanding of his word.

That's about all for now. I could write on this subject some more as I have more ideas flowing through my brain as I sit here. Perhaps I will do that at a later time and place of God's choosing....

What are some of your special talents?

I gave this week's question a lot of thought. Not because I believe I lack any special talents. I'm far too arrogant to think that. Rather, I needed the time to process what the difference between a talent and a trait is. The definition of a talent that I found online is fairly simple: "Talents are the natural endowments of a person." My answer will probably crossover a little between what a talent is versus a trait—and so here goes.

1. ACTIVE LISTENING AND GOOD VERBAL IQ. I became aware in college that I have a special talent to listen to the professor and really be able to retain what was said. I also have the ability to take good notes that memorialize the important stuff and not all the " in between".

2. TEACHING AND OTHER PUBLIC SPEAKING: By most accounts I am a very good teacher and public speaker. Much of teaching is being prepared and able to anticipate questions. That talent

seems to be intuitive to me. I am also able to connect with students or an audience in a way that is fun and also gets the message across. I have a fairly good sense of humor and like the interaction with the students. While teaching was a bit exhausting (partly given the fact that I am an introvert) I must have enjoyed it and had a talent for it since I had 16 years in the classroom, not counting the time I spent teaching seminars.

3. STORYTELLING. This talent goes hand in hand with number 2 above and made teaching and public speaking relatively easy. The storytelling I am speaking about is not the retelling of "canned" material but rather the ability to pull from my experience ,on the spot, great examples that highlight the subject matter or the point I'm attempting to drive home.

4. DISCIPLINED. I chose this talent because it's really not something I knew I had until much later in life. The discipline I'm talking about is the daily grind of followup and follow through and the drive to get the job done. In my younger years I had a tendency to procrastinate and when I did it played havoc with my sleep and digestion. That pretty much told me that my "talent" is having an innate sense of when things need to get done. In other words I have a talent to recognize a sense of urgency AND also when something really isn't urgent.

5. NETWORKING. This talent came naturally to me and I was able to develop that talent over my working career. I have a large group of people that I interact with monthly be it on the phone

or in person. I am proactive when it comes to keeping my network robust and active and am thankful now that I am retired that I have a talent in that regard.

6. CONSCIENTIOUS. Much of 1-5 above is probably propelled by my being conscientious. This is probably less a talent and more of a trait I've had since birth. However, this trait has allowed me to develop my talents in the areas of time management, organization, self control and focus. I have a strong "internal voice" that forces me to be prepared, get organized and stay focused when I have something that needs to get done.

7. WRITING. Last, but certainly not least , is my talent and ability to write. I have spoken about this in other answers but clearly it is a talent that I have developed over the years through a lot of practice and research.

I believe we all have God given special talents. Life's journey for me has been one of discovering those unique talents and trying to capitalize or "build" on them in a way that provides for a more joyful life and, hopefully, a stronger spiritual bonding with the Good Lord.

Did you ever move as a child? What was that experience like?

Our family only moved once when I was a child. It was in 1953 when I was 2 years old and I, honestly, don't remember anything about it. For all intents and purposes, that's the end of the answer. But I will write a little about what it was like NOT to move and having a family house (home) that my mom cherished and lived in for 63 years.

I have written before about my experiences growing up in one neighborhood, going to one grade school, high school and college, and pretty much having the same neighbors my entire life until I got married at the age of 22. I will speak a little more below about the pros and cons for me of living in one home.

The pros are fairly obvious. Most child "experts" say that growing up in one house provides stability and a sense of safety and security. I can agree with that since I really never doubted

my safety in the neighborhood and I never felt much anxiety or stress. (At least as a result of moving from place to place). I knew most of our neighbors and that I could go to them in any emergency. The neighbors were, for the most part, just like my family and we really did watch out for each other. We trusted them and they trusted us. Our neighborhood was ours and we knew immediately when there were "strangers"among us.

The cons may not be so obvious. Never moving meant that I never had to deal with new schools, new friends or neighbors. It also meant that I never had a new beginning. I couldn't bury the sins of the past because nobody knew me. Not having that experience is limiting in the sense that maybe it's good to be given a healthy challenge earlier in life where one is forced to get out of their shell and adapt to their new surroundings. I believe that I would probably have benefited by at least one move since I have turned out to be a real homebody and pretty much hate change. Clearly, my physical world growing up was very narrow and predictable. Again, some would say that's a good thing and overall it probably was. However, it does tend to stifle some of the growth necessitated by forced change.

One last thought. I never wanted to leave the Twin Cities. Fortunately for me, Connie shared that same feeling. We both have strong familial roots here in the Twin Cities. Our connection to the older generation of our families was very strong and, truthfully, we never wanted to leave them . We have

been very fortunate, indeed, in our ability and good luck to live and prosper in this one community.

Do you believe that people can change? Why or why not?



Before I address the question, here is a definition of Change I researched on the web. “ 1. To make or become different. 2. Change implies making either an essential difference often amounting to a loss of original identity or a substitution of one thing for another.”

Change is an essential part of life . In a biology class in college I learned that the definition of life is something that grows and changes. So it seems that in order for people to live they must, in fact, also change.

Notwithstanding what I have said above, I think the essence of this question is related more to a person’s ABILITY to change either their personality or habits. I’ll address this below.

Some people, much smarter than me, theorize that the normal state of being for most people is a state of “inertia” whereby we

resist change rather than embrace it. Let's face it, the status quo is much more comfortable for the average person. No change, no problem. Why rock the boat?

I have known many people over my lifetime and have come to realize that some people can do just fine as they are and with what they have. Others are on a constant journey seeking change. Inertia is their enemy. However, I think most people are somewhere in between.

So while I do believe most people CAN change, I also believe many people lack the courage to change for the better. In this discussion, I am focusing on positive changes rather than negative changes (habits) that we develop over a lifetime. Those bad habits are, unfortunately, all too familiar to us as they effect ourselves and our families and friends. I'm talking about excessive drinking, smoking, gambling, drugs and the list goes on.

The Bible speaks to change in at least two verses that I researched. The first is John 8:11 where Christ tells the woman adulterer " Now go and sin no more". His admonishment to her implies that He believes we can all change, particularly sinners. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 St. Paul writes " Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, old things have passed away, behold all things have become new."

So back down to Earth. I do believe all people can change and they do so for a myriad of different reasons. Spiritual reasons

probably top the list. Changing bad health habits are also probably right up there, at least for many older folks.

One final element of our ability to change is our rational hope, no matter how old we are, that we CAN change with some effort. Without hope it seems to me that any motivation to change would be hard to come by. The hope to be healthier, get to Heaven, be a better employee, parent or spouse. These are all good reasons to want to change. Now the courage to CHANGE is another subject, perhaps, for another time.

What are your favorite dishes—either to cook or to eat?



This is one of those questions that is very easy to answer— on the surface. But as I thought about it more over the last few days what popped into my mind were " visuals" of not just the food I enjoyed making and eating but also the time spent around the dinner table with my family. I'll incorporate a little of that in my writings below.

Food when I was growing up I liked to make:

Spam and scrambled eggs with cheese and chopped onion was a favorite Sunday meal that I started cooking when I was 16. The inspiration for this was my time spent working at Perkins Pancake house in the kitchen. Their recipe called for ham but our family, at least my dad and I, liked browned spam. I recall making this Sunday dish while I was in college as well. The memory of eating those Sunday meals after attending Mass will

always be with me.

Food I liked to eat:

The fact is that when I was a kid I pretty much ate anything and everything. I was not blessed with a particularly discerning palate. One of my all time favorites back then was slow cooked spam over a bed of sauerkraut. (What's up with the Spam?) The fat would render out of the spam and onto the sauerkraut giving it a delicious slow roasted flavor. Another favorite was round steak slow cooked in the oven seasoned with dry onion soup mix. We probably ate it with some kind of potato or maybe even rice. I'm pretty sure my sisters really didn't like this particular dish and that was just fine with me since I ate my portion and theirs.

Another favorite meal of mine was blood sausage and "experimental" bread. So a little explanation about the bread. My dad worked at the Grain Exchange and back in his day the larger grain companies would have small kitchens on site to test the samples of wheat that came in from the farm fields. They would make these large loaves of bread during the day and occasionally my dad would drop in and ask to take home some of the day's experiments. I can honestly say to this day I have never had anything better. I would also say that my older siblings agree with me on this one.

Eating blood sausage was more common back in the 1950's and 60's. My dad and I both loved it but I'm not so sure about the rest of the family. I also remember my mom making bloods

sausage with spaghetti. And, of course, I loved it. One other meal that we had a lot of was liver. My mom, dad and I loved liver but, like the blood sausage, I don't think my sisters were too fond of it. Oh well, more for me!

Food I like to make now:

As an older adult I have a couple of items that I still enjoy making, although truth be told as I get older I would much rather watch someone else do the work……

I really enjoy "doctoring up" plain frozen sausage or pepperoni pizza's with extra cheese, mushrooms and green olives. It's one of my favorite things to splurge on. I've been doing this since Connie and I were first married and, honestly, I prefer those doctored up pizzas over any other I've had. The added benefit is that just about everyone else likes my pizzas.

My Thanksgiving sausage dressing that we stuff into the Turkey is one of my oldest and longest standing traditions. I can remember preparing this when we first lived on East Shore Drive way back in the late 70's. As I write this a week before Thanksgiving, 2024 I'm well on the way to pulling everything together for it this year. Christina and I will go shopping and pick up the onion, celery, butter, croutons, sausage (a 50/50 mixture of mild and hot) and mushrooms for the dressing. I usually pair a pound of sausage with each bag of croutons which gives it a very robust and meaty flavor.

Foods I like to eat now as an adult:

In addition to the pizza and sausage dressing some of my favorite meals as I get older are Chinese Fried Rice, a simple spaghetti bolognese (with a hearty meat sauce), and soy sauce marinated chicken wings cooked on the grill. Back in the day when I was in my 30's and 40's I never passed up an opportunity to have end cut prime rib. But those days are long gone. At some point the body says it's just not right to be putting this stuff in your mouth— as good as it might taste.

What do you think is key to maintaining a happy relationship?

I went on the internet and asked how many books have been written on the above question. According to AI research: “ It’s impossible to determine an exact number of books written on maintaining healthy (using healthy and happy interchangeably)

relationships, but due to the vast topic and constant publications of new titles, there are likely thousands of books available.....” I am fairly certain that many people smarter than me, who have actually studied this topic and written extensively, have some really good answers and suggestions. But, be that as it may, here are my thoughts on this question starting with number 1 below.

I don’t believe there is just one Key to maintaining healthy relationships but rather a number of interdependent “keys”. I will speak to them below, but for now, I will leave you with two

of my keys, Perseverance and Forgiveness, that I will come back to. My assumption as I write this answer is that we are discussing LONG TERM healthy relationships. So here we go:

1. A MUTUAL belief that you are in it for the long haul. For a married couple there needs to be a real commitment by both parties to staying in the relationship. I have had a fair amount of experience over my 50+ years advising couples and can honestly say there are certain "tells" that one party may not be fully committed. In my world someone that doesn't want to discuss their financial situation, work on improving their financial condition or be willing to adjust their lifestyle are all tells. That's a real problem and does not bode well for a long term healthy relationship.

2. Learn to RIDE the waves and NAVIGATE difficult waters. This probably seems obvious but my experience again tells me that many times one, or both, of the parties doesn't recognize that they are in troubled waters. Or, on the other hand, they don't want to recognize the problem. Either way, it does not bode well for a long term healthy relationship.

3. A WILLINGNESS to work on the relationship when needed and WITHOUT delay. The longer you put off tough discussions about the relationship the more, whatever the issue, it will likely continue to grow like an unchecked cancer. What I'm talking about, of course, is authentic communication that involves being honest, open, and respectful while also sharing your thoughts,

feelings and experiences. Without this willingness it does not bode well for a long term healthy relationship.

4. Hand in hand with number 3 is a recognition that both parties need to continually grow in the relationship and get their own individual needs met. This certainly requires communication, but it also requires NEGOTIATION whereby there is a mutual acceptance of each others needs. I have spoken about this in some of my other answers in this book.....If you're unwilling to negotiate it does not bode well for a long term healthy relationship.

5. Keep your EGO and TEMPER in check at all times. Fight the temptation to get angry. I think this is especially important for men. If you're unwilling to keep your Ego in check, it does not bode well for a long term healthy relationship.

6. RECOGNIZE when bad habits are getting in the way of a healthy relationship. This too is probably obvious and, yes, I'm talking about drinking, smoking, gambling and the like. Oscar Wilde said " Everything in moderation, including moderation." Not having moderation does not bode well for a long term healthy relationship.

7. AGREE that the relationship can transcend differences in politics and religion. This is an especially difficult key in that, as we get older, we tend to become increasingly entrenched and more myopic in our political and spiritual beliefs. Be a good listener, understand the other's position and open enough to

compassionately accept the difference. Not being able to agree does not bode well for a long term healthy relationship.

8. PUTTING TRUST IN GOD to help guide your relationship. I believe God listens to our prayers and guides us in our relationships to do His will. The dialogues that I have with God, which is another form of prayer, has been one key item that I turn to in times of need, including " navigating difficult waters" in any and all my relationships. Without the steady hand of God to turn to I doubt that I would have had as much relational good fortune. And of course, without this trust in the Good Lord, it does not bode well for a long term healthy relationship.

This brings me to the last thoughts of this answer. PERSEVERANCE and FORGIVENESS. I consider myself fortunate to have many long term and (hopefully) healthy relationships. My marriage of 50+ years, while not perfect, has been a blessing to me as well as my children. I grieve for parents who are not able to have healthy, loving relationships with their children. I am blessed to have many long term friendships of over 60+ years and long term loving relationships (again not always perfect) with ALL my siblings. However, I also know that none of these would be possible without perseverance and, when necessary, the God given grace to forgive and to be forgiven. Not having this God given grace would be disastrous to a long term happy relationship.

What were some of your favorite classes in College?

In an earlier question: " What were your Favorite subjects in High School?" I indicated that I would write about my favorite subjects in College. I have alluded to and written a little about my college experience in other questions, but will talk specifically about the college courses I particularly enjoyed below.

As a preamble to my answer, let me say that I really gained a lot of confidence academically my first year at St. Thomas and am most thankful for that. I was not a serious student at De La Salle high school and it was mostly my fault, although the "modular scheduling" program back then didn't help. I will write about classes that I took that I both enjoyed and excelled in with a 4.0 GPA.

1. STATISTICS. The first semester at St. Thomas was a real test for me. I had pretty much no say in selecting the classes I took that first semester. My freshman advisor, Monsignor Flavin I

believe, suggested the coursework and he thought I would do fine taking a Statistics class right out of the shoot. To say that I was concerned at that time would be a huge understatement.

My instructor was Mr. Hamm. He was experienced, very knowledgeable and a really good guy to boot. We had 33 guys in that class. I remember one of the first questions he asked us was " what's the statistical probability that at least two of you have the same month and day of birth?" I figured it to be very low. It turned out that there were 3 matches in our class and the statistical probability of a birthday match with 33 people is about 99.9%. WHAT!! From then on I was hooked on the study of Statistical Probability. I loved the subject and don't believe I missed a day of class even though it was in the mid/late afternoon. The fact that I got an A was the confidence booster I needed to know I could succeed in college and at St. Thomas.

2. BUSINESS MATHEMATICS. This was another class that I took my freshman year. It was required of all business majors which was the road I was headed down. The teacher was a younger fellow by the name of Bob Veverka. He was an attorney by education and taught business law as his primary area. Business mathematics was an easy class for me probably because I was given the gift of "numbers". By that I mean I was good with percentages and ratios as well as basic addition, subtraction etc. (I figured out afterwards that many aspiring business majors really weren't very good with basic numbers and problem

solving. And this class was a gentle way of weeding them out of the business field of study).

3. ECONOMICS. I took a total of 4 economics classes when I was in college. The first two were required classes for a business major. I remember being out for a drive in my old 1960 Chev, before the start of my first economics class, and thinking " what the heck do I know about economics." I knew nothing about the teacher and really started at ground zero that first day. The good news for me is that I had confidence that if I went to EVERY class, participated and studied hard I should be in pretty good shape. And that's exactly what I did. The teacher was a very young Doctoral candidate by the name of Terry Kinal, from the University of Minnesota, who was teaching part time at St. Thomas. His classes were very late in the afternoon and while there were a lot of guys enrolled, not many showed up. My guess is that at any one class, other than test days, no more than 40% of the guys showed up. I really enjoyed all my economics classes and ended up with what would qualify as a minor in Econ.

4. BUSINESS ETHICS and INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY. I believe I have written about these two separate classes in the past so I won't spend much time here other than to say I really enjoyed these classes which did not have textbooks. Rather, the Professor, Dr. Fred Flynn, lectured 100% of the time in class. I learned a lot about integrity and honesty in the workplace before it was " fashionable" to be taught. Also, as a pragmatic matter, I

learned how to take good notes which came in handy in all aspects of my future career.

5. MUSIC APPRECIATION. Yes, Music Appreciation. This was one of the few courses I took Pass/Fail in college. The Professor was Dr. Anthony Chuminato. I actually took this class as an elective because I got to know Dr. Chuminato and wanted to learn more about classical music and the instruments in the orchestra. (This was the last semester of my senior year). Dr. Chuminato was an elderly fellow, maybe 65 or so, and enjoyed drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes with us regulars early in the morning before class in the old St. Thomas Grill. That's the same place I met Connie.....although she didn't smoke cigarettes. Unfortunately Dr. Chuminato died in the middle of the semester, but even in that short time I learned much about classical music. I continue to be an avid listener to this day and believe the good Dr. Chuminato would be proud of me.

6. INDIVIDUAL INCOME TAX. I wrote about the instructor I had for this class, Mr. Dan Sevenich, as part of my answer to other stories. Suffice it to say that I really enjoyed this class and it awakened in me an area of interest where I felt I could make a career. That being a Certified Public Accountant. The class itself was one of the toughest classes I have ever taken and I studied like crazy for this class. Simply put, I wanted to excel. The effort I had to put in taught me how intensely I needed to study when I took the CPA exam a few years later. Mr. Sevenich died at the age

of 95 on December 23, 2023. May the Good Lord rest his soul. I cannot tell you how much admiration and respect I had for him.

It should be clear to any reader that the 4 years I matriculated at St. Thomas were some of the most fulfilling of my life. I grew up a ton in college and am ever thankful for all the support I got on and off campus. Those were 4 very good years in my life!

Did you have any nicknames when you were a child? How did you feel about them?

I had a few nicknames growing up that I'm still called today by some of my old grade school classmates. My primary nickname was "Porky" and the other one was "Frenchie." I'll spend some time below just giving you the facts about the origin of the nicknames and then talk about the use of nicknames in general and how I feel about them.

The nickname Frenchie was used far less often than Porky and its origin is fairly simple since my last name, Paquette, is French. The nickname Porky was given to me early in my grade school years and definitely had something to do with my physical size.

I was a really big kid and grew very fast in grades 3-6. I was overweight by most standards but also very athletic. I'm not sure

who hung the moniker "Porky" on me, but it was probably Mark Murlowski who was responsible for most of the nicknames in our motley group.

I never minded the Frenche nickname as I figured it is what it is. There weren't that many French people in our area of Northeast Minneapolis and so that nickname was pretty much exclusive to me.

The nickname Porky was another matter. For any of you old timers out there you might remember Porky Pig, the Warner Brothers cartoon character. It was created in 1935 and so it's been around for a few years now. Obviously, having the nickname Porky is not something I would put on my resume. It's a little embarrassing to say the least, especially when you consider the fact that even my coaches and the parents of my friends called me that most of the time. But, as in most things in life, you learn to live with it.

But a deeper dive into the use of nicknames in general is in order. All my friends had nicknames and most of them were not very flattering. Back in the 1950's and 60's that's just the way things were and most people didn't pay all that much attention to any personal negativity around their usage or viewed them in a highly emotional way. In other words, if you didn't like your nickname too bad. Generally, your friends and classmates were going to call you by your nickname rather than the name given to you at birth. The positive thing about getting your nickname

by the group meant you were accepted and in. And, as we are learning today, that's a positive thing since kids need to feel a sense of belonging. When they are ostracized, or just a loner by nature, and adding the social media negativity that many kids experience, bad things can happen.

There has actually been a fair amount written on the usage of nicknames and the impact, both positive and negative, on young people. In this day and age, however, one needs to be aware that calling someone by a less than flattering nickname could get you in "trouble" with the sensitivity and appropriateness folks.....

What talents did you always wish you had?

I'm writing the answer to this question during Christmas week of 2024. Admittedly, I haven't had as much time to think about this answer as I would like, but sometimes it's better to not "overthink" things.

I don't believe there is anyone who has ever been born that hasn't wished they were more talented. So many times we have seen someone sing a song, play a musical instrument, write a novel, act in a play, speak many languages, hit a home run, run like the wind and the list could go on and on.

Sometimes I feel we conflate skill with talent and I think it would be good to talk about the differences between the two. A little research that I did said " The main difference between Talent and Skill is that Talent is a NATURAL ability, while Skill is something that is learned. Further, Talent is a natural ability that someone is born with, such as a creative mind or a perfect

pitch (as in singing, not playing baseball). Talent is a gift that is independent of effort or desire. Finally, Talent can give someone a head start, but Skill is what allows someone to achieve excellence." I think it's safe to say from the definition above that the old saying " The greatest predictor of success, or in this case excellence, is time spent on task." is once again very true.

I did attempt to take an inventory of the talents I was born with and came up with a few that I consider to be mostly positive. I have always been very quick witted and a good public speaker and didn't shy away from situations that required it. The classroom teaching experience and public speaking skills I have are the result, I believe, of being born with talent and then working on that talent to become better. The other talent I had , early on, was a very inquisitive nature and the ability to ask the right questions. I remember my dad chiding me frequently for asking so many questions. I think this inquisitive " nature" was a gift/ talent given to me at birth and has continued on to this day, now 73 years later. Of course, the other "talent" some would say I was born with is my ability to eat! But, I won't go into that now.

So on to talents that I wish I had. I wish I could sing like some of the famous opera singers of our time. Luciano Pavarotti and Placido Domingo are two that come to mind. Every time I listen to them I am awed by their ability to hit the high C's. I wish I could play a musical instrument. The violin and flute are two of

my most favorite. Perhaps this desire to be able to sing and play a musical instrument comes from my “genes” since my mother’s side of the family, especially, were musically talented.

I wish I had more natural foot speed and was able to be a better hitter in baseball. I knew early on that I was not the fastest kid on the playground and that probably led me to be a catcher in baseball, a center in football, and a heavyweight wrestler. While the good Lord didn’t bless me with foot speed , he did give me excellent short distance quickness which was a real plus in the three positions I named above.

I’ve often wondered about all the wasted talent people are born with. This could be from an inability to recognize the talent, not having the resources to develop the talent or just not having the desire to use the talent to excel. I’ll probably never know what talents I let waste but, at least, I can be happy knowing that I was able to develop some of the talent I was born with.

How did you get to school as a child?

This could be, quite easily, one of the quickest questions to answer seeing as how I went to one K-8 school as a child and I only had one choice of transportation; my feet. However, to make it a little more "fun"I will expand the question to include all modes of transportation (and other more philosophical thoughts) while I was in high school and college.

I walked to grade school and also home for lunch every day. I walked alone most of the time, which I will speak to a little more below. It's funny that I don't really remember walking with my siblings very much. Maybe it's because the ones near my age were girls and they had their own friends to walk with.

The distance from our house to school was .04 miles. All in, I walked 1.6 miles to and from school every day for 9 years. (Including home for lunch and back.) It was very seldom that I packed a lunch or had hot lunch at the school.

It took about 9 minutes one way to cover the .04 miles on foot and I was able to do a lot of thinking during those short walks. I actually remember the intensity in which I would think about things. Of course, one has to take into account that in the 1950's and 60's there were no cell phones to interrupt your thoughts with calls, texting, music and the like.

I went online and researched the importance of contemplation and alone time for younger children and, not surprisingly, there are some real benefits to having periods of alone time every day.

To quote " Alone time for children ages 5-12 is CRUCIAL for their development as it fosters CREATIVITY and INDEPENDENCE and the ability to self regulate.... It allows them to be more comfortable in their own company."As a side note, I doubt very much that those kids that did take a school bus to school had much real quiet/ alone time in which to contemplate.

My high school experience was the most diverse regarding how I got to school. De La Salle was 4.5 miles from my home in St. Anthony Village. Sometimes I took the city bus my freshman and sophomore years but I usually car pooled with other people. The one car pool I remember the most was with Tom Fudali (Tom had his own car. I think it was a 1960-62 Chevrolet Station Wagon.) My cousins, Mike and Tom Ludwig also rode with us. Tom Fudali and Mike were seniors and Tom Ludwig and I were sophomores.

I will share one funny incident (in hindsight) on our way to school. Fudali was an avid NON SMOKER. All three of us cousins were smokers at that time and smoking in the car was strictly verboten. Mike was wanting to test the limits of Fudali's patience one week and decided to light up a cigarette in the back seat of the car. Fudali warned him a few times to throw the cigarette out and on the third warning he reached back and took Mike's lunch and threw it out the window. Back in the day it was a long time from breakfast to dinner with no food. Let's just say that none of us ever tried to light up a smoke again in the car. My junior and senior year I drove the '60 Chev most of the time to and from school. That proved to be both good and bad since I always had a car sitting in the parking lot to make a quick getaway when I was skipping out of school. (I've written a fair amount about my misspent high school years and won't go into that anymore here.....)

The College (now University) of St. Thomas was 6.5 miles from my house and only took about 15 minutes to get there. I drove the Chev for the first couple of years (until it fell apart) and then I bought a 1965 Buick LaSabre for $700 the start of my junior year from Gary Balego, a friend of mine. I borrowed all the money from the St. Anthony State Bank with the loan being co-signed by my dad. I made 18 monthly payments of $42, all on time, to pay the car off. What a blessing it was that I was in the right place at the right time to buy that car and had a good job

that enabled me to make the payments. I drove that car until I started my first career job with Ernst & Ernst in January, 1974.
A few notables to take away. I never rode a school bus at anytime during my 17 years of education. I often wondered what that experience was like. But perhaps all the alone/quiet time I had walking to school and then having my own space in my car to think was a very good thing.

What is one of your favorite holiday memories?

Rather than one, I have a number of favorite holiday memories that I will write about.

In thinking about this answer I reflected mostly on Four holidays (and in some cases also holy days) in particular; July 4th, Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas. So here we go.

I have very fond memories of Celebrating the 4th of July with John and Linda Schroepfer and our collective kids Tony, Molly, Jesse and Christina when they were between the ages of 5 and 12 years old. Connie and I would usually pack our kids up and head out to the Schroepfer's early to mid afternoon and have a big cookout, usually barbecued ribs and everything else that goes with it. Linda made her "famous" flag cake for desert (I would give you the recipe but it's a secret for sure) which was always a big success. Later in the evening, just before dusk, we would hop

into our cars and go to the fireworks display by the State Capital grounds. I think we also may have ventured across the river a few times to Minneapolis to watch the fireworks display near Nicollet island.

Our Halloween was also always celebrated with John and Linda and the kids. The Schroepfer's moved from the east St. Paul area to Cottage Grove in the late 1970's, I believe, when that area was still populated with lots of farmland and homes spaced well apart. Not a good recipe for bagging lots of treats in a rapid manner. Linda would make her "Black Cauldron Stew", again a well guarded recipe secret, and bring it to our house. We would feast on that before getting all the kids dressed up in their costumes. We were still living on Lake Phalen back then with a lot of homes near each other that made for successful " Trick or Treating".

The enduring memories of both those holidays are the closeness we had as families and the pure joy of watching our kids celebrate those holidays full of fun and laughter. It was a different time in our lives when money was much more scarce and we did simple things that were focused on family — and didn't cost a fortune.

I have written before that Thanksgiving is probably my most favorite holiday. Interestingly, my most memorable Thanksgivings were those at 1772 East Shore Drive—Lake Phalen, back in the 1970's and 80's. Just like Halloween, it was

that holiday, so many years ago, that spoke to the closeness of family and having our children still at home. This was also back when Connie's mom and dad and her maternal grandparents (the Eligi's) were still alive. We would all get together at our house for my Turkey and sausage dressing (and EVERYTHING else that goes with it!). Having 4 generations of family all together at one time was something special. I know that Connie's mom and dad and Mr. and Mrs Eligi really enjoyed those times and I was happy to be part of the enjoyment.

My Christmas memories go way back to when I was a kid in the late 1950's and early 60's. By the time Rich was born in 1960 there were 6 of us kids ages 3 months to 11 years old. At our house there wasn't enough room to put presents under the tree for all us kids so Santa left Therese's, my, Nancy's and Marti's neatly stacked and unwrapped on the dining room table. (It was nice of Santa to do that.....). Karen and Rich's presents were under the tree. It was a happy time for us kids and for mom and dad too.

My last very favorite Christmas memory that I will share is the Christmas Day Italian dinners at Connie's parent's home back when they also lived on East Shore drive. (About ¾ of a mile from us.) To characterize those dinners as outstanding would be an understatement. They were elaborate 5-6 course affairs with spaghetti, meatballs, sausage and pepperoni (along with toasted garlic bread) as the first course, followed by a wonderful Italian

salad, followed by a pork loin roast, followed by oranges marinated in anisette and finally desserts of all make and varieties. These were meals not for the faint of heart……I am pleased to report that I was usually able to make Connie's mom, Mary Jane, proud of me with my voracious appetite.

As I get older it becomes clearer to me that the great holiday memories are all about time with family and the little things that occur when together that make us laugh and just enjoy our time together. Connie and I have been truly blessed with wonderful families who get along, take time for each other and genuinely love each other in spite of all our faults and foibles. As the French would say "La famille est tout", the family is everything !

What's a small decision you made that ended up having a big impact on your life?



This is actually a hard question for me to answer. Most small decisions are generally not worth remembering, unlike the BIG decisions that for the most part become benchmarks in our life. The big decisions such as where to go to college, the profession you choose to work in, who to marry, whether to have children and so on are very memorable and, indeed, I do remember them like they were yesterday when, in fact , some were made 50-60 years ago.

Small decisions are much more benign and occur every day of our lives. Do I have another glass of wine before I drive home? Do I discipline my child for a specific wrong, or just let it pass? Where do I go to dinner tonight? What time do I get out of bed

this morning? And on and on they go. But there were five, seemingly small, decisions that did have a great impact on my life that I will write about below.

The decision to NOT join the National Guard, when I was 18 years old, was a small decision to make because I was a full time college student and, therefore, I had a draft "deferment" while I was at St. Thomas. (The National Guard commitment was 6 years, I believe). There were a lot of college age men that did decide to join the Guard and therefore were much assured that they would not be sent to Vietnam during the war. I was a full time student from 1969 to 1973 at St. Thomas and had my deferment all the way to May, 1973 when I graduated. The good news is that the war was winding down starting in 1972 and the draft ended in March of 1973. So I " lucked out" as it were and was never drafted into the military.

The small decision to go out on what was, essentially, a blind date with Jackie Peterson in the summer of 1972. I knew nothing about Jackie and was set up on a date with her by one of my friends who was dating her roommate. As it turned out she was the office manager at Abrams Meat Distributors Inc. and they hired me, on her recommendation, at the end of that summer to work during the school year. I worked there for over 2 years. I have already written a little about my experience at Abrams and the outstanding hourly wage I received. On average, I received $5.00 an hour pay the two years I worked for them. That $5.00 is

worth about $40.00 today! It was because of that job I could afford to go to college.

The relatively minor decision to agree to tutor Connie in accounting when I was a junior at St. Thomas. What more is there to say about that?

In 1977 I was asked to join the Finance Committee at Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish. Connie and I had just moved from our apartment to our first house on East Shore Drive in Maplewood and Presentation was only about a mile away. It was an easy decision to join the parish since Connie and her family had been parishioners for many years there. Father Bill Kenny was the new Pastor at Presentation and he and I became fast friends. In fact, he just passed away a couple of years ago at age 92 and we remained friends until his death. That first experience on the finance committee, when I was all of 24 years old, was the precursor to all the charitable work I have done for so many Parishes, Schools and the Archdiocese for the past 48 years.

The last "minor" decision that had a major impact on my life was to go to the Emergency Room in May of 2023 with upper back and arm discomfort. I have written extensively about that experience in a number of my previous Storyworth questions and won't go deeply into it here. Suffice it to say that that decision saved my life.....

It occurs to me, as I write the answer to this question, that life is made up of many, perhaps thousands, of minor decisions punctuated by what we usually call major life decisions. And really it's those minor decisions that make all the difference in our lives. I know they have in mine.

What were some of your experiences when commuting to High School?

This is a question I posed to myself. I wanted to write something a little more on the "lighter side" this week and also give you a little more insight into how things were back in the 1960's. I have written a little about my experiences of getting to and from high school in another story and will try not to repeat much of that; specifically the story about the ride sharing incident with Tom Fudali and my cousins. Some of these stories are bittersweet, as are many memories we have going back 60 years. But I think we learn something valuable about ourselves through these bittersweet memories that last us for a lifetime.

I didn't get my drivers license until the spring of 1968. For whatever reason it was hard to find the time to complete drivers

training and take the test until six months after I turned 16. (FYI— I still remember taking that drivers test at the old drivers license testing center off of highway 35W near Arden Hills. I drove my dad's 1965 Pontiac Bonneville and that car was as big as a Tank. Thankfully, I got a grade of 92 on my first try!) At that time, I was at the end of my junior year. I drove the old '60 Chev Impala to school most of the time my senior year.

Part of the inspiration to write this week's story is the result of the -20 below temperatures we experienced yesterday (January 21, 2025). I couldn't help but think of the freezing cold temperatures back in the 60's during my commutes, much of which were by my feet. For reference the coldest day in 1967 was on January 18 at -31 and on January 7, 1968 it was - 21.

For much of my freshman year I needed to cobble together an assortment of rides. Getting to school was generally not a problem since I took the city bus that picked me up on Stinson and 29th and went down Hennepin Avenue in front of "D". Getting home was another story since I played three after school sports and didn't get done until after 6:00pm most nights. I tried to take the bus home but after about 6:30pm it ran infrequently and many times I had to take the bus that dropped me off up on Johnson and 29th, about a ¾ mile walk. I also recall getting rides home from kids with a car going in my direction or from others parents who picked them up after practice. That was not something that my mom or dad did back then.

I vividly recall one night that I had to take the bus home. It was after wrestling practice in the winter of 1966 and one of the coldest nights of the year with a strong wind. (Back then they didn't record the " wind chill" temperature.) I'm not sure how it happened but my underwear had gotten wet and I didn't have the chance to dry it out. So I decided to leave them in my locker and I went home "commando style". Well the bus was running late that night and it was colder than Hell. Unfortunately, it was the bus that dropped me off up on Johnson and not Stinson. I DONT HONESTLY THINK I HAVE EVER BEEN COLDER SINCE THAT TIME IN 1966. As I think back, that was a very poor choice to take the bus home. But 14 year old kids often believe they are invincible and make poor choices frequently. Thankfully, I made it home and also learned a lesson in the process.

I rode to school with Mark Murlowski much of my sophomore year. I would walk to his house and ride in one of his dad's pickups. It was always a frenzy trying to get ready in the morning, with all my siblings rushing around, to get out the door in time to catch the ride with Mark. Invariably,during the cold winter months, I would have to leave the house with wet hair which would freeze by the time I got to Mark's. The good news is that my hair would unfreeze in the truck by the time we got to school. The bad news is that my neck and shirt collar were usually wet.....

One final story. As mentioned, I drove the Chev to school much of my senior year. I usually picked up Tom Ludwig at his house, which was about ½ mile away. I recall one very snowy morning driving to Tom's. There had to be about 6 inches of new snow and the plows hadn't been out yet. I was trying to get up the Silver Lake Road hill between 29th and 33rd but the tires on the car were so bald that they just spun. By the way, the cars back then were almost all rear wheel drive. One of the St. Anthony Village cops pulled up behind me (who I happened to know because we gave him free food from Sandy's), got out of his car, took one look at my tires and offered to push me to the top of the hill- which he did. Back then many of the cop cars had chains on their rear tires and grills on the front for pushing cars. All's well that ends well! I don't think that's something the police would even be allowed to do nowadays.

Having to fend for yourself is one of the great learning experiences in life. While I would have liked a ride to and from school, at any hour of the day or night, it was not in the cards. However, one thing for sure is that I learned how to take care of myself early on which has helped me greatly in life; I learned to try and solve my problems on my own first before asking others for help. I believe it's called initiative.

What are some of your all-time favorite restaurants?

I have had a number of favorite restaurants over my lifetime; some that are still in business and, sadly, some that aren't. I will write about eight of them.

Perkins Pancake House (now just called Perkins) has been a favorite of mine for over 60 years. I actually worked my first job at a Perkins in 1966 as a dishwasher and then a cook until the end of 1967. My favorite food there is the ham and cheddar cheese omelette with pancakes, although nowadays I usually get fruit instead of the pancakes.

Totinos Italian restaurant was located at the intersection of Central and Hennepin Avenues in northeast Minneapolis. It opened in 1951 and closed at that location in the early 2000's I believe. I went there for many years starting in the late seventies and enjoyed taking my dates there as well. They had great Italian

food, a cozy atmosphere and good prices. I could get a plate of spaghetti and bread for a couple of dollars. As I got older my siblings and I enjoyed going there for our siblings "only" dinners until they closed.

Another favorite restaurant of mine was Arthur's located on University Avenue in northeast Minneapolis. Connie and I and John and Linda Schroepfer used to enjoy going there in the late 1970's and 80's. They had huge onion rings that we used to eat as an appetizer..... I usually got the end cut prime rib that was probably 24 ounces of beef. (I don't do that anymore!). Arthur's went through a series of ownership changes in the late 80's and finally went out of business in the 1990's.

One of Connie's family's favorite restaurants for Italian food was Geno's on the lower east side of St. Paul. I was introduced to Geno's when Connie and I started dating in the early 1970's and the restaurant quickly became a favorite of mine. After we were married, we went there frequently as a family, including grandma and grandpa Eligi. Much like Totinos, Geno's had great Italian food and a cozy atmosphere. The prices weren't too bad either. Their spaghetti sauce was very good and even my mother in law, Mary Jane, approved of it. It was probably closer in flavor to her sauce of any Italian restaurant in St. Paul. Connie and I had our wedding luncheon there immediately after the wedding Mass. I think there were at least 60 people there and I have very fond memories of that event. Sadly, Geno's closed in the 1990's.

When Connie and I joined St. Bernard's parish in 2001 we would frequently go to breakfast after Mass at a small "joint" called the Coffee Cup that was only a half mile or so from the church on Rice Street. The restaurant was open from 6:00am until 2:00pm only and served just breakfast and lunch. The Coffee Cup was a great favorite of the St. Bernard's crowd and the food there was excellent and plentiful. One pancake was the size of the entire 9 inch plate and one order was three pancakes. I was unable to eat an entire order. They also loaded every plate of eggs and sausage with copious amounts of hash browns and three whole pieces of toast. It was impossible to walk out of there and not be full. Sadly, the restaurant had to close around 2012 because of a fire and was just reopened a couple of years ago.

I started going to the Downtowner restaurant on West Seventh St. in St. Paul in the early 1990's when it was a small diner with about 6 booths and a counter that had about 12 chairs. The little restaurant grew over the years and now is one of the nicer venues in St. Paul. I have known Mo, the owner, for many years now and his restaurant is one of my "go to" places for breakfast. The food is very good and reasonably priced. And for me, it's a place that I can meet with people and actually hold a quiet conversation. The restaurant caters to many retired folks and business people and is one of the places where many Minnesota Legislators go. You also see a fair number of health care professionals since the restaurant is located just a block from

United Hospital.

The Pool & Yacht Club is a favorite place of both mine and Connie's. It is located in the Lilydale section of St. Paul on the Mississippi River and has been around for years. Like so many of my favorite restaurants, the P & Y Club is fairly small and the food is outstanding. Also, the prices, generally speaking, are very reasonable. For a nice night out we really enjoy that restaurant.

My final favorite restaurant, and the one I currently frequent the most, is the Egg & I in St. Paul located at the intersection of I-94 and Hwy 280. I usually have breakfast there with my good friend (of 50 plus years) Denny Felicetta every Saturday morning. My all time favorite breakfast is the Feta Cheese Omelette with their Rye toast and, of course, coffee. I have known the owner, Eric, for many years. The restaurant has been at this location for 33 years and is still going very strong. One thing I give credit to both Mo, at the Downtowner, and Eric was/is their commitment to customer fairness post pandemic as evidenced by their pricing. While so many other restaurants have increased prices significantly, added service fees and a fee for using a credit card these places have maintained the status quo. Interestingly, both of the restaurants are doing very well.

You can probably tell from the above that my selection for favorite restaurants is heavily dependent on great food, a cozy atmosphere where one can actually hold a conversation and reasonable prices. I'm certainly not a restaurant "snob",as it

were, and I don’t go for high style or even higher prices.....

What are your favorite TV shows?



This question is asking what are my favorite shows — now. I can certainly speak to those and will also comment briefly on shows from my past that I also consider some of my favorites. (Most of these older ones are still being rerun on various cable TV channels. I enjoy watching these old shows from the 1950's, 60's and 70's.)

Currently, my favorite shows to watch are the local news and weather show on Channel 45 at 9:00pm, The Five on the Fox channel, The Incredible Dr. Pol on the Nat Geo Wild channel, Gutfeld! On the Fox channel (with a big nod to the old Johnny Carson show.) I'll explain a little about each below.

I remember watching the nightly news ever since I was a little boy living with my parents. It's a habit I got into and never out of. Connie and I now watch the evening news as part of our "going to bed"routine since we have a very nice large screen TV

in the bedroom. We have been doing this pretty much since we were married.

The Five is a conservative opinion/entertainment talk show that Connie and I have been watching since its inception in 2011. It's an hour long show starting at 4:00pm Monday through Friday and a nice way for us to relax and learn a little bit about the day in politics. The cast is made up of 4 conservative commentators and 1 liberal. So, at least, there is some balance of the opinions.

The Incredible Dr. Pol show is about a long time Veterinarian who has practiced in Michigan for over 40 years. It follows him and his staff as they medically treat many animal varieties. I have always enjoyed watching shows that are about animals and especially large ones like horses and cattle. I honestly can't tell you why I have an interest in these shows, and believe me when I say the last thing I should be is a farmer!

The Gutfeld! show is the most popular nightly talk show by far and stars Greg Gutfeld, a 62 year old conservative commentator and comedian. Interestingly, he is also one of the cast members on The Five. The show airs at 9:00pm Monday through Friday and we watch it after the news for about 20 minutes to laugh and relax a little before lights out. He has a cast of 4 people with him nightly. Two of them are regular cast members and 2 are guests.(Connie and I got used to watch the Johnny Carson show that always came on after the news back in the 70's, 80' and 90's. That show is my all time favorite nightly talk show by far.)

As a side note, when I have the TV on anytime during the day or evening, I play the music channel probably half the time instead of watching shows. I typically read 2-3 hours a day and enjoy listening to the Soundscapes, Light Classical and the Classical music channels while reading.

The older shows that I consider my all time favorites are Gunsmoke, The Rifleman, The Andy Griffith show and All In The Family. The first three shows ran in the 1950's and 60's and All In The Family premiered in 1971 and ran for 9 seasons. The first two shows were your classic western/ cowboy shows and the last two were family oriented comedies.

One final thought from a historical perspective. Until cable television became a dominant entertainment force in the 1990's there were very few TV stations. In Minnesota, we had basically 4 channels: ABC, CBS, NBC and the public broadcasting channel. The old shows I noted above had a very wide viewing audience and focused on American family values. Today's cable programming has hundreds of channels, and the viewership/ subject matter are very diverse. However, for me, I still like the old shows, and a very few select current shows, as I feel they have some "traditional" values and moral compasses that are more to my liking.

Who is the most important person in your life, and why?

This is a thought provoking question. And it's present tense; who is the most important person in your life -NOW. I did a little research on the definition of "most important person" and came up with: "The most important person in my life is someone who makes the biggest impact and would be missed the most if they were gone." Further then, the question is WHY would they be missed the most? Here are some reasons: Shared history, children and grandchildren, the understanding of each other's nature, a general acceptance of the other and a willingness to work through challenges, are some very common items that came up in my research. I would add to that common beliefs and goals, a willingness to let each other be the best person they can be, and a deep bond of love and affection.

I'll get back to WHO that other person is in my life, but now I will do an " about face" and say that the most important person in my life has to be me. For most of us our daily needs take precedence over any other person's needs in our life. Common sense tells us that we must be the most important person in our life because we must take care of our health, daily ablutions, feeding ourselves and other activities of daily living before we could even begin to look at others as more important. For those folks that experience some form of disability, I would argue that the most important person in their life must be their care givers. Those care givers are essential to enable that person to even sustain life.

I have been involved, over the years, with various non profit organizations that support care giving to disabled people. Multiple Sclerosis and Parkinson's are the two that I have had direct involvement. Also, and unfortunately, there are and have been others I have known well who have fallen victim to disease or health issues that have required nursing home care. That experience serves to affirm that, in their lives, the care givers are the most important people. And thank the good Lord for granting His Grace to them for their willingness to do this heroic work.

So back to the original premise of the question asked. Who is the most important person, other than yourself, in your life?

For me, Connie is the most important person in my life, given what I have written in the first paragraph. I could, perhaps, be more flowery in my description as to why she is. So because of that, I ask for her forgiveness. Our marriage has lasted for over 50 years. We've clearly beaten the odds since only about 6% of marriages last for that length of time. Without most, if not all, of the attributes I discussed above about the WHY, I am certain our marriage would not have survived. It could only have lasted because we are the most important "other" person in each others life.

I think it needs to be said that our lives are, hopefully, filled with many people important to us. And I would also argue that, at times, the most important person in our lives may be a parent, a brother, sister, friend, priest and so on. Remembering the famous line attributed to Rose Kennedy when asked " which of your 9 children did you love the most?" Her answer was "whichever one needed it at the time." I think it works the same way in all our lives. Our pressing needs come and go. And it's those very important people in our lives who help us meet and then overcome those needs.

I am blessed and thankful for my bride of 50 years and for all the "other" most important people in my life.

Who had the most positive influence on you as a child?

I was fortunate to be born into an intact family with both a mother and a father. We were the classic “old fashioned” home whereby my parents had a stable and loving relationship, we ate three square (well maybe two) meals a day and a roof over our head that didn’t leak. I would say it was their relationship that had the most profound impact on me. We did not have the trauma of parents getting divorced, being abusive, unfaithful and the like. Not to say that our family was perfect but, even with the various difficulties that almost every family has, my parents were able to provide a good, loving and stable home life.

My mother was the dominant parent when it came to raising us kids. She was a stay at home mom until I was about 16 when she got a full time job. My mom was the constant presence that provided the essential love and security in my life, as well as all

my siblings. I knew that my mom would always be at home if and when I needed her. I believe that one fact alone was a major item in my positive upbringing. I would say that my siblings agree with that as well.

So a little more about my mother's influence in my younger life. I got the " worry gene" from her which, on the surface, doesn't sound so good. Therefore, I'll change the description of that trait to the "conscientious" gene, which according to the Oxford dictionary is "A person wishing to do what is right, especially to do one's work or duty well and thoroughly". My mother was nothing if she wasn't about doing her work and duty well and thoroughly. She was extremely well organized and ran the household like clockwork. Certainly there were times that she was a little obsessive about her work like laundry, cleaning and other chores. But in the end we all enjoyed the fruits of her labor and also learned how to do laundry and clean the house to boot.

I learned good financial management skills from my mother. She was the "keeper of the exchequer" as the Brits like to say, meaning that she knew what the household income and expenses were down to a tee and was able to masterfully manage the funds. There were times that I would come home from school and she would be sitting at the kitchen table working the family budget to make sure that every penny was accounted for. (And here I am some 65 plus years later having lived a life long career in accounting, auditing and financial management.) Apparently

this apple didn't fall far from the tree.

My mom, and dad, were both faithful practicing Catholics. They went to church every Sunday come rain or shine. And they always went together. My mom was the more prayerful and pious, I believe, of the two. I view their faith as very positive in my life and they did their best to raise all of us in the Catholic Faith.

My mother was my biggest mentor when I was growing up. She recognized my strengths as well as my weaknesses and, to her credit, helped me overcome some of those weaknesses with fairly constant reminders. Some might call those reminders nagging, but who's to quibble with results. In the end I turned out OK, or so some therapists might say!

But back to the life long benefit of having both Jerry and Elaine Paquette as parents. They had a life with both happiness and love, occasionally mixed in with disappointment. They were able to navigate through the ups and downs and showed me what a good and loving (not perfect) family could be. And as I look at my upbringing compared to so many less fortunate today, I can only conclude that I was blessed indeed.

If you could change something about your childhood, what would it be?

The changes in my childhood I thought about after receiving this weeks's question are in two broad areas. The first are some of the physical " amenities" I would have liked. Amenities are defined as " a desirable or useful feature or facility of a building or place." The other is the relationship with my father and, to a lesser extent, my siblings.

I have written before how the home I grew up in was pretty small for a family of nine. The first item that I would have liked is a larger bedroom for my brother and me. (My very own bedroom might have been really nice but I'll try to keep my list of wishes realistic.) The bedroom we had was about 120 square feet in size. We had just enough room for a couple of single size beds with a

dresser in between to put our clothes. There was no room for a desk or chair.

My second wish would have been for another bathroom in the house before 1964. We added on an addition to the house in 1964 which included a large dormitory type bedroom, where my four sisters slept (this was before Marie was born) and another full bathroom. It was pretty difficult navigating bathroom privileges before then.

A finished basement, perhaps with a bedroom and bathroom, would have been nice early on. Many homes like ours, built in 1953, had basements that were "finished" and usually included a family room, a bedroom and a small bathroom. A lot of times these finished basements were the dad's handy work, especially if they were involved in the construction trades or had learned carpentry skills earlier in their life. Our dad was not necessarily "handy" as it were that way. (Nor am I)

My next wish, as I got a little older, would be for a two car garage or, at least, a driveway large enough to park two cars. We had a one car garage with a narrow driveway leading to the street. During the winter months we were not allowed to park on the streets in our little village. As a result,I needed to park the old 1960 Chev in the driveway overnight, blocking my dad from getting his car out of the garage in the morning. Most of the time I was up and out early going to school before my dad needed to leave. But there were times, especially the weekends when I

worked late, that I would have to get up early and move the car so he could get out.

On to my relationships with my dad and siblings. Over the years I have come to regret not spending more time with my dad and my siblings.

I would have liked to have had a deeper understanding of my dad and what really made him "tick". I have a sense that my mom was one of the few people that really knew Jerry. It's not that he didn't have feelings, he just didn't want to talk about them. At least that's my take. Perhaps my siblings, especially Rich, have a better sense of dad.

I know much of my limited time with my sisters was due to being in college, working many nights, then getting married at age 22 and officially out of the house. Had I had more time at home, my guess is I would have gotten to know them a lot better back then.

One last wish list item. A little more spending money "support" from my parents would have been nice growing up. I suppose that goes without saying and almost every child wants more money. For me, though, I always felt like I couldn't ask for things. That's probably the reason I quite playing sports in high school and got my first job at the age of 15. In hindsight, I suppose, that formed me into the person I am today who does not spend money frivolously or on "toys" for myself— like boats, classic cars, vacation homes and the like.

Having said all the above one thing is certainly true. At any point in time we are the sum and substance of our life to date. To quote the author B.J. Neblett "We are the sum total of our experience." Meaning that our experiences, both positive and negative, shape who we are.....And the truth is I don't really have any major complaints about my childhood.....

What are your favorite books?

I do a lot of reading. I started reading in earnest about 20 years ago after Tony and Christina had graduated from college and were out of the house. (In other words, I had more time to myself). Reading helped me fill a lot of the time that I had spent with the kids attending all their activities over the years and just being a parent to them when they were home.

I didn't become a big reader "by accident". My mother loved to read and she stayed up well past midnight many nights when all was quiet in the house and she could read peacefully. Most of my sisters are avid readers as well.

I don't really have one FAVORITE book. At least, not one that I remember reading that had an instant or profound effect on me or one that I might refer back to on an regular basis (other than the Bible which I will speak to later). Certainly there are some books that I have read over the years that I really enjoyed. Part of

my problem, however, in trying to identify them is that I am not good at remembering titles. If I were to name two books (that were also a movies) that I REALLY enjoyed, I would say it was the 1969 book Conager written by Louis L'Amour and the book Pride and Prejudice written by Jane Austin in the 1840's I believe.

I have three broad genres of books that are my favorites and have been for many years. They are action/spy thriller, Victorian era romance, and religious. Definitely a diverse group.

I will speak to each one below.

The first, and mostly unlikely genre for a guy like me are the Victorian era Romance Novels. I have a number of favorite authors such as Mary Balough that are very prolific writers. She has written well over 100 books the past 30 plus years. I'm not sure if I have read all her books but a conservative estimate would be at least 50 of them.

Secondly, I enjoy reading spy thriller/action books. Here again there are many authors to choose from and some are very familiar like Vince Flynn, Tom Clancy, Robert Ludlum and Michael Connelly. I have read books from dozens of different authors. Currently I'm reading the " Dewey Andreas" book series by Ben Coes. I think there are 9 books in this one series alone.

This brings me to Religious books. I believe I have written before about the daily prayer book series I use called Give Us This Day. I began reading this book daily in mid 2023. Each day's readings, including the daily Mass, is about an hour in total. There are the

morning prayers including the Mass, evening prayers and nightly prayers. Each day includes a reflection about the readings from different people trained in Scripture. The Bible is the other religious book that I refer to fairly frequently. This is especially true when I have questions or need clarification about one of the daily scripture readings.

There are certainly other genres of books I enjoy and have read over the years. Self- help books would be in that category. For my part, I can only take those in small doses. For reading pleasure, though, it's the big three areas above where I find myself most often.

What makes you happy?

This is a very open ended question and I could list many items that make me happy. But as I reflected on the question I also thought a lot about what brings me joy and what the difference is between the two.

I did a little research, of course, and came up with these definitions:

1. Happy- Feeling or showing pleasure or contentment.

Having a sense of confidence in or satisfaction with a person, arrangement or situation

2. Joy-A feeling of great pleasure or happiness. Joy is often considered a deeper , more lasting state of contentment and well being that comes from within. It emanates from a sense of purpose and meaning, perhaps even meaning from suffering...,whereas happiness is a more fleeting emotion often triggered by external events or circumstances. Joy is more internally driven whereas happiness is more external. Joy is more enduring whereas happiness is more temporary.

Joy is spoken about often in the New Testament. Joy is seen as the natural outcome of fellowship with God.
You can be joyful without necessarily being happy at the same time. And you can be happy without being joyful!

The question above, however, asks what makes me happy. I will add joyful as well to part of this discussion.
Writing makes me happy. Whether I complete a hand written letter or write, as I am now, on my iPad I get a sense of accomplishment. In fact I am joyful about my physical and mental ability to write and am deeply thankful at age 73 I am able to do it.
Spending time alone with Tony and Christina makes me happy. The relationship I have with them, now as adults, is both a source of tremendous joy and thankfulness. (Unfortunately, I have witnessed for a variety of reasons many unhappy parent/adult child relationships over my many years as a Certified Financial Planner.)
Spending time with my grandkids makes me happy. And having grandkids brings joy to my life. The joy of grandkids is different, at least for me, than the joy my children bring me. I was much more involved in all aspects of my children's lives when they were growing up but, as a grandparent, I participate in the joy that they bring to Connie and me.

Feeling good physically makes me happy. Having a sound mind and relatively good health brings me joy.

Other items that bring me happiness are classical music, spending time alone, my prayer life, volunteering and philanthropy, and spending time with my good friends.

The answer to this question would not be complete without talking about the joy that Connie brings to my life. Please note that I may sound a little "clinical" in this analysis. Anyone who has been married for at least 25 years understands that there probably are both happy and unhappy times. Perhaps some people are able to live in a perpetual state of marital bliss. (That being " the state of COMPLETE HAPPINESS and JOY experienced within a marriage.....") However, I'm not one of those and I suspect Connie isn't either. I think we both believe that no marriage is perfectly happy all the time. But this is where Joy comes in. As I noted above you can be joyful (like in your marriage) and also be unhappy at times. I would say that Connie and I have a joyful marriage because it is rooted in essential trust, our common belief in the importance of family, a deep caring for the wellbeing of the other and the knowledge that we are and have been in this marriage for the long run. (I will also credit Connie's patient endurance with me and my many foibles) I think another reason our marriage is joyful is that we understand and allow for each other's needs. For example, Connie understands my desire to be philanthropic (within

reason) and do volunteer activities. I understand Connie's need and strong desire to travel abroad. And one last item. I believe we truly respect and love each other.

What stories have you been told about yourself as a baby?

As I thought about this question the last few days, I needed to define “baby” since there are different definitions of the “baby stage”of life. Most people define the baby/ infancy stage as newborn to one year old. Usually, people think the “toddler” stage is one to three years old. However, I’ve read other descriptions saying a baby is a child from newborn to four years old. For this answer, though, I’ll stay with the newborn to one year old “ infancy”stage.

I haven’t been told much about my infancy lately so much of what I remember is probably 60 to 70 years old.....

I was a full term but small newborn weighing a little less than 5 pounds at birth. My mother had a kidney infection, apparently during the pregnancy, which had an impact on her overall health and my weight at birth. Shortly after I was born, I developed a

blood infection, or perhaps I had it at birth as a result of my mom's kidney issues. In any event, I needed a blood transfusion and was told that the only way they could do it was to put the IV's in each of my femoral arteries. I'm not sure exactly how old I was (maybe one to two months old?) I actually have scar tissue on both sides of my lower groin area where the femoral arteries are to "prove" this story.

When I first came home from the hospital, I needed special attention to stay warm and was placed on the oven door with the temperature set so I could stay warm. (I feel fortunate that I didn't end up baking like a turkey at Thanksgiving. Although, it would have been a very scrawny one)

I have mentioned this before in previous answers, but I needed to be "wet nursed" by my aunt Leora since my mom was unable to nurse me. The good news is that I had plenty to eat, or so I'm told.

My mom used to tell me when I got older that I was a pretty "quick study" as a baby. Once I got past all of my newborn issues, my health was pretty good and, supposedly, I didn't have any developmental delays. Or at least any issues I can blame on those types of things.

I spent most of the summer of 1952, I believe it was 1952 when I was about 9 months old, at my Grandma Torborg's house. My mother became ill and my older sister Therese and I were taken care of by our grandmothers. (At least I think Therese went to

Grandma Paquette's that summer.) She would have been about two and a half at the time.

My Uncle Charlie (Torborg) and Aunt Peggy were still living at home back in '52 and they used to tell me all about that summer. Peggy was 15 turning 16 that summer and leaving for the convent in the fall. My guess is that she got a lot of babysitting in that summer. (Perhaps it was that experience with me that convinced her to enter the convent.) Charlie was just out of high school and working at Honeywell. Charlie told me that one of the "fun" things I liked to do when I was in the playpen was to stand up at the railing and then do a "dead fall" onto my back, laughing hysterically the whole time. Those dead falls probably weren't great on the back of my head but it goes a long way in explaining why my mother used to always ask me in later years if I was "tetched in the head". Yes, that is actually a slang word meaning slightly mentally unbalanced.

That pretty much sums up what I have been told about myself during infancy. All in all things must have worked out pretty well since I'm still around to talk about it.

Who inspires you?

I am going to modify this question a little and add "Who OR WHAT inspires you? Before I start writing about the who or what I did a little research and came up with this definition of inspire from a variety of sources. "Fill (someone) with the desire , confidence, and enthusiasm to do or feel something , especially to do something creative or give someone an idea or motivation." It's derived from the Latin word " inspirare" meaning "to breath into".

At the sake of sounding more arrogant than (hopefully) I am, I also did some research on being inspired by yourself. The information I read on that question said "Yes, absolutely, you can be inspired by one's own self. (I suppose you call that self-inspiration.) It goes on to say that we can draw inspiration from our own experiences, values, and potential. It also talked about self- inspiration being more sustainable because external inspiration can be more fleeting and less resilient. I believe that the inspiration to write every week for the past two and a half

years is, at least, partially fueled by my self inspiration. But enough on all that……

As unlikely as this sounds, I draw inspiration from people, of all walks of life, who are less fortunate than me but who are motivated to succeed and work hard in the process. Perhaps this explains my personal philanthropy over these past 40-50 years, focused on those people who want a better life for themselves and their children and need some financial support along the way.

The faculty and staff in our Catholic schools are a tremendous inspiration for me. Specifically, our Catholic school teachers who do such great work with our kids and are compensated far less than their public school counterparts. Their passion and dedication to our kids is truly inspiring.

I derive inspiration and motivation every time I visit one of our Catholic Kindergarten through Eighth Grade schools. Over the years I have had the chance to visit many of the 80 or so schools in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. I must say that seeing the kids filled with joy and full of life and potential has always inspired me to continue my support ; and fills me with a sense of purpose and joy as well. I don't know how anyone can spend time in our schools, seeing those kids, and not be inspired to help them in some way, large or small.

Successful people with integrity who put others before themselves inspire me. For many successful people there comes

a time in their life when what they have is “enough”. Inspiring people are those who have the courage to give of their time, talent and treasure and do it because it’s the right and good thing to do, not because they are being praised for it. Jesus speaks about these people in Matthew 6:3-4 when he says “When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be a secret.”

In the final analysis I truly believe that the Holy Spirit has front row and first seat when it comes to what and who gives me inspiration. Many people have asked me over the years why or what motivates me to help others. In some cases I honestly don’t know and all I can attribute it to is the gift of being inspired by the Holy Spirit.

What was the strangest thing you wanted to be when you grew up?

I don't remember ever wanting to "be" anything strange growing up, or dreaming about what I could be. My assumption, when it comes to the "want to be" question is what type of job or profession did I ever want that might sound strange to others. For example, I knew a few guys in my younger years who thought that joining the circus and traveling the country would be fun. That was never for me.

When I was young, I didn't think much about what I wanted to do or be when I grew up. I've always been fairly pragmatic, and probably so, because my mom was very much that way. Her focus was always what was in front of her on a daily basis. That focus modeled what my life needed to be. There wasn't much use in daydreaming about joining the circus or going to the moon when I needed to get a job and pay for high school—and college.

The old saying that you can be whatever you want to be in America sure sounds nice, but for most people that's just not reality. I know I'm being a bit negative here but that's what it is as far as my many years of experience and observation tell me.

The fact of the matter is that there were only 2 "jobs" I gave much consideration to when growing up. Neither one would've been considered strange back then. In my early grade school years I thought about becoming a priest. I'm not sure many young boys, who went to Catholic grade school and were alter boys, didn't think about it. The nuns and priests both spoke very highly of the "special" vocational calling from God to the priesthood or, if you were female, to the convent. The notion of becoming a priest died out pretty fast once I reached puberty and became aware of (we're talking 5th grade here) my very strong attraction to the members of the opposite sex. After all, priests were "required" to be celibate and that wasn't going to work for me. Tony, Christina, my six grandkids and any other descendants at this point unknown should be grateful that I came to that realization when I did.

The other profession I thought about well into my early adulthood was becoming an attorney. One of my favorite shows on TV was Perry Mason which ran from 1957 to 1966. It was all about the intrepid attorney Perry Mason who almost never lost a case, had a great looking secretary played by Barbara Hale, and cool, top of the line, convertibles, either Ford, Lincoln, or

Cadillac to drive around.

The problem with being a lawyer is you need to go to three years of law school after college (and pay for it). Having met Connie in my senior year of college and then getting married a year later pretty much ruled out law school. Also, I had taken some audit, tax and business law classes in college and discovered that my talents were more in the auditing and tax arena than the practice of law. So becoming a CPA was the right profession for me in spite of the fact I never thought about becoming an accountant when I was younger. I have NEVER regretted not becoming an attorney and my career in public accounting was, in fact, a very fulfilling one in as much as I enjoyed working with people and consulting on their financial matters. Over the years, I have helped many people live better lives because I was able to assist them with many difficult tax and financial matters as well as becoming a trusted advisor who they could confide in.

A final thought. I do not, in any way, blame my parents or teachers for my lack of imagination when it came to "being whatever I wanted to be". More to the point was my need to have solid footing in whatever I did and a plan to get there. I think that solid footing was accomplished in a focused and pragmatic way.

What were your favorite books or stories when you were a child?

Before I address this week's question, a little more clarity around "child" or childhood would be good. Most people agree, and my research confirms, that childhood starts at about age 2 and goes to about age 11 or 12. However, there is a big difference in what we can comprehend and the stories we like between those two ages. I will speak to that a little more below.

I was 2 years old in 1953. Unlike children of today, parents were not expected to promote the young child's intellect by telling them nightly stories or reading to them on a frequent basis. (In many cases that was just not possible given the fact that many families had 5 or more kids spaced 2 years apart) In 1953 we did not have a television (or a car for that matter) but we did have radio. I suspect, but do not know for a fact, that I must have listened to the radio alongside my mom and dad, although I have

no recollection of doing so. I also have no recollection of my mom or dad ever reading a book to me when I was a young child. However, this is not to be construed as a negative reflection on either of my folks. TIMES WERE JUST DIFFERENT BACK THEN! As a result of all of that, I don't really remember having any favorite stories or books as a young child.

I do have memories from my kindergarten and first grade sitting in a circle around the teacher with my other classmates and listening to her read. Given that I went to Catholic school my guess is we listened to stories of Saints, Christmas, baby Jesus and the like. To this day I am fond of Christmas stories and stories about happy families who really care for each other especially in tough times.

As I got into more of my middle childhood, say ages 8 to 10, I read a lot of Dick Tracy, the detective, comic books. Those books were first published in 1936 and have continued to be published off and on to this day. Another comic book from that same era was the Adventures of Superman comic books that I enjoyed reading. (I distinctly remember bringing comic books for a few years to our 2 week vacation at the lake and spending a lot of time reading them there.)

As I reflect back, it must have been when I was about 7 or 8 when I really began reading a lot. I know I was also reading parts of the Minneapolis Star and Tribune paper that was delivered to our house daily. The sports section was a big favorite of mine,

especially the Sunday sports section, where they published a list of all the hitters in major league baseball during the season with their batting averages and other statistics.

As I think back to my later childhood years and moving into my adolescence, I became a voracious reader of the Encyclopedia. Yes, believe it or not! Let me give you a definition of an encyclopedia since they went out of hard cover publication in about 2012. "An encyclopedia is a reference work that provides summaries of knowledge, either general or specialized, usually in articles arranged alphabetically. It's a comprehensive collection of information, often in multiple volumes [and now online] covering a wide range of topics."

Encyclopedias were not cheap to buy and we did not have one at home. I would go to the library by myself and spend hours reading the encyclopedia. Every library back in the late 50's and 60's had a well stocked encyclopedia section. One of the most famous and well know was the Encyclopedia Brittanica. I continued to read the encyclopedia all the way through my college years which put me at about age 21.

I vividly recall my dad taking me and my other siblings, after supper, to the library on Lowry Avenue. This would have been in about 1961 or 62. He would drop us off and then pick us up a few hours later. If I had school homework to do I would finish it and then head over to the encyclopedia section to pick out one of the volumes. Generally, most encyclopedias had 20 to 22 volumes to

choose from.

Forgive me for taking a wide detour in answering this question, but I believe the fact that my favorite books to read and my fascination with acquiring knowledge by reading the encyclopedia goes a long way to understanding who I am today. The fact is, all the reading and "research" I do online today is a continuation of my passion to learn new things that started almost 70 years ago……Who would have thought?

Did you have enough money growing up?

This seemingly simple question is actually a little more complicated to annswer, especially as I look at it through my 73 year old lens.

I will define the term Growing Up as the period from birth to 18 years of age. (Essentially when one has graduated high school.) However, a strong argument could be made that, nowadays, the years from 18 to 22 could be considered part of the growing up period since so many people are dependent on their parents/ guardians at least through college.

The question focuses on the word “enough”. In my mind, enough is a very individual state of mind. I have known many people in very similar economic/ financial circumstances who would give vastly different answers to the question above. A little research indicates that children as young as 3-5 can discriminate between rich and poor people by their possessions and by 8 years

they have enough fine grained understanding of inequality to be able to rank jobs by income— Imagine that! If a child can do that they would certainly have an opinion on whether, or not, they have enough money.

Having enough money for some people means knowing they can cover all living expenses without having to worry about the basics of food, clothing and shelter. For me, and in that context, I/we/the family had enough money growing up.

But what about my discretionary wants and needs? Was there enough money growing up to satisfy those. Many of the kids I grew up with seemed to have money for fancy baseball gloves and bats, spending money to go to the movies and professional baseball games and other spending money for incidentals. From that standpoint, we did not have enough money. I learned early on that money in our household was scarce for "niceties" and if I wanted extra money it was up to me to go out and make it. Which is what I did by getting my first job at the age of 15.

To take this question a step farther. As a Family unit with 7 kids, my parents did not have the money to help me with any of my college tuition and in that regard we did not have "enough" money. My mom and dad were not able to set aside any significant funds for their retirement or the kids post secondary education. My observation, and now in hindsight, says they pretty much lived hand to mouth and paycheck to paycheck.

But before I turn this answer into a pity party for me, I must say that I never felt insecure or worried about having enough food, clothes to wear or a solid roof over my head. When you are born into a family you coexist with that family for better, and sometimes, for worse. While we didn't have a lot of extra money we did have a camaraderie amongst us kids and two parents that loved us. I have said this before, but it bears repeating, as an adult who raised "only" 2 kids myself I can't imagine the daily pressure that both my parents felt to provide for ALL 7 of us kids. And overall, they did a marvelous job of getting each of us to age 18 with enough money AND also an abundance of love, caring and faith in God that they passed on to us. For that I am ever grateful.

What traits do you share with your mother?

I have written a little already about the similarities between me and my mom in previous stories. So please forgive any redundancies.....

I went online and researched a definition of the word Traits: Basically, traits are a distinguishing QUALITY or CHARACTERISTIC. Further, a quality refers to the overall level of excellence or the inherent nature of something. A characteristic is a distinguishing feature and can be thought of as an attribute that makes something unique or identifiable. Having defined the above I will intermix quality and characteristics in my discussion of traits. So, here we go in no particular order of priority.

1. A Rule Follower. My mom followed the rules. She ran a pretty strict household by being organized and efficient. The way she did that was by laying down the rules for us kids like the rules she had as a kid. I'm pretty much the same way. My long career

as a CPA and financial consultant was heavy on following the rules. Just think of income taxes and all the regulations as well as the practice of accounting with all its principles and standards.

2. Savvy. My mom had good common sense and generally good judgement. Over the years I have found that I leaned heavily on common sense as a guide of what, and what not, to do—particularly in difficult situations.

3. Hard worker. There is no question that my mom was a hard worker. It was impossible not to be and also "successfully" raise seven children over a span of forty plus years. (Until we were all out of the house.) I believe I share that trait with her in how I worked over so many years in my career, including my stint teaching and all the volunteer and boards of directors I served.

4. She did most things in moderation and was a creature of habit. (Aside from her interesting diet routine where she would binge eat on the weekends and then literally starve herself Monday through Thursday.) Honestly, that's what she did for many years. She was always moderate in her drinking and her overall lifestyle. She would try to get enough sleep and liked to nap in the afternoons. I too do the same thing when possible.

5. She loved her Kids and, for the most part, accepted us for who we are. I for one never felt unloved. She knew each one of us pretty well and used that knowledge of our strengths and weaknesses in a positive way to help us grow through the years. I think she also had an innate intuition of how hard she could

push each one of us when it came to our education and career choices. Like her, I believe I tried to get to know and understand both Tony and Christina and even now, to a lesser extent, my grandchildren. I use my innate intuition to help guide me along the way.

6. Mom was a little risk adverse. That sounds like a strange trait we share, but I always weighed the pros and cons of any business ventures or investments and seldom risked more than I should. I am not one to take BIG chances, but rather calculated chances always trying to know the worst that could happen.

7. She was conservative in her spending. I have written before about how she managed the household budget and to do so without too many "hiccups". Obviously, I take after her by the career choice I made years ago to become an accountant. But beyond that I learned to live without too many WANTS. All my needs have been, thankfully, met without too much struggle and I never wanted, like so many others, for the "adult toys" like boats, numerous cars, country clubs or vacation homes.

7. Mom was a Voracious reader. Like her, I read at least one book a week and usually more like one and a half.

Enough said on all that!

I'm going to deviate from this question and add some Traits I DON'T SHARE without elaboration.

Mom loved to talk, to be the center of attention, was vivacious, a better practicing Catholic than me, and she had red

hair.....couple those traits with 1-7 above and you get the picture of a fairly complicated personality. Perhaps that's one thing where I do resemble her; possessing a fairly complicated personality.

What things have mattered most to you in life?

In Latin, those things that mattered most to me in life are "Pro Deo, Pro Familia, and Pro Patria" In English "God, Family and Country." From the 5,000 foot level those are the things that have mattered most in my life. I suspect the answer would be much the same if you asked this question of most men (and women) of my age and background. But I think this question should be answered in a less generic way and I will do that below. Before I do, please be aware that I am not attempting to prioritize the items that are most important, although my Catholic "conscience"tells me that it MUST BE God. The fact is the items I talk about below have,at any one point time, been the most important in my life. When I am sick and in the hospital my health is probably the most important item in my life. Is my faith also important to me? Yes, but the priority is my health at that time.

I truly believe that God, and my Faith, have been and are very important in my life. My source of strength that I can call on, in times of need in this physical world, is limited. I have always recognized that and have kept my focus on the Good Lord. Without His enduring love for me it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to carry on in times of great need. As a side note, it is in those things that are completely out of my control where I have tried to learn to rely on the Good Lord to see me through.

My wife Connie and children, Tony and Christina, have mattered most to me in this life. There is little doubt in my mind that is true, and will continue to be as long as I am alive. However, as I said above, there are things that are out of my control especially now that Tony and Christina are adults. My fallback when I am worrying about my children (and grandchildren) is my reliance on my Faith to help see me through.

My lifelong friends have been mattered to me a great deal. The true test of what matters the most in life is where you spent your time and energy. I have some good friends that I spend time with and have for many years.

My health is certainly very important to me, although that has not always been the case. When I was a younger person I didn't exercise, was significantly overweight and smoked. I quit smoking at the age of 24, but I didn't lose weight or get into a fairly regular exercise program until I was in my 50's. Experiencing significant health issues the past few years has

certainly sharpened my focus on good health and it is very much a priority for me now.

Having purpose and meaning in Life has always mattered a lot to me. However, I was never one to throw myself completely into my work, religious life, or charitable work. Some of my family might disagree with that, especially the charitable work and giving, but I always tried to maintain a balance between my family, work, faith and charitable activities.

What did you Discover about Yourself during Connie's Trip away from Home to Australia and New Zealand

The date as I write this is April 23, 2025. Connie has been away since March 31 on an extended trip to Australia and New Zealand. She is scheduled to return tomorrow. In total, she will have been gone 25 days. This has been the longest stretch of time, since we have been married, that we have been apart. I have some thoughts on my experience about being "alone" for that extended time which I will discuss below.

But before I do, there is one thing that I knew about Connie that has been confirmed. SHE LOVES TO TRAVEL! During her trip we emailed daily and briefly spoke to each other almost every day she was gone. During that entire 25 days, there was not one real

complaint from her about the hectic in country tour schedule with all the plane flights, bus travel, extended walking and hiking, the early mornings or late nights and the list goes on. And she seemed to enjoy all the people on the small tour and they got along great.

The first thing I discovered about myself is that I made the correct decision in not going on that trip. I honestly don't know if I could have kept up the pace and I know for sure that I would NOT want to be doing all that in country travel, no matter how beautiful everything is. I simply don't have the passion to travel like Connie and I am just fine with that.

Living by myself might be described as easier, although I'm not sure that's really true because Connie does run the household and pretty much always has. No doubt that has made my life easier. However, I find living on my own much simpler than with another person. (It should be noted that I have picked up a few good habits from Connie these past 50 years like keeping the house clean, the dishes done, the bed made and the laundry done) All of these things make for a better living for me when alone and, in a way, actually simpler because I'm not feeling pressured about dirty laundry piling up and the like.

I enjoyed my alone time but got lonely at times. Connie and I have developed a pretty good daily routine (which I really like) since we have been retired that is very comfortable. We enjoy coffee together in the mornings for about an hour each day when

I am not off to some breakfast meeting or another. We usually discuss what's "on the agenda" for the day and what our evening meal might be. As different as we are, we are still compatible. Certainly, compatibility is a big key to our marriage.

I discovered that I do not like to live alone and never have. I enjoy the married life— however one might define it. Perhaps it's because I grew up in a large family or never went "off" to college, but I simply miss someone else being in the house.

I discovered that having many siblings, two children with six grandchildren, many friends and keeping relatively active with volunteer work and writing allows me to spend the time, when Connie is gone, productively. There were times that I did get bored but I think that's more to do with my general nervous nature rather than being alone.

Lastly, I enjoy the married life and am thankful that both Connie and I are relatively healthy at this stage of our lives. And we shall see what the future holds as long as the Good Lord wills it.

What was life like in the 60s?

The question that was originally posed this week from Storyworth was " What were some of your favorite camping trips?". Since I never went on a camping trip, at least as far back as I can remember, that was not a good question for me. In the alternative, I posed the question above.

I was age 9 through 19 from 1960 to 1970. It was the time of the most change in my life, since I went from childhood to adulthood during that period of time. It was the most memorable period in my life because of the many different life experiences I had. I have written about many of those experiences in previous questions in this book and so will focus more on the generic "what was life like" in the 60's

The country had been through 2 wars the prior 20 years up to 1960. WW2 and the Korean War were still freshly in the mind of most adults and then the US became involved in the Vietnam

“conflict” in the mid 1960’s. From my perspective, especially in the mid to late 60’s the Vietnam War pretty much dominated the nightly news and much of the printed media. There were many protests on college campuses and the country was very divided as to whether, or not, we should be there. It was always part of the backdrop during the 60’s and culminated in the 1973 pullout of US troops.

As a Catholic, the 1960’s were a time of great change and , some would say, upheaval in the Church. Vatican II, the second Vatican Ecumenical Council, took place from 1962 to 1965. All the changes as a result of the council began after 1965 and had a great impact on our life as a Catholic household. The focus of the Council was to update and modernize the Church and to revitalize its relationship with people and other religions. The Church took on a more outward look at justice in our society and changed some of the longstanding sacramental worship rituals like turning the altar around to face the congregation and promoting English speaking Masses. That also created some conflict both internally in the Church and in the Country as the voice of the Church became much “louder” in society.

Notwithstanding the discussion above, I believe that the 60’s were a much simpler time when compared to today. There were no cell phones, no personal computers (computer use was limited to just a few of the larger companies) and, perhaps more importantly, there was no social media.

The nuclear family was more prominent in 1960 compared to now. In 1960, 95% of children were born to married parents. Today that number is closer to 60%. Family life was more stable in the 60's.

I believe authority figures like older adults, teachers, clergy and police officers were much more respected in the 1960's. Kids back then were more worried about consequences and were held accountable for their behavior. Unfortunately, not so much today.

There was MUCH LESS media presence and bias (of all sorts) in the 60's. There was a stronger sense by Politicians of what was best for the county versus their own political party affiliation. I also believe there was much more common sense and societal agreement on right and wrong and good and evil. That also made life much simpler.

Kids were allowed to be more independent in the 60's. Part of that is probably due to the streets being generally safer back then with much less hand gun proliferation, drugs and gangs. Kids were expected to get out on their own and get a job sooner than today; to become emancipated, as it were, at an earlier age.

Finally, and at least for me, I think it was a lot easier to be alone and discover who you were, as a person, more readily in the 1960's. There was less "noise" in our daily lives that we had to deal with. There was something really great as I remember, back in the late 60's, of getting into my old 1960 Chev, with a pack of

Marlboro cigarettes, a radio that didn't work and being able to drive around with just my thoughts. Like they say "those were the good old days."

Who are your heroes?

This is a hard question for me to answer since I have never been a hero "worshiper". And in the current culture it seems that everyone is a hero for some reason or another.

I did some definitional research on the word hero and here's what I came up with:

Hero: Oxford Dictionary definition —A person who is admired or idealized for courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities.

The Biblical definition— Someone who demonstrates faith, obedience, and a willingness to serve God and others, even in the face of adversity. And here's the important point: They are often characterized by humility, self sacrifice and a focus on God's will rather than personal gain. Being a hero means being a helper, supporter and friend over the long haul. Especially to those who are in need.

Heroes to me are ordinary people who have lived good lives, parented their children well, have been a good spouse and have

done this over their entire lifetime. They have the courage to face whatever comes their way and do it without resorting to victim hood and "bailing" when times get tough.

Heroes are those who ask the Good Lord for strength and perseverance and accept the divine guidance that they pray for.

And so who are these heroes in my life. They are the people who embody what I speak about above.

Two people stand out in my life who are ordinary people on the surface and probably the most unlikely of hero's. Denny Felicetta is one and Linda Schroepfer is the other and for essentially the same reasons. Both have spouses who are currently in nursing homes. They have been married for 50 years in each case.

For Denny, his wife Lucy began showing signs of early dementia about 12 years ago and the family had no choice but to admit her to a memory care unit in a nursing home about 5 years ago. His devotion to her over the time of her extended illness, continuing to be a man of great faith as well as a loving husband, father and grandfather set him apart from us mortal souls.

Linda's journey has been different but no less remarkable. Her husband John suffered a severe stroke in 2016 that paralyzed his left side and significantly affected his eyesight and energy. At the time of his stroke the doctors did not believe that John would survive long term, but here we are 9 years later and he is still with us. John is in a nursing home and is doing as well as can be expected, but unfortunately, it's a situation where he is able to

survive but not necessarily thrive. Linda has shown extraordinary devotion to John where many others probably would not. She has worked diligently with all of John's caregivers to assure that he is given the best care possible. She makes sure that John is included in as many family events as possible and can be, to the extent possible, the loving father and grandfather that he is. And she does this out of pure love for her husband of 50 years, even in times of great difficulty.

The great nurses at Allina hospital that cared for me during my heart and cancer issues in 2023 are heroes to me. These are ordinary women and men who do extraordinary things every day in a very difficult environment and with many difficult patients. (But not me, of course.....)

All parents who love and care for their children, enduring all the hardships of parental life over their entire lifetime are hero's to me. Parents who must do the unthinkable and bury a child while still having faith and the fortitude to carry on with their lives are especially remarkable. Unfortunately, in our society today, too many sports "heroes" are the worst of parents and yet are glorified by many because of their athletic skill.

My uncles Jean and Charlie Torborg are heroes to me. They helped parent and mentor me after my dad died in 1986. They did this in addition to being men of faith, loving husbands and fathers. My aunts Marie and Leora and, of course, my mother, Elaine are all heroes to me. These women embodied the biblical

definition of heroes that I write about above. They had unwavering focus on their children over their entire lifetimes. While Marie did not have any "blood"children of her own, I would submit that she was the truest definition of a loving and caring mother. I miss these uncles and aunts very much.

And finally, I couldn't be a man of some faith without looking at Jesus Christ and admitting that he is one of my heroes, even though he lived 2000 years ago.

What is one of the best photographs you've ever taken?



I am not much of a photographer. I never had a camera until I got a smart phone with a built in camera. Even with that, I seldom take photos or, for that matter, film/record the grandkids at sporting events and the like. The fact is, I think we have become a society addicted to taking pictures and recordings and I intentionally shy away from taking pictures. However, I do have some favorite pictures, not taken by me, that I will speak about a little later.

As I was thinking about some of my favorite pictures, my thought process went to the question " Why are these particular photos some of my favorites?" Interestingly, the word NOSTALGIA came to me defined as: [A sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal associations.] And while this is a pretty clinical definition it's also one that resonates with me.

There is a picture from 1898, above, of my Great Grandparents Zephryn and Philomene Paquette and their 10 living children (at that time). My great uncle Cyspian was born in 1880 but died either at childbirth or very early on. In addition to the 10 children pictured they had another 3 children: Alfred, born in 1899, my grandfather Phil born in 1901 and Estelle born in 1903. For whatever reason, that picture has always captivated me as I think about what life must have been like back then.

There are little pictures of Tony and Christina when they were about 7 and 2 in a locket in my bedroom. I keep it open and on

one of the shelves where I can see it every morning when I get out of bed. It was a gift from the two of them many years ago that I have always cherished. It's a wonderful reminder for me of the times when they were little and the joy that I, and Connie, had raising both of them.

The next favorite picture is actually not a photograph, but a picture of Tony from about 1989 on the Wheaties box. Tony did some modeling when he was younger, and was selected to model the "Get your picture on the Wheaties box" promotion that General Mills did back then. I have kept a few empty boxes of Wheaties with his picture on the back all these years. I had it displayed in my office at the accounting firm as well. It was a great conversation piece.....

There is a picture of Christina and me from a Hill Murray Father/Daughter dance when she was, I think, a junior at Hill. (Maybe 1999) It was taken during the event and it reminds me of how much I enjoyed my time with her and my many years of involvement at the School.

There is a great picture of Connie and me just outside the door of our bedroom taken in 2010 or so. It is quintessentially Connie, and me for that matter. It captures her spirit and enjoyment in the moment as is evident from the expression on her face. I am standing behind Connie and the expression on my face says I'm really glad that she is having a good time.....And in fairness, I was having fun as well.

There certainly are more “favorite” pictures I could talk about. But in the end, the ones I noted above speak to the very positive memories I have over many, many years. Hopefully, there will continue to be pictures taken (not by me) that will resonate and provide more great memories as time goes by.

What's a food or food combination that you love, which most other people dislike?

I gave this question a fair amount of thought and then went on line and researched “foods that most Americans don’t like”. I needed to specify Americans because, when I began the research, there were all kinds of really distasteful (some would say disgusting) foreign foods that came up; like certain types of bugs and animal body parts that I won’t mention. Yuck! The fact is that I know the foods I like to eat but didn’t have a good frame of reference for what others don’t like. So the research really helped in this writing.

The first food item that I really like, that most others don’t, has a back story. My dad used to take me with him when he would go to an “old fashioned” butcher shop in the late 1950’s and early

60's. You knew it was old fashioned because they still used sawdust to soak up the blood and grease from the floors. Yes, those were the good old days! It was at that shop that my dad would buy their home made Blood sausage. I can't rightly say WHAT was in the sausage but I absolutely loved it. I'm pretty sure my sisters weren't too crazy about it, so there was plenty for me and my dad. The French are actually known for their blood sausage recipes and it is still a favorite in France as I understand it. Sometimes it's good to have French roots.

Here is a list of the foods I like to eat which, apparently, many others do not: Black licorice, Anchovies, Beets, Blue cheese, Mushrooms, Olives, Pickles, Canned Tuna and Canned Salmon.

According to my research, about half of America does not like black licorice, anchovies or Blue Cheese and to a lesser, but still significant, extent the other items on my list.

I knew about the black licorice and anchovy dislike since many of my family and friends do not care for them.

I'm surprised that so many people don't like olives or pickles. Those two items, for better or worse, are real staples in my diet. I can't remember a time that I didn't ask for extra pickles with my hamburger or lots of olives on my salad.

Blue cheese was an acquired taste of mine. I don't really go out of my way to eat Blue cheese like I would a slice of Cheddar but blue cheese dressing is one of my favorites salad toppings.

Mushrooms are interesting in that most people either love them or hate them. How many mushroom haters have you dined with who painstakingly take every morsel and bit of mushroom out of the casserole or pizza they're eating? For many people, it's not so much the flavor as it is the texture of the mushroom- again that's according to my research.

I grew up eating canned tuna (made with oil not water, although I did switch to the water packed type many years ago.)

Tuna was a great high protein "snack" when I was younger requiring only a can opener to "prepare it." I'm actually very thankful that my dad would pick up a few cans for me every week when he went grocery shopping at the Red Owl in the village.

I began eating more canned salmon in the last few years for the same reasons I eat tuna fish. Quick, easy and nutritious. I prefer canned over cooked salmon if you can believe it.

Finally, I will end this story with a food I hate and most other Americans don't. BEER. YUCK!!

What is one of the most memorable road trips you've ever taken?

I'm going to amend this question a little adding "by car" to the end of it. I've been on a number of tours/ vacations, especially in Europe, where our mode of travel was by bus and some of those were fun, but none are among my MOST memorable.

I did a little research on what is the minimum distance (in miles) that a trip needs to be in order to qualify as a "road trip". According to the research, a trip of 500 miles, or more, is necessary to be called a road trip.

There are 5 road trips that I will talk about. Three of them were in various parts of Europe and two in the United States.

Connie and I were most fortunate to take 2 private car tours in Europe with our good friends Dale and Jeri Peterson.

In the late summer 1998, we travelled to France and ended up doing a two or three day car tour of areas around France,

including the Palace of Versailles and the Chateau de Fontainebleau. We had a driver who was native to Paris and on the last day we drove about 100 miles outside of Paris to the countryside. That was a wonderful and memorable day, especially when we were able to stop in a small village, buy some bread, wine and salami and ate lunch at the side of a small stream. For whatever reason, that day just sticks in my mind. It was one of the most peaceful and serene times I have ever experienced . Our driver, being local to the area, was extremely knowledgeable and took us to a number of out of the way places during that day where we experienced the real culture of rural France.

Our next trip was in the early 2000's, also with the Peterson's, where we travelled to Germany (concentrating on southern Germany in Bavaria) and did a week long tour with a private driver. Our driver was a very interesting fellow with an unusual background. The Bavarian Alps area of Germany is absolutely gorgeous. We were able to visit Hitler's retreat area (Kehlsteinhaus, otherwise known as the Eagles Nest) in the mountains and learn much about the Second World War. We were also able to spend a few days in the town of Rothenburg in northern Bavaria. There are a few towns in Europe that I would go back to and Rothenburg is one of them. It was " spared" bombing in WWII and therefore most of the medieval architecture survived. It was a most memorable and wonderful

trip.

Connie and I took a three day trip to Romania with a private driver in 2019. We spent most of the time in the Transylvania area which is beautiful and mountainous. Our driver was a young Romanian man who was very knowledgeable and took us to a number of small villages where we visited some wineries, other local businesses and a few castles. One thing that Europe has are Castles, no matter which country you visit.

I have written earlier about the business trip through South Dakota and Nebraska I took with my dad when I was about 7 or 8 years old. Since my dad was driving for 5 days visiting various grain elevators, I think he wanted some company and my mom probably wanted me out of the house. This trip, done in 1959 I think, was a real education for me about small town rural life on the Great Plains. While the memories of that trip are not as spectacular as those in Europe they are no less memorable.

The final "memorable" trip may not even qualify as a road trip but I would be remiss if I didn't mention it. It was in the winter of 2004 I believe and it was a drive home I was taking from Milwaukee to Minneapolis after visiting Christina at Marquette. I didn't get on the road until about 7:00 at night. I recall that when I got to about Menominee at 11:00 I was so sleepy that I actually thought about stopping at a truck stop to get a few hours of sleep. But I powered on and by the time I got about 10 miles from the Minnesota border I was falling asleep at the wheel. I recall

opening all the windows and blasting the radio to try and stay awake. Thankfully by the Grace of God, I made it home. But that is one trip I will never forget. And one that I won't do again!

What is the best advice your father ever gave you?

This was a fairly difficult question for me to answer and I put a lot of time thinking about it. Not because I didn't get advice from my dad, but because it usually came from my mother and he almost always gave his non verbal consent. My dad wasn't one who usually started a sentence with the dreaded "you should". In fact, he really wasn't a big talker and I remember only a few times that he and I ever sat down and had a real conversation. I think part of that is because my dad came from an era where the accepted custom was for the men to gather and talk at one of their favorite bars over a couple of drinks. And for whatever reason, that was never my style. In hindsight, there was plenty of opportunity from about 1972, when I was first of legal drinking age, until 1983 for me to have joined my dad at one of his favorite places and have a private and meaningful conversation. As a side note, I think my brother Rich, when he and dad were both working at the grain exchange, had more of a

chance to talk one on one with my dad at any one of the three nearby bars. I do know ,from experience, that having a few cocktails would loosen Jerry's tongue and he would open up more about his life, thoughts and beliefs. But I have digressed a little (or maybe a lot) from the answer!

Sometimes "advice"can be given nonverbally. As I said above, my dad was not a big talker and I recall very few times that we ever sat together one on one and had a conversation.

I did some research and there has been a fair amount written on how advice can be delivered; and about verbal AND nonverbal advice. To quote the Oxford dictionary and some AI " Yes, advice can absolutely be given non verbally, often through body language and other non verbal cues. Facial expressions, gestures and other non verbal signals can sometimes replace the need for words altogether."

For those of us that knew Jerry Paquette well, HE most certainly could convey advice by "the look"👀. Most of the time that advice was "it's probably best to not do that", when invariably, I was about to do something stupid.

While my dad wasn't one to give much verbal advice, he knew what stupid looked like and, even without him saying anything, all he had to do was look at you and you knew what he was thinking and his message, or advice was clear.

Thankfully, there was some advise given verbally by my dad that has stuck with me.

When I was about 10, I recall my dad telling me that a firm handshake while looking the person directly in the eyes helps make a good first impression. That has held to be true my whole life and I think I have passed that advice on to my kids.

I recall a conversation my dad and I had when I was a junior or senior at St. Thomas. We were on the deck and talking about some of the job opportunities I had with the big CPA firms. Somehow I must have mentioned how lucky I was to have received a number of interviews with prestigious firm's. Surprisingly, my dad very firmly and clearly said that in order to have good luck you must ALWAYS FIRST PUT yourself in the position to take advantage of the good luck. In other words, had I not worked hard to put myself through college and get very good grades, interviews with those firms wouldn't have happened.

His advice here was pretty clear to me and I have remembered it my entire life. That is, being prepared and working hard towards a goal will go a long way, with some good luck, in achieving your goal AND if you have some bad luck along the way you will be able to better handle it.

Do you believe in a higher power?

This week's question is one I have thought about, off and on, for most of my adult life. Growing up Catholic and believing in God when I was younger was pretty easy for me. Having parents that were good, practicing Catholics, friends that were almost exclusively Catholic, going to a Catholic grade school, high school and college pretty much assured I didn't challenge my belief in God early on. I don't think I questioned my faith until I was in my early twenties. I have written about this before, but the fact I chose the Confirmation name Thomas (after the Apostle "doubting" Thomas) when I was but 10 years old must have been a divine foreshadowing of my journey of Faith.

I want to define "Higher Power" and draw a distinction between believing THAT concept or GOD. Here is some research information from Artificial Intelligence:

[While “God” is often used synonymously with “ Higher Power” in some contexts, they are not necessarily the same thing, as “ Higher Power” is a broader term that can encompass various concepts beyond a traditional deity, particularly in programs like Alcoholics Anonymous.
The term “Higher Power” is intentionally broad and can be understood as any force greater than oneself that provides support, guidance and strength.
“God” in many religious traditions refers to a specific, often personal, deity who is believed to be omnipotent, omniscient and benevolent and actively involved in human affairs.
This understanding and definition of “ God” can vary significantly between different religions and individuals.]

But before I discuss my specific belief in a higher power (or God) here are a few comments about my adult journey of faith.
For almost all of my adult life I have been active in the good works of the Catholic Church. I have embraced the teachings of Vatican II, beginning with teaching religion classes at the tender age of 16 in the late 60’s to being active with various Archdiocesan programs even today. (I have written about this before.) Also, Connie and I have been extraordinarily philanthropic for the past 30 plus years to the Catholic Church primarily in our support of K-8 Catholic education helping those who otherwise couldn’t afford it to have access to a Catholic

school.

When asked WHY (even by family members) I have done this my entire life I can only answer that it's the right thing to do. I honestly don't think about my belief in God or some other higher power as my motivation to do good. It's truly a mystery to me. (Again, I have written about this in previous answers and am aware of some events in my life, for which I am ever grateful, and probably spurred me on to do good works.)

Through my entire adult faith journey, I have ALWAYS believed in GOD and that ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE WITH HIM. That is the only possible answer I have for the mystery I speak of above.

My Catholic religious journey has had its ups and downs, particularly the past 20 years, as more has come out about various abuse issues primarily by our all male priesthood. Quite frankly, there are many guys who should never have been ordained.

I have also wondered during my journey if today's church is what Jesus had in mind as he left the building of it to

Peter. I suspect it may not. (Even 2,000 years ago married priests were allowed, much to the chagrin of the Apostle Paul as noted in 1 Corinthians Chapter 7.)

Lastly, I believe in God and the Holy Spirit in the omniscient sense, as it is They who I turn to for strength in my life when the chips are down. My relationship with Jesus is more in the temporal sense and probably more complicated(although I don't

deny that He is the son of God) since I am able to see the model of a well lived Christian life through Him.

To sum it up then, no I don't believe in a Higher Power, I do believe in God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

What's one of your go-to stories that always gets a good response?

I have a number of “go to” stories that I have used over the years with clients, students and friends. There is one particular story that I will write about below that almost always gets a positive response. (I may have mentioned this story in a previous writing, so please pardon any redundancy.)

Over the years I have had many clients and students ask me: “What is the most important element in becoming successful?”In other words, what’s the secret sauce to ensuring that, whatever your goal, if you DO THIS ONE THING you will have a greater chance of success.

About 30 years ago the Wilder Foundation, under the leadership at that time of Tom Kingston, commissioned a study of the lives of about 600 young people with the primary question “ Of all the items that go into the mix, what’s the one item that is the

greatest predictor of success?" The results of this study were of great interest to me for the reason noted above. I recall the conversation with Tom about what they found out and his answer both enlightened me and rang true from my classroom teaching experience. While they looked at many variables such as a person's economic background, ethnicity, education levels and personal and physical traits the one item that stood out above all was the amount of time a person was willing to invest to meet their goal (i.e. become successful). In other words, TIME SPENT ON TASK WAS THE GREATEST PREDICTOR OF SUCCESS. As noted above, this outcome affirmed what I had believed for a number of years. A simple example is getting a high grade in a particular class. The more time you invest in going to class, doing homework and studying etc., the greater the likelihood of success. This answer was not always what my clients or students wanted to hear ie. there is no secret sauce. But sometimes the truth is painful.

I had actually put this knowledge into practice prior to the study when I told my accounting students back in the 1980's at St. Thomas that if they came to class every day, did all the homework, asked for help as needed and studied diligently for the tests, I would guarantee a grade of at least a C; no matter how they performed on the tests. (It helps to understand that many of the students who were business majors and required to take accounting were deathly afraid of the subject. The

“guaranteed C” proved to be a big stress reliever.) Interestingly, I never had a student do the required work as I laid out and score below a B- on their own merits.

So when I am asked today about what is the greatest predictor of success I have a story and a ready answer that is (almost) always well received, but only if the listener is willing to take the time to listen.

What would you want to be famous for?

I have never wanted or aspired to be famous. Nor do I ever want to be famous. My observation of many "famous" people, especially in today's world of social media, indicates that the fame almost always comes at a price. And that price usually includes loss of the quieter life and blissful anonymity that I seek.

There are many good and positive attributes that I WOULD like to be "well known" for. Within my circle of family, friends, siblings, business associates, and clients I have tried to model those positive attributes. As I have grown older and , hopefully, wiser I have learned that actions do speak louder than words. I find it refreshing when I come across people who speak less and let their good works and deeds do the talking for them. I have been fortunate to know many such people and those folks are, indeed, well known to me as honest, honorable and forthright. It

was from those good people that I learned to speak less and act more……

But first, I took a look online at the difference between being "famous" and being "well known" and came up with this:

[" Being well known by many people is typically due to exceptional quality or achievements. It often relates to individuals or things that are distinctive or notable in some way. Being famous often involves public recognition and acclaim that sets someone or something apart."] Given this definition, I would pick WELL KNOWN over FAMOUS any day of the week.

Here is a list of items that I would like to be known for:

1. A loving and good husband, father, grandfather and sibling.
2. A caring and trustworthy friend.
3. A strong advocate and supporter of Kindergarten through 12th grade Catholic education.
4. Being forthright in all my dealings with people. Honesty and Integrity have been key attributes I seek in others AND myself.
5. Being successful in my business life and, with Connie, helped provide well for our kids and family.
6. Sought opportunities to help others through my charitable work and philanthropy.
7. Able to give sound advice —when asked.
8. Having a belief in God and a faith life that focused on others and modeled a life of Catholic Virtue.

There are other great attributes that I would be proud to be known for, but the list above are those that are conscious to me. Successfully living and embodying the big 8 above, I believe, would be a life well lived.

Have you made any noteworthy New Year's resolutions?

I don’t recall ever making any NOTEWORTHY New Year’s resolutions that have been successful. I have CERTAINLY made some New Year’s resolution but those were mostly when I was a younger adult. Like many people, I think the “losing weight” resolution was the one I most frequently made and failed at.

Over the years, and as I got older, I came to the realization that most resolutions that I made that were going to start at a specific DATE just didn’t fit me.

The Oxford Dictionary has two definitions for Resolution :

1. A firm decision to do or not to do something.

2. The quality of being determined or resolute.

Clearly the New Year’s resolution is what is contemplated in item 1; making a firm decision.

The process by which I ultimately come to a resolution requiring action on my part is a rather lengthy one. I like to "cogitate" on things and possibly do more of that than most people. So when a deadline (definite date) is imposed on my deep thinking, I tend to lose the passion that is needed to fuel a resolution. In other words, I just need time to think and reflect freely without being pushed into action. When I have done that it invariably leads to failure in a short timeframe. (There is a reason that 80% of New Year's resolutions fail in the first two weeks of January. And that reason in my mind is lack of RESOLVE!) It seems obvious, and if you dig deeper, I'm convinced that many people make resolutions that "would be nice to make or keep" but have not thought about what the implications in the change of that behavior means in their daily life. Let's use the example of giving up caffeine. First of all, I don't think many people are aware of how much caffeine is in our beverages or food. Certainly, coffee is usually the worst culprit as are sodas, like Coca-Cola. From a lifestyle standpoint, for coffee drinkers like me, drinking coffee is a staple of my mornings at home with Connie and any and all of my frequent breakfasts and lunches at most restaurants. To give up just the coffee alone would have a huge impact on my life and my enjoyment.

I'll make the distinction here between a lifestyle change and a medical necessity resolution. I think quitting smoking is a good example in the latter category. When I quit smoking 49 years

ago, I didn't go through a lengthy deliberation and resolution process. I had been hospitalized for a pulmonary embolism and ABSOLUTELY could never smoke again. I wanted to live and made the choice at that time to do what I could to make that happen, including no smoking.

For most people New Year's resolutions, thankfully, are not life or death decisions. A resolution to keep spending in line with the household budget may be more of a necessity and might have a greater chance of success because this probably falls into the category of I really need to do this. Unfortunately, I think even resolutions as important as this are part of the 80% failure rate I noted above.

Trust me when I say that making a New Year's resolution isn't pure folly. I think the exercise of thinking about and making a resolution, even with a New Year's deadline, is worthwhile. We do learn from our failures and hopefully over the course of those failures we are able to learn what resolutions we need to make in our lives and what lifestyle changes will be necessary to enable the resolution to be successfully lived out.

Do you believe in love at first sight?

I'm not sure actual and true love at first sight is possible but it all depends on how you define "love." My research indicates:

[Psychologists have defined LOVE as " something that is cultivated between two people and grows OVER TIME, through getting to know him or her, and experiencing life's many ups and downs together."
LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT is a strong, immediate feeling of attraction towards another person often described as a powerful connection upon first meeting. It's a subjective experience, and while some find it to be a real phenomenon, others view it as a strong initial attraction that can lead to love but isn't inherently true love.]

If real love by the definition above can only be cultivated over time, then real love at first sight would be on impossibility. But

for true romantics, I believe they hope and pray that love at first sight, instant love, is not only possible but also preferable.

I have admitted in the past that I do enjoy reading a good romance novel (if such a thing exists). I have been reading them for many years now and regularly exchange Victorian era romance novels written by many different authors with my sisters Therese, Nancy and Karen. Sharing my love of romance novels with my siblings helps affirm the fact that, even though I am staunchly male, it must truly be in the DNA. As a side note, and in my further defense of my masculinity, our mother was an AVID reader of romance novels, often staying up until 1:00am in the morning getting her fix. I can say then with some certainty that one of the hallmarks of a good romance novel is the "falling in love at first sight" premise. Without that it would take too long within the framework of a 300 page book to cultivate true love.....

I've often thought that most people fall in "lust" at first sight and it feels so good at the time that the only possible explanation it could be is true love. The stars in the eyes and physical and psychological attraction for one another is certainly real but, unfortunately, fleeting in many if not most cases.

I have spoken about this before, but when I first met Connie it sure felt like love at first sight. There is no question but that I was smitten with her. And while I can say that true love did develop over time (and now being married 51 years) I too felt

like it was true love at first sight. And who really knows.....
The old saying "Falling in love is easy. Staying in love is harder" has always made sense to me in the context of a young man and young women who fall in love and get married, and is true of my (and I'm sure Connie's) personal experience.
There is another experience that I have had of falling in love at first sight. The birth of both of my children was absolutely a case of love at first sight. Unconditional, all forgiving and forever love of your children is not only possible but also a Grace from God given freely by Him to parents. And thank the good Lord for that.
There is a beautiful passage in the Bible from Romans 8:38-39 that speaks to God's love for his people: " For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus or Lord."
And that says it all about my love at first sight for my children AND grandchildren.

What keepsakes or family heirlooms do you treasure most?



I gave this week's question a lot of thought. The truth is I don't have many tangible heirlooms or keepsakes from a prior generation. I come from a large extended family and, I would guess, any of those items that did exist are with other Paquette or Torborg families. For clarity sake, I researched the definitions of Heirlooms and Keepsakes and came up with this:

Keepsake—A small item kept in memory of the person who gave it to you or who originally owned it.

Heirloom— A valuable object that has belonged to a family for several generations.

Most people would agree that these are the traditionally accepted definitions. But I dove a little deeper and did some research on what might be considered a "non -traditional definition." Here's what I came up with:

A non - traditional keepsake is something that transcends the physical (or even valuable) and evokes powerful memories, feelings or associations and can hold significant sentimental value and serve as a cherished keepsake. They can be experiences, personalized items, or unique objects that hold special meaning. These could be experiences beyond the physical, like a weekend getaway or personalized online experience. They often emphasize the emotional connection and shared experience rather than the material value of the item.

And so, with the above as some context, I had/have three items from my grandparents and great grandparents.

1. I HAD my Grandpa John Torborg's College Diploma from the Catholic Normal School, class of 1910. Normal for some reason was the term used 150 years ago to describe schools dedicated to training Catholic teachers. Unfortunately it was broken beyond repair a number of years ago.

2. I HAD a pocket watch used by my great grandfather Zephirin Paquette. The watch did not work and was damaged beyond repair. Somehow it got lost or discarded.

3. I HAVE a picture of my Great Grandparents Zephirin and Philomena and their children. See below. The photo is undated but it probably was taken in 1898. I know that Tony has a copy of that picture framed at his home as well.

There are keepsakes and heirlooms that I intend to hand down to future generations. Connie, Tony and Christina are generally

aware of these and I will list them below.

1. This Storyworth book. My hope is that this book will be handed down from generation to generation as a keepsake or heirloom, however you prefer. I have written the book specifically for THAT purpose. However, this book may be of interest to others (whoever they may be) outside the family as well.

2. My letters to the Kids. I'm not sure how many handwritten, usually 3 page, letters I have written to both Tony and Christina. I started writing these letters when Tony went off to Brown University in Providence RI in 1996 and have continued to write him a letter at least semi- monthly since then. I write Christina less frequently since she " came back home" after college.....My guess is there are in excess of 800 total letters at this point. I have tried to maintain copies of all of them.

3. My college ring from the College of St. Thomas, class of 1973. As I have written about in the past, one of my better achievements in this life was to graduate from St. Thomas with a cum laude Bachelor's degree and totally debt free.

There may be other keepsakes that I am not identifying here and that hold special sentimental value to me and therefore could qualify as a keepsake..... But for now I think we are good.



Photo of Zephirin, Philomena and Family @ 1898

What is one of your fondest childhood memories?

I have many fond childhood memories. As I thought about them this week, in preparation for writing this answer, it struck me just how many I have. I have written about some of these before and will elaborate on five more of my fondest memories.

Four of these memories have to do with spending time with family and one was playing on the baseball team when I was in the 7th and 8th grade at St. Charles grade school.

(By definition, I have decided to use age 12 as the limit to my "childhood" memories for this story.)

We had a great baseball coach at St. Charles by the name of Louie Mitteco. He was a pretty strict disciplinarian and liked to win. I learned a lot about playing together with others in a focused and disciplined way which has stuck with me my whole life. We also had many very talented young athletes and a great

championship caliber team. One thing we all learned both years was it felt great to be a winner. We won the Minneapolis Don Bosco league championship those two years and played in the Twin Cities championship games at Midway stadium in St. Paul. I reflect back often about those years and Mr. Mitteco.

The family time events were Thanksgiving, Christmas, our annual outings for a week or two to Bay Lake, and going often to supper at Grandma and Grandpa Paquette's house when they lived at 3750 Xerxes Avenue North in Minneapolis.

Thanksgiving was always a happy occasion that was spent with just our family. This was before the time (around 1962) that any of us had boyfriends or girlfriends who might come over for Thanksgiving. I recall fondly my mom getting up early on Thanksgiving morning and getting the 25 plus pound bird stuffed and in the oven. The great smell of the roasting Turkey during the day and watching football with my dad were a lot of fun. It was just pure Paquette family time!

Christmas is one of my fondest memories both because of the family time and going to Mass on Christmas Day and then to Grandma and Grandpa Torborg's for Christmas night with ALL the aunts, uncles and cousins to boot. (A conservative count would probably be between 30 and 35 people including 22 young kids- between the ages of 6 months to 18 years of age.) The house was absolutely packed, which I would think was more fun for us kids and less so for the adults. But we always sang

Christmas Carols after dinner accompanied by my grandpa playing on the baby grand piano. (The piano took up at least a third of the total space in that little living room.)

Once a year our family went on a two week vacation to Woodland Beach Resort up at Bay lake in Northern Minnesota. My mom's brother, Jean, his wife Mary and large brood of 9 kids would also be there in a separate cabin. We enjoyed the time swimming, fishing and just being lazy as the Paquette family on vacation "was wont to do."

The final memory I will write about is going to Grandma and Grandpa Paquette's, usually once every six weeks or so for dinner, back before they sold their home in 1960. Grandma would make BOTH a beef roast and a pork roast with sauerkraut. Maybe it's just me but those roasts were the very best I have ever had. Spending time with just our family and my grandparents was very special. My grandma was a large and handsome woman who enjoyed to laugh and drank her whiskey straight. My grandfather was a very bright and successful businessman in Minneapolis. But he too enjoyed to drink, in moderation, and have a good laugh. Those were great times. To this day, I still drive over to that old house and walk around that old, but proud, neighborhood soaking in the sights, sounds and memories that just being there evokes. I am so very fortunate to have such wonderful memories from my childhood.

How do you want to be remembered?

I have already written about what I would want to be remembered for in a previous question a few weeks ago. That question was " What would you want to be famous for?" In that question, I indicated that I didn't really want to be famous and then continued to write about what I WOULD want to be known for. The result of that answer were 8 items that are also what I would want to be remembered for after I depart this world.

In thinking about " being remembered" I did some research and noted there is a tremendous amount written on the subject.

Interestingly, many people do NOT want to be remembered after they die. The reasons given are a desire for privacy, a belief that their lives were not particularly significant, or a preference for focusing on the present rather than dwelling on the past or future. Those reasons for not wanting to be remembered don't really resonate with me.

I believe the vast majority of people DO want to be remembered in a positive way. All through history we see examples of people who have lived extraordinary lives and are not only well remembered but also revered. George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Benjamin Franklin, Albert Einstein, Rosa Parks are just a few. The Catholic Church remembers and reveres its many Saints for the lives they lived on this earth. But for most of us, I think, we want to be remembered for a life well lived no matter what our background or circumstances.

Our Catholic Faith teaches us to remember in prayer those who have gone before us, "May our soul and all the souls of the faithfully departed rest in peace" is a prayer of remembrance. And every time I pray it I am reminded of all my friends and relatives who have died. A prayer from the Bible says " Those who live righteously will be remembered as a blessing while the wicked may be forgotten." Given that, it seems a good thing to live righteously!

In the final analysis, if nothing else, I hope to be remembered as a man who loved his children unconditionally. And as a man who treated others with respect and tried to help, with the best of my ability, those less fortunate than me.

What personal expectations do you hold yourself to?

I looked up a general definition of “personal expectations” and came up with this AI overview: An individual’s beliefs, feelings, and assumptions about what you believe will or should happen in the future, encompassing relationships and self-perception.
I then asked the specific question posed by Storyworth this week to AI and came up with “ Personal expectations you hold yourself to are the INTERNAL STANDARDS and BELIEFS a person holds for their own behavior, achievements and well- being which can include being honest, respectful and striving for excellence. These expectations can cover various aspects of life, such as relationships, career, and health, and serve to provide direction and accountability.” I like the second and more precise definition as it focuses solely on your standards and beliefs for yourself. So here goes.

I always EXPECTED I would be a good Husband. I had good role models to guide me with my mom and dad's marriage as well as the marriages of my many aunts and uncles. Sadly, I have also seen many marriages that end in divorce. One thing for certain, I never expected to get divorced and thankfully that has held true.

I EXPECTED to be a very good Father. I was fortunate enough to have known many good father's and saw the types of things that good fathers did. I also saw many things that not so good fathers did as well. I always had the sense that I would be a good father and believing that made it somewhat easier to acknowledge and readily accept the responsibilities of fatherhood.

I EXPECTED that I would be a good brother to my Siblings. There were times when I could help them out as we grew older and was happy to do so. I believe living in the twin cities, where most of us reside, also helped us to just be family and get together for dinners and special occasions. I have said before that we are a fortunate bunch of siblings and it was never a doubt in my mind that we would always be close.

I EXPECTED to be a good member of the community in general; Law abiding, respectful of my neighbors, and doing my civic duty when called upon. I have also been fortunate to be philanthropic and to come to the assistance of a number of community and Church based organizations primarily helping our K-8 Catholic students.

I EXPECTED THAT I would be honest and forthright in my professional and business career. Being a CPA and then, later on, adding the CFP made it fairly easy for me to be "righteous". The ethics and standards of those professions and the code of conduct were things I took very seriously.

I EXPECTED to be a life long Catholic. And early on I also grew to expect that I would be involved in the Church and other non profit organizations in our community. It just seems to be who I am.

One final thought. I believe, as a person gets older and matures, they continually "crystallize" their self expectations and learn more about those from their lived experiences. I know that to be true in my case.

What was one of the most romantic moments in your life?

I spent a lot of time thinking about this question. Connie and I were in Connecticut earlier this week and I didn't have much time to write, but I did have time to think.

I went online and looked up a definition of "romantic moment" because my sense is that it could be something very different for many people, especially people of different ages. Here is what I found: A romantic moment is " Being in a time (as in THAT moment in time) when everything slows down, and the only thing that matters is the magic of being with someone you care about." I really liked this definition and take note that it doesn't talk about a "romantic partner" but simply " someone you care about". This definition opened up a whole host of moments that could be considered romantic.

I have always believed that I was a true " Romantic" at heart and did some research on that meaning as well. The modern definition seems to essentially fit me. Romantics are defined more as " Someone who is expressive and thoughtful in love through gestures and words. They value deep emotional connections . Romantics are also known for their ability to listen attentively and engage in meaningful conversations." I will admit that I am not as expressive and thoughtful in love through gestures, but more so in words.

I have three romantimoments in my history that I will speak about. They are my memories of a time when I was a much younger man than I am now, all going back to the 1970's.

The first are the times I spent at Minnehaha Falls Park in Minneapolis late in the evenings (after dark) when I was out on a date. This was usually when I was a Freshman or Sophomore in college and didn't have much money for movies or dinners. The setting was totally conducive to sharing intimate thoughts and speaking hopefully about our life to come.....I'm pretty certain that I took Connie there but this would have been when I was a senior in college, or the summer after that.

The second moment, believe it or not, was when Connie and I went to midnight Mass on December 25th, 1972. I have spoken elsewhere about this experience. I knew for certain that I was falling in love with her then and was hopeful of the possibility of a life together. We had only known each other for a few months

and didn't start "dating" until that December. I recall my feelings from that evening and felt a unique closeness to Connie, as well as a spiritual rightness that I will never forget. It was truly magical for me and I had a suspicion (maybe more of a Hope) in that moment that it was true for her as well. (Which now, with 53 years of hindsight, must have been the case!)

The last moment I will speak about is when I proposed to Connie and gave her an engagement ring. It was a colder evening in April of 1973 and we went for a walk near her house on the other side of Lake Phalen. It was a very dark night and we were alone in the park. Her hands got cold and I told her to put them in the pockets of the heavy jacket I was wearing. (I had the ring in a box in one of the pockets.) When she put her hands in she felt the box. I think she knew what it was and teared up. And the rest is history as they say. That entire moment could not have been more romantic, at least in my simple mind.

Phil, Do You Consider Yourself either a Cynic or a Skeptic?

This is a question I posed to myself this week. I felt it would be good for me to delve into the degree to which I possess these "traits" (for lack of a better word). I have expressed my belief that I, indeed, can be somewhat cynical in some of my previous answers and I know, for a fact, that I am often a skeptic.

Let's start with some definitions. I went online and looked up both words and came up with these:

1. A cynic is a person who has an inclination to believe that people are motivated purely by self interest. They are people who have a negative attitude and outlook on life.

2. A skeptic is a person with a questioning attitude or a doubt toward claims of knowledge that are seen as mere belief in dogma. (My take on this is a little different. I see a skeptic as someone who often takes the position "I don't believe that" and

communicates that willingly in words or mannerisms.)

I will get back to skepticism a little later, but first here are the thoughts on my cynicism.

Unfortunately, I can be cynical at times. However, I think (maybe Hope) that I can keep that cynicism to myself. I have seen many people during my long career who are motivated by self interest. They are the ones who want to tell you about the great deal they made on the purchase of their last car, beating the IRS by paying less taxes, or the righteousness of their life. But I don't necessarily view them as cynical. For me, the cynical are the ones who have a very negative attitude towards others and seem to lead with that in their conversations. I'm not sure where I land on the "scale of cynicism" but hopefully it's on one of the lower rungs.

When I was a young CPA and new to the auditing profession we were taught to approach all our audit work with " a healthy attitude of skepticism". A pretty good definition of that is "incorporating critical thinking and curiosity by using systematic analysis to follow evidence wherever it leads."

As a practical matter, it meant that we did not accept answers as necessarily true unless we could verify them through other audit procedures. That attitude of healthy skepticism is something that has stayed with me my whole life and, I believe, has served me well.

In the final analysis, pun intended, I consider myself more a skeptic- modified with a healthy attitude, than I do a cynic. I do need to continually work on my proclivity towards being cynical. I also need to try and give people the benefit of the doubt especially in situations where they have long held, and sincere, beliefs without any real evidence to back it up. People will believe what they will and feel the way they do and all the evidence in the world to the contrary may not change them. I'm happy to just let them be.

Have you ever experienced a severe storm?

Most of us have experienced strong storms with pouring rain, howling winds and lightning. I know I certainly have. But I think this questions assumes storms that are the proverbial "once in a lifetime" memorable type of an event.

As a side note, my great uncle Fred Paquette died in the great Minnesota/ North Dakota Blizzard of March 15, 1941 that claimed many lives due to the suddenness of its onset. People were just not prepared and were caught outdoors. I believe Fred was about 60 years of age when he died.

I have never, thankfully, experienced anything like that but there are 2 memorable storms that I will speak about below.

The first one was back in the fall of 1967. It was one of those storms that dropped buckets of rain for days. I remember it vividly because I was on the De La Salle football team and we were playing Cretin on a Friday night under the lights. By the

time the game started it had been raining for a couple of days. Back then, they pretty much played through the elements no matter how much "danger" to the players or damage was done to the field.

I was a sophomore at the time and the long snapper on the team. Meaning I was the fellow who hiked the ball to the punter who usually stood 13-15 yards behind the line. We were in a punting position on the field and the referee handed me the wet ball. Oh, did I say that the field was pure MUD and the rain was coming down in torrents. As I leaned down over the ball I, unfortunately, put some weight on it and felt it sink into the mud. I knew there was no way I was going to be able to hick it 15 yards behind me and tried to call a time out. But to no avail. I was forced to attempt the hike and it ended up 3 feet behind me. Next thing I knew I had at a dozen guys laying on top of me trying recover the ball. That's one storm I shall never forget……

The second memorable storm was back in the winter of 1982/83. I was driving back to St. Paul late in the afternoon from the Wilson Center in Faribault, which is about 60 miles from St. Paul. I decided to take a County Road "shortcut" instead of staying on 35W North. (Not really sure why). It had been snowing all day in the area and when I left Faribault the wind began to really pickup. By the time I turned onto the "shortcut" it was also very dark. I think it was about 5:00pm. It didn't take long to figure out I was "in trouble". The plows had not been by to clear the

roads in quite some time and that, mixed in with the darkness and near blizzard conditions, made the road virtually impossible to see. (Don't forget that there were no cell phones or other in car emergency communication devices like there are today. My only saving Grace was the brand new 1982 Cadillac Sedan de Ville that I was driving. The big car did a remarkable job staying on the road as it plowed through the snow. I also took comfort that this County road essentially divided farmland properties and there were farm buildings and houses visible with their lights on most of the way. I figured if I went off the road and in the gully, at least I could walk the short distance to one of the buildings.

I've been very fortunate over the years to have avoided the catastrophic storms. I also tried to use common sense and stay put when the weather forecast is very ominous. In other words, I tried to not take any chances.....

What was your favorite candy as a child?



This question seems to imply that I had only one favorite candy as a child. As if I could be so lucky to have had only ONE.
I had MANY favorite candies when I was young. I could try to list them all but it would be an inexhaustible list. Suffice it to say I really never met a piece of candy that I didn't like.
As I was thinking of this answer earlier in the week it struck me that while the candy itself is certainly fun to think of, there are three memories I have associated with some favorite candies that I will share with you.
Snyder Brother's Drug store in the St Anthony Village Shopping Center had a huge self help candy counter back in the late 1950's and early 60's. It was an area about 6 feet long and 4 feet wide loaded with all types of candy. The usual ones were there, of course, like Hershey bars, Snickers, and Nut Goodies. They also had all types of hard candies like Life Savers, Candy Cigarettes,

and Necco wafers. The Necco wafer was a flavored hard candy that was about the size of a communion host. The nuns in the second grade used them to practice giving holy communion to us kids before we received our first holy communion. That was one of my favorite classes in the second grade. Interestingly, the Necco candy wafer was invented in 1847 and was a favorite of civil war, WWI and WWII soldiers in the field. Quite the history.

My second memory is of the leaf shaped gummy candies that my grandpa Bernice always had on hand. These candies became very popular in the early 1900's because they were made pretty much of all sugar, and could sit out for what seemed like months on end without getting hard. Even then I could still eat them —although they were a tad more difficult to chew. To this day, I can't think about spearmint gummy leaves without thinking fondly of my grandma Bernice.

My final memory is of "The Good & Plenty" brand candy. These were small black licorice pieces wrapped in hard candy. My aunt Marie always had a bowl full of these at her house. I ate a ton of that candy, unfortunately, as an adult when I would make my frequent trips to northeast Minneapolis to visit her. This candy was invented way back in 1893. Of interest to me is that Good & Plenty had about $24,000,000 in annual sales in 2024. Not too bad for a candy that been around for over 130 years!

And just like the association of spearmint leaf gummies with my Grandma Bernice, I can't think about those Good & Plenty's

without thinking fondly of aunt Marie and all the wonderful times I shared with her.

What is one of the riskiest or bravest things you've ever done?

I liked this question, which was posed by Storyworth, because it provoked a lot of thought. I've never considered myself as either very brave or one who takes many risks. Upon further reflection it occurred, to me also that there is a fine line of distinction between risk-taking and brave behavior.

I did some research on the definitions of the two words, and came up with these:

1. Risky behavior refers to actions that have the potential to cause harm or negative consequences to oneself. (Seems like a pretty simple definition.)

2. Being brave is having, or showing, mental or moral strength to face danger, fear, or difficulty: having or showing courage.

Taking a risk is also defined as taking a spontaneous action WITHOUT thought or planning. Bravery is a courageous action

taken after some thought, knowledge, and understanding of the consequences.

So where do I see myself on the being risky or brave scale.

Most people would say that I took a risk when I left the big CPA firms in the early 1980s and started my own public accounting firm. I was only 29 at the time and certainly didn't have a lot of money set aside or even a well-laid-out "Business Plan" of where I wanted to be in 5 years. I believe my mother, always the conservative voice of reason, didn't really agree that starting my own firm was a good idea. I don't recall her ever saying much to me about it, but I am fairly certain she didn't like it.

I'm not precisely sure how Connie felt about me leaving KPMG in 1981. (I also started teaching at St. Thomas College in the summer of 1981 so that might have taken some of the "sting" out of my decision.) I know we talked about it. Connie was pretty well established in her career by then and doing well. I also knew that she did not plan to be a stay-at-home mom and wanted to continue pursuing a career. And as fate would have it, she had an exceptionally good career.

All in all, I would have to say that leaving the big firms and starting out on my own was either one of the riskiest things I've done OR one of the bravest depending on your definition. Now in hindsight, it was probably more brave than risky since I did give that move a lot of thought before taking it.

Shifting to another plane of thought. I believe that most of us live ordinary lives and do many extraordinary things during that time. I think doing risky or brave things are the times when we are contemplating the extraordinary.

For me, having children was probably doing something brave since it's such a tremendous commitment to raise kids the RIGHT WAY. And I'm not just talking about the financial aspect, which is significant, but also the commitment of ourselves to put our children first. I truly believe it was brave on both Connie's and my part (probably more Connie's) and doing it together as a couple certainly helped.

It seems that fewer and fewer couples I know are deciding to be courageous, or brave and have children. And unfortunately many people are having children who don't have the financial resources or commitment of their time and character to raise good kids. That probably doesn't bode well for our society as a whole...

Epilogue/Do You Plan to Continue Writing?

I asked myself this question as an epilogue to this book and as an exploration of continued writing in some format.

It's been three years since I began this journey. And, as I have written before, I found this to be mostly a labor of love.

I've done a fair amount of self searching about why I enjoy writing and thought it might be good to do a little research on why others write memoirs/autobiographies. The reasons are many and I will share with you some of those that resonate with me below.

1. To preserve their unique life stories for family and future generations.
2. To gain self - understanding and emotional clarity through reflection and the act of writing.
3. To find purpose and meaning.
4. To enjoy the process.

There are also a few more that, in my case, explain why I write.
I am a person that needs structure and an ongoing " go to" project that has meaning for me and allows the time flexibility to choose when to write.
Unlike many men, I do not have any hobbies like woodworking or stamp collecting that I can go to at any time of the day or night. I am not a person who is a skilled handyman around the house. (Far from it!) I am also not an avid sports fan, golfer, pickle ball enthusiast, gardener, casino frequenter or gambling at the race track kind of person. The point being I certainly have the TIME (and health) to write on a weekly basis.
The four items I listed above are fairly self explanatory. As I contemplate item 2, however, there is for me something else; that being intentional FOCUS. This is a short quote attributed to the author Ayn Rand " Words are a lens to focus one's mind". The written word allows me greater focus, leading to a more conscious and purposeful experience of life. And the process of thinking about and reflecting on why and what I'm going to write about is the continuation of my ongoing deeper journey of self discovery.
So the question remains " Will I continue to write?" I think the answer is fairly obvious that, indeed, I do plan to continue writing and I will most likely continue to use the Storyworth format to do so. To not write would be to shun self discovery and stop growing as a human being. And apparently at age 74, to my

surprise, I'm not ready to do that.