

From: Gordon Stoppel <gstppl@aol.com>
Subject: My life history and some experiences
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I was born in Chicago and lived there until I was 18, when my dad retired and we moved to Santa Barbara. I was an only child and lived with my parents in a small apartment above my dad's drug store. I had an average childhood but had some problems later in life possibly due to my mother leaving me alone a lot (I do not recall having a baby sitter), slapping me down when I was "bad", and discouraging me from dating as a teenager and being my teenage pal to the extent that she took me around to many places and events in town so that I mostly missed the teenage peer group experience and bonding with most other kids my age except for a few. By and large though, I am sure that my mother loved me as did my dad, who felt that he had to work much of the time to make his store successful, and my mother missed out on getting enough companionship from him and apparently tried to get it from me.

Besides the physical abuse from my mother, which most kids got in that era, just after World War II, I was attacked and beaten by a couple of bullies, whom my mother was able to stop abusing me by various means. My spiritual/religious life started when my mother took me to Sunday school at the neighborhood Lutheran church and later in another one, when we moved to a suburb of Chicago, Edison Park. My parents never went to church themselves, as far as I can recall. I really had my first experience with spirituality, when my mother brought me to a class given by Dr. Bhagat Thind, who was a Sikh spiritual teacher, who mostly taught meditation, breathing exercises, and some East Indian philosophical teachings on karma, reincarnation, etc. He traveled around the country and taught his classes in several large cities in the U.S. Meditation became a life-long habit for me, and I felt much peace from doing it and following Dr. Thind's teachings. As time went on, I started to read several spiritual classics, including "Autobiography of a Yogi" and began a lifelong search for spiritual/psychological meaning in many books and several other spiritual teachers, the latest and most important being Amma, the so-called "hugging guru", with whom I received a lot of uplift and even some personal assistance, even though she has millions of students around the world.

In 1955 my dad retired, and we moved to Santa Barbara. I was able to attend UCSB and obtain a degree in Botany and later a M.S. in Horticultural Science at UCLA. I enjoyed my time at the universities. I was very studious and enjoyed learning, and although I was intelligent, I was not very "bright", and for various reasons did not go on for a PhD. I did have some difficulty getting a good job with this background and worked as a technician at several agricultural research stations in California. I finally decided that there was not much of a future in these jobs for me and decided to go back to school and get a degree (MLS) in Library Science. I worked as a Librarian in Elnai County, a rural area in Arizona, for about 8 years and enjoyed this kind of work, especially cataloging. After that time I felt a need to return to Santa Barbara and did so in 1980 with my 9 year-old daughter at the request of my mother, who was able to share her home with us and help raise her--a very positive period for the both of us. My mother died in 1998 (my father in 1974, before we returned to live here). I was unable to find a library job but got a job as a Plant Locator and was promoted to Plant manager with First American Title Insurance Co.

I kept this job until I retired in 1999. This job was somewhat boring at first but proved to be interesting later on, when I learned how to do locating of property and drafting of easements, roads, etc. in the county for clients. This was all on-the-job-training and not related to my lengthy university experience, but it helped pay the bills! My hobbies and activities consist of stamp collecting, reading, lawn bowling, chess, adult education and other lectures, gardening, plants, etc.

Now I will discuss my relationships, which have been most problematic for me in much of my life. Being an introvert and very shy, I was unable to form close bonds with very many people as a young man, although in old age, I have managed to obtain at least two close friendships with women, which I very much appreciate. Unfortunately, possibly due to my limited experience with women as a young man, I chose a woman for my wife, who had a severe mental illness, which I was unaware of prior to my marriage. We had a daughter, and she has been one the shining stars of my life. After the divorce and much effort, I finally obtained custody of her and moved in with my mother a few years later, as mentioned above. I was able to date several women after the divorce, and one person, whom I had met and dated in Arizona, decided to continue our relationship by long distance, when my daughter and I moved back to California. Even though I liked her a lot, I finally decided not to continue it after a few years, and after going with a few others on a friendship basis only, I met a lady, with whom I fell deeply in love with here in Santa Barbara. This relationship continued in a normal way for about two years, and we had a wonderful time going to lectures, beach, botanic garden, restaurants, etc. and especially enjoyed laughing and giggling together. This lasted until she suddenly started to change and unfortunately developed a rare type of dementia different from Alzheimer's but just as severe. At this point I had to make a choice as to whether to continue being with her or not. With her sister's approval, I became a part-time caregiver for her two afternoons a week for eight years. This was certainly a different kind of experience with her than before, but as time progressed, I enjoyed being with her more and more, even though it got to the point that she no longer was able to talk or even to walk without support. She seemed to enjoy being with me and I with her, but there certainly were some concerns being with a person in that condition. However, I never experienced burnout as a number of caregivers report. I remember that she had distinctly called me her boyfriend before she developed the dementia, and I ran with that thought and continued to entertain the idea that we still had a close boyfriend/girlfriend relationship. This became problematic for me later on. She was placed in a death and dying facility early in 2018 by her sister and died a couple of months later. Although I was, of course, sad to see her go, she had become much worse in health toward the end, and she was ready to leave this earth. I am thankful that I was able to spend as much time with her as I did.

I really love this class and hope it continues for many years.

Best of regards to all.

Gordon Stoppel