|  |
| --- |
| APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY |
| Initial Reflection |
| The Road Less Traveled |
|  |
| **Stephen G O’Neil** |
| **2/2/2018** |

|  |
| --- |
| O’Neil |

Stephen Gerald O’Neil

Dr. Shanan Fitts

CI 5045

February 2, 2018

**Introduction**

In growing up as a young man during the Baby Boomer generation in the early sixties, the notion that I would one day teach was about as foreign to me as you could possibly imagine. This was on account of the idea instilled in me at an early age that one should always aspire for the money. I suppose what one might expect this, especially in my having been raised and taken care of on the sole income of my father, a Finance major and career financial officer with Chrysler Financial. During my time in this class, I’ve also considered the influences that my ancestry has been exposed to, as it relates to the Protestant work ethic. You see, to my father’s generation and partially my own, in having had a somewhat distilled dose of what he was exposed to, your self-worth was tied to the profession you were aligned with and just as importantly, your income.

This instilled in me a sense that anything one did for less than the optimum income had less worth in society. Now of course, as one matures in life, their experiences help to shape them also, but it was with this understanding that stayed with me during my formative years. I believed that as a result, the pay and social class standing that minorities held in the community placed them in a lower status, when compared with the more prosperous middle class. At this time, that meant the staunch middle-class standing of a car and mortgage, to go along with the requisite two kids amidst a suburban type setting was the goal. I was fortunate to have quite a bit of diversity offered on my father’s side of the family, and in particular, embodied in his two sisters. While my Dad was essentially cut from the Puritan ways of his Father, my two Aunts were not about to conform to the times. For one, my Aunt Judy was a proud, vocal, and extremely intelligent gay woman, who enlightened me to the compassionate side she held up to the less fortunate members of society. She was also extremely colorful and open, to the point where I came up accepting of gay people, I believe as a result in having been educated early on in acceptance. Her influences also made me grow up far more sympathetic to the causes of those that couldn’t speak up for themselves at the time. My second Aunt, Lynn, was impactful in that she was a very strong willed, independent woman, who stood up for herself in ways that were not common at the time. She fought back against a physical partner, and later one who would deliver an emotional blow from time to time, while making a professional living outside of the home in raising her daughter. This was of course not the norm at the time in having woman working out of the household, but she was firm on this right, and it taught me for the first time the strength and compassion of not one, but two women who were very much setting an example for both myself and others that they touched along the way. I think that these experiences have taught me to enter the classroom at this late stage without bias in passionately advocating for diversity in my classes. Both my mother and father also instilled in me the belief that ultimately hard work and higher level learning will allow for you to lead a productive life. These lessons, coupled with the message of the Prophet Martin Luther within our Lutheran faith; (that being if you resisted temptation you’d be spared the rod), would ultimately allow you to succeed in life.

**Career**

As a result of my aforementioned belief that a successful outlook had to be both academically and financially driven, I started working and going to school all but right out of high school. My first two jobs really grounded me and eventually really inspired me to gain a better outlook on my professional ambitions in seriously pursuing college. I was struggling to stay motivated with college part-time, and so the part time work that I been performing as a busboy turned into full time work eventually as a waiter. After a couple of years, a friend informed me of a “machine shop” position that promised “a really good hourly rate”. While this was certainly true, it also led me down a rabbit hole in realizing how a hard drinking crowd of men adapted to the rigor of working in a factory with heavy lifting and much work while covered in cast iron dust. Suffice it to say, working conditions were not prioritized during this time. I worked with several minority groups, to include that of Hispanic, African-American, and Asian men. I also learned first-hand the impact that the lower social class of workers had to absorb in not really having any kind of support system during their careers in this line of work. One of my most vivid memories was that of the injuries and suffering experienced in this workplace. I was fortunate to maintain functionality with my hand after a severe cut, and another older Hispanic man heavily drank to more or less self-medicate, with a bottle of Black Velvet whiskey always present in his locker. My time lasted four years until I moved up the ladder into a cleaner and more professional position in manufacturing, but I’m forever impacted in my compassion and belief in my fellow worker, particularly among the blue collar rank and file! When I look back on this period of my life, I thank my lucky stars that I came from a familial background with financial support. Not many of these co-workers at the time could say the same. It was during this time that I was beginning to make decisions that were as much based on my future as my present day income. My new position was carrying with it far more opportunity than that of the prior, and I was encouraged to pursue a career pathway that could lead from the machine shop to a design engineering position. Subsequent choices to always push the envelope left me feeling short of fulfilling some fictitious goal of having to find something better. Eventually something better led me to a company that went bankrupt within two years of my hire here in Wilmington, North Carolina. I suppose that my story could have continued to evolve within my Industry elsewhere, but something told me to stay, and given the opportunities available to me, quickly led me to teaching. It’s been during these past few years that I’ve had to realign my value system in coming into the understanding that your value is not necessarily tied to personal wealth or social standing, but rather to the passion and impact you can have on someone’s life; and that’s the concentration I lean on these days.

While the influences I’ve had over my life to this point freed me of quite a bit of bias and prejudice, I believe that looking back, it was my time at Wayne State University that best prepared me for this eventual position of teaching. During this time, I was fortunate to cross paths with an Instructor Dr. Ece Yaprak. While she’d likely not remember me, given all the students she’s taught over her career, she left a very strong impression on me. Dr. Yaprak taught Microprocessor Fundamentals, but it could have been any other class in the curriculum. That’s because her approach was one that I believe holds a consistency amongst all the strongest teachers, and that is empathy. While unyielding in her rules and expectations, she had a tender, empathetic approach that made that you want to please her and do well. While not able to please everybody, she demonstrated to *me*, just how forthcoming and willing to work with you she could be, while not offsetting the demands she placed on you as a student. This is important in that it demonstrated to me something I hold on to dearly today, in that a teacher should demand no more of their students than they were willing to demand of themselves. So whether it’s tutoring, mentoring, advising, (just as she had on my Senior Project in school), I try to follow the same approach that Dr. Yaprak demonstrated as I venture down this educational pathway.

**Reflection**

I am now well into my second year in teaching out of Eugene Ashley High school in Wilmington, North Carolina. I believe that my stronghold in this profession comes from my life’s experiences in dealing with what worked and what didn’t work in my upbringing, with respect to my parents, teachers and supervisors. Furthermore, as a CTE educator, my adult life in the field of manufacturing engineering allows me to adequately cover the Autodesk Computer Aided Design & Drafting material, in having captured this material in the workplace for a good number of years. In spite of having met the content requirement, I’m taking on this course of study in the pursuit of my Middle & Secondary Graduate Certification. All of which leads me to consider what I still must acquire in the way of skills to not only satisfy my increasingly diverse class of students, but also in maintaining my own peace of mind. For one, my limited experience in this field has already taught me that it pays to listen and interact with the students as much as possible. At the end of the day, while certain stereotypes can be subconsciously associated with the various subcultures, we’re going to have to move past that in peeling back the layers of the person, something I grew up accustomed to doing. In the process, we’re able to simply get to know one another better in finding that comfort level. I’ll try to accomplish just that, in not letting it get too personal, and yet definitely trying to alleviate the tension that these students so often feel in seemingly always being assessed and judged.

I also try to just steer clear of negativity as it’s plentiful amongst the teaching ranks, and find the optimistic folks. They’re out there, they’re much less biased, and truthfully, they outnumber the former. I don’t believe there’s enough time spent communicating amongst our peers, so I try and make a point of crossing paths with at least one of these teachers a day.

**Conclusion**

In summary, if I had to express in one statement why I wanted to accept the challenge of addressing all of my personality in the revealing role of a teacher, I’d say that it’s because I have an incredible desire to impart what I’ve acquired, in the way of a much varied background in practical engineering skills. I hope to accomplish this in such a way where the students come away inspired to ***not*** pursue a pathway on account of who they’d like to become as a professional, but rather in pursuit of ***who*** they’d like to become as a person. For if I’ve learned nothing more during my years since leaving my former industry for teaching, it’s that it’s your individualism that cannot be compromised in pursuit of your life's’ goals, and if you stay true to your own wants needs and desires, the rest will take care of itself.

sgo