

**I want to thank Robin Cooper with the Multicultural & Spiritual Affairs Dept for this invitation on a most intriguing topic! Welcome to all of you, students who have taken the time away from other activities, colleagues, & even family who could not be dissuaded from coming.**

**After digesting the concept of giving my last lecture & realizing how difficult a task this is I had two afterthoughts: What if no one shows up or what if many people show up! The focus of my presentation is on what I have found to be most important in life, as well as the experiences & people that have shaped my life!!!**

**Well here goes! There are some things that I have come to know & believe to be important in life. Don't be afraid to Love & don't be afraid to Touch someone's life. Actually do it even if you are afraid! That's the difference between LIVING & EXISTING: facing your fears & going forward. This unique experience gives ownership to your life & sets you free! It gets you in touch with who you are. So my advice is: Don't wait..... make life happen! Nothing lasts forever. Take charge of your life and make your dreams come true!**

**I decided that the best way for me to present my last lecture was by way of FIVE MAJOR DECISIONS THAT CHANGED MY LIFE! Within these decisions I will weave in the content & the message I wish to convey. By doing this my intention is to in some way help you towards your future.**

**The 1<sup>st</sup> major decision that I can remember I was 12 yrs. old. It was dark, it was raining, I was washing the outside windows of Ritchy's Music Store in Altoona Pa. My father had just driven up to pick me up after work because it was payday I wouldn't have to walk home! On the way home I told my father how much I wanted to go to college. He bluntly told me there was no money for college. We were poor. I also had a younger brother & a younger sister. The 4<sup>th</sup> child, my youngest sister, would not be born until 1959 when I was 17yo.**

**My dad worked for the PRR & many months of the year he was laid off. The year was 1954. I was crushed by what he said, but knew better not to cry or whine to my father. I decided right then & there that I would get a scholarship to college!!! I knew that the only way to get a full-scholarship was in athletics, so my next dilemma was to determine which sport would have the honor of offering me an athletic full scholarship to college!!!**

**I won't bore you with the humiliating experiences I had trying out for the football team, the basketball team, the baseball team & the wrestling team. That pretty much took care of JHS. No pending scholarships in sight! I rememberd that on the 6<sup>th</sup> grade playground at Adams Elem. School I took 2<sup>nd</sup> place to Jerry Riley in the 100 yard dash ..... so why not try the track team! 10<sup>th</sup> grade started HS & I was the last kid to get a track uniform, a shirt, shorts & spiked running shoes. Once again I took a beating trying to find an event that I could compete. After much trial & error I realizes that only one person ran the hurdles & he was a senior. I finally**

**found my way into college. By the end of my senior year I was one of the top hurdlers in the tri- state area & received a full athletic scholarship to PSU.**

**With the benefit of hindsight I'd say that what this experience taught me was that , at any age & at any time, life forces us to decide, either to do nothing, give up, or to take charge. Even if your choices take years to achieve, taking charge will allow you to become accountable & responsible for your life.**

**My 2<sup>nd</sup> Major Decision came at the end of graduation. I truly had no clear direction for my life at that time, except to continue my quest to make the Olympic team, I had gone to the Olympic Trials & continued during the Summer to run for The Baltimore Olympic Club. Graduate school wasn't even a remote thought. Mostly, I just wanted to get away from home! My relationship with my father at the time was bordering on disastrous. I know now as an adult that my father never meant to hurt me, but until I left home my father with a look or a stare could turn a warm Summers day into a cold Winters night!**

**I had done a Summer Practicum placement at a State Mental Hospital where my Uncle was the coordinator for all adjunctive services like OT, RT for schizophrenic patients. He suggested that I strongly consider applying for a new position on a Fed'rl grant from NIMH to work specifically with chronic schizophrenic patients at PSH in Phila. The program was designed for college graduates, & would eventually lead to a Masters in Psy. So off I went to Phila.! After being screened & accepted I started my full-time position at the salary of \$3,600 per year or \$75 per week, tax free!!! This decision to go to Phila., Which ultimately was indeed the quintessential decision of my life, was almost like a non-decision , because mostly I just wanted to get away, even though it felt right. It truly became the beginning of the rest of my life!**

**I moved to Phila. in Dec. of '64 right before X-mas. I told you I wanted to get away from my father! That Winter was pretty miserable, being totally alone in a strange place without knowing anyone, I was barely able to get an apt. & had no phone. One of the worst winter snowstorms hit & I was shut in until my 1<sup>st</sup> day of work Jan. 3<sup>rd</sup> '65. PSH was a sprawling facility the size of a college campus except that it was cold and dank with brick & stone buildings that held the cold in Winter & life for the patients ( predominantly schizophrenics) was more like prison life than anything close to therapeutic! For most of the over 7,000 residents, it was far from a campus atmosphere & was most notably called " The Snake Pit" by local newspapers! The program I became involved in was essentially a re- socialization program for patients who had been in the hospital for at least 12 years. These are the types of programs that eventually led to community mental health centers, as these patients were eventually returned to the community.**

In the Summer of '65 my then roommate ( who can afford an apt. alone on \$75 per week )? RAD announced that he wanted to introduce me to the girl he thought I should marry because she was THE RIGHT one for me!!! Being very intrigued at the prospect of meeting my future wife, I agreed. I will never forget seeing Mary Catherine Wallace for the 1<sup>st</sup> time in front of Bldg. S-10 on the campus of PSH.

It is simply impossible to describe what I felt because I never experienced that feeling before, but what my eyes saw was the absolute most beautiful women I had ever seen. Believe it or not "I" was actually speechless & for the 1<sup>st</sup> but definitely not the last time in my life RAD was right!! Three days later Mary went with me after work to a basketball game at the hosp. in the gym. It was a game for the staff against the patients! I played for the patient team [don't ask me why] but somewhere during the game I announced to everyone that I had fallen in love with the girl in the stands with the green skirt & the most beautiful auburn hair you ever saw! I guess I finally realized what that feeling was the moment I first met her three days before. Yep! Well after that day we became a couple & I was happier than I had ever been in my life.

I was so happy that I decided to ask Mary to marry me! {by the way I just want you to keep track of how many times I ask her} Before I tell you what she said it is important to note that at this time the U.S. was at war in Viet Nam. I was eligible at my age & was part of a Nationwide lottery, each month all men of draft age watched & waited breathlessly to see if their number would be called for the draft & then it was off to basic training & Viet Nam. Now back to Mary, she decided that the only reason I asked her was to get out of being drafted, because men who were married were not drafted at least at that time. Even though this was not true, Mary did not believe me then & still does not believe me to this day!! Standing here today I'll admit not marrying me at that time was probably a good decision on her part, but at the time it simply crushed me!! It quickly broke us up & eventually after our training period ended I transferred to another hospital to work. ( Remember that's the 1<sup>st</sup> time I asked her to marry me, in '65.)

I eventually met Barbara Azeff, a single mother with two children, Yvonne 5yo & Philip 3yo. It felt like the family I never had & Barbara said yes the 1<sup>st</sup> time I asked her so we were married in Jan. '69. I finally received my M.S. in Psy. In '72. Better late than never!!

No, I haven't forgotten about the 5 decisions that I need to get to. To get to my 3<sup>rd</sup> major decision I must move forward & cover some years & some events. My marriage to Barbara ended in the Summer of '76. The good news is that we eventually forgave each other & agreed that the divorce was very painful yet not destructive, & she remains one of my best friends to this day . By the way Mary loves her too! My relationship with the children especially Vonnie is a story of it's own & will be part of the Dept. of Beh. Science Theme on Identity in the early Spring of '07. I'm very proud to announce that Vonnie, will be one of the speakers to celebrate our focus on Identity.

**Before I move on I must share briefly, that divorce can be ugly & far from the experience that to some extent has been normalized because it is so common . Usually most of the focus of a divorce is on the adult couple, & from my experiences both personally & professionally what turns out best for the parents is usually what is ultimately best for the children. However, the emotional & personal issues for the children often get lost in the process of starting over & even well intended parents may miss the pain of even the most necessary divorce!! WE also know that even very young children manage to protect one or both parents from their suffering to assuage their grieving parents! At ages 10 & 12 I doubt very much if either Yvonne or Philip were prepared for the calamity we caused. The negative effects of a divorce may last for decades & should not be minimized.**

**At the time that Barb. Left, we were living in Md. She moved back to Pa. & I moved on to the Univ. of Md., to pursue my Ph.D. Before we got to the forgiving each other part, I was devastated again & felt abandoned & hopeless; but thankfully not stupid, so I entered therapy with Dr. James Thorpe, a N.Y. trained psychoanalyst . He confirmed for me that I was indeed depressed & suffered severe separation anxiety from the loss of the marriage. He asked me a pivotal question, a question that absolutely riveted me to my chair!!! He asked, What do you want? I replied , smugly as I recall, that I WAS doing what I wanted to be doing..... a Psychologist at Arlington Mental Health Center during the day & a Ph.D. student at night. He made some comment that my job should not define me & that one's job is what we do, not who we are!!**

**I'll never forget the next thing I said to him. If you REALLY want to know the TRUTH I want to quit my job, I want to go to school full-time, so that I can finish ASAP, because as far as I'm concerned, Wash., Va., & Md., can float into the sea because I want OUT OF HERE ASAP!!! I couldn't believe those words came out of my mouth, but I don't recall anyone ever actually ever asking me before, to tell them exactly what I wanted. At that moment I realized I wasn't doing what I wanted to do. Dr. Thorpe calmly told me to do exactly what I said I wanted to do. Actually, he simply said, Do It! { I think NIKE must have been Listening!} I did not believe how profound his words would be to me until I woke up in the middle of the night totally terrified in a cold sweat!! I sat straight up in bed & realized , faced the fact, that I actually thought I would die! Fortunately the instant I allowed myself to feel- identify- that feeling of dread , it left me & I sat up at my desk & wrote my resignation to work. My 3<sup>rd</sup> DECISION. I had faced my fear.**

**Facing your fears sets you free, free to feel, to enjoy life, to accept life on lifes terms & to chase your dreams!**

**I quickly registered at school to go full-time & within 2 wks. I got a job working on weekends as a Contractor's helper making more money than I did at the MHC. Much more than that, I was finally able to realize that my feelings & what I want are important & that unwittingly fears keep us from facing our own truths. I can't fathom what my life would be like today if I had not made that crucial discovery, but I was soon to find out because Decision #4 was close behind.**

**AS you know my relationship with my family was very strained particularly with my father & we had not communicated for many years, yes years. The situation that led to my complete break with my father was one of pivotal personal importance for me but it cost me essentially no contact with my mother my brother & my two sisters as well! My father told each of them to choose between him or me & I lost. In all fairness to them only my father & I knew what he had done to have me cut him out of my life. It was on a weekend I wanted to spend with my parents & also to see my youngest sister Karen, so I left Barbara & the children to see my dad & play some golf. On Sat. after a round of golf my dad & I got into a heated argument, not uncommon when we would get together, but this time it was different! At some point my father stated that, "Someday you'll find out when you have children, at which point I replied " but I have two children meaning of course Vonnie & Philip. My father looked at me with disgust, then he spat on the floor & in a most disgusting voice said, "they don't count"!!**

**Well I had never before stood up to my father to defend myself but for the first time I would stand up to my father to defend my children. I quickly packed my few clothes I had brought & stood before my father with my index finger in his face & said that as far as I was concerned He was dead, Then I left. We never spoke again for 15 years!!! Unfortunately, the lack of contact was also true with my brother Robert, not because we didn't love each other but he was married with 3 children & lived in Plantation, Fl. We had not seen each other for about 5yrs. Early in Oct. of '76 my mother broke the lack of contact. She called to ask if I was interested to know that my brother was involved in a car accident on 95 in Brwd. Co. & was in an intensive care unit in So. Fl. Actually, he was in Holy Cross Hospital. There was absolutely no hesitation on my part because THIS TIME I knew exactly what I wanted to do & FEAR had nothing to do with it!!! DECISION#4**

**I immediately made plane reservations & flew into Ft. Lauderdale. The moment I saw my brother in the ICU attached to a ventilator, & tubes coming from everywhere I knew I was not leaving! Within weeks Roberts wife, Kathy, & I new he would die if we left him at Holy Cross so we made arrangements to have him moved to JMH into the SICU under the direction of Dr. Joe Civetta. In 1976 families were only permitted to visit 5mins on the hour. This was not acceptable to me so I managed to convince the staff that I was no threat & I needed to be with my brother 24/7 if need be. I moved into his shared ICU space with a leather chair they provided for me Except for life threatening code situations I was permitted to stay with him. I would arrive about 11am or noon after Kathy would leave & stay until midnight or 1 or 2am. At night I stayed in a room provided by one of my brothers**

friends. My brother had no brain damage , he was mostly alert & awake & there were brief times he was off the ventilator. He had been driving home from the airport with his boss , & as he was getting off the exit ramp a car from the other direction on 95 crossed at least 6 lanes of traffic & hit him head on. The jaws of life were needed to extract him from the car & it was only later in the Hosp. that they discovered that he had a torn Aorta from the collision. This procedure left him paralyzed from the waist down & fighting for his life.

It was during one of those brief times off the ventilator that Robert told me that Kathy had asked for a divorce! My brother was an Elementary School Teacher at Key Biscayne Elementary School & an Artist. Kathy was from a very wealthy family so Robert had taken a job working for Kodak as a supervisor, only for the money. He shared with me how sorry he was that he gave up what he loved for her & now he was losing her anyway! I promised him that when he pulled through this that I would move to Fl. We would live together & even in a wheelchair he could still teach & be an Artist. We made a PACT to be together!!! It was the last time I saw him smile. He died on Jan.1<sup>st</sup> 1977. On that day I swore never to wait to follow my dream & to never let go!!! Regardless of your decisions you must face the consequences of those decisions. So, at least face the outcome of decisions that you feel passionate about, NOT decisions you made for the benefit of someone else!!!

I stayed for 2 more weeks to be with the people that cared for my brother. I had become very close with the physicians & nurses who cared for him. I related to Dr. Civetta what I observed re: the severe stress on the staff particularly the nurses who had the day to day minute to minute care of critically ill patients. Before I left to return to school Dr. Civetta asked me what he could do for me? ( another WHAT DO YOU WANT!!!) This time I was ready & replied OFFER ME A JOB!!! He said I'll get back to you. A few weeks later a job offer came in the mail & it was more than \$3,600 per year. I finished my course work & took my written comps which left me ABD; I managed to get a dissertation committee together, wrote a proposal, sold my furniture & my house, loaded my Fiat Spyder & drove to Va. To see Dr. Thorpe. I was finally leaving Wash. Md., & Va.. I gave him my Teac reel to reel music recorder & asked him how I could ever repay him for all that he had done for me??? AS usual he replied very simply, "Pass It On". With those three words I felt liberated, He had validated me, he set me free & he told me exactly what I could do to repay him. I'll never forget Dr. James Thorpe, he taught me one of the simplest & at the same time one of the most powerful lessons of my life. It's so simple it's elegant. He cared for me in spite of how much I hated myself & how unbelievably angry I was! Then he had the audacity to liberate me as long as I simply "Pass It On"! So, I LEFT FOR FLORIDA!!!

I only have Decision #5 left: What could it possibly be? Well I've arrived in Fl. I'm working in the SICU with Dr. Civetta doing research on how psychological and emotional stress impacts on the professional staff & patients & families. Oh yes also starting my dissertation! Soooo, what more could a person want? WANT, there's

that word again. It is now Summer of 1979. I wonder what Mary is doing?? Don't even go, there say all of my friends, because you can never go back. Even though we had never talked, during these years apart, I did keep up to date on Mary & knew she was not married although a few had asked her with the same results that I got! So it has been 14yrs. & I know that she is reported to be engaged. My truth is that I deparately want to have final closure with Mary because even though we broke up many years ago she said she still loved me, YES she did, I knew that maybe it did not make sense to most people, but I no longer do things for other people I can only please myself. So what do I do? I must be crazy!! What's the worst that can happen? She won't talk to me & then it will be over & I can move on knowing that I did everything I could.

So, finally DECISION#5 I call Phila. State Hosp. & ask to speak to Mary K. Wallace!!! The operator puts me through. She says, Hello, I say, is this Mary K., Mary says, Oh my God it's you!!! I can't talk now I'm in a meeting. I'll give you my number call me tonight! We began to talk every night for months, after 11pm the rates went down & we would talk for hrs. Finally, she said I could come to see her. We met in the train station in downtown Phila. It may not be New Yorks train station but it's very romantic! She entered from the north end of the station, it was late afternoon, the sun left shadows inside but there was no mistaking her silhouette as she strode ever so sensually on the old wooden flooring with her auburn hair distinctly placed just so. Wow, what a marvelous sight, my heart lept as it did the first time we met just a mere 14 years ago.

We continued to talk & visit each other through the last of the Summer & early Fall. Now what do I want? I want to get Married! So, on my next visit I arrived with an antique Chinese ruby & diamond ring & ask her the 2<sup>nd</sup> time! Mary dutifully wears the ring to show all of her friends at work & then before I leave I say, well!!!! Mary says, I don't know. I say well look you've been waiting 14 years for me how much longer do you need! So I asked her for the ring back Mary knew she had to give it back but she REALLY didn't want to. I said, well you did better than the last time but you still did not say yes, so give me the ring! Needless to say she was very upset as I returned to Fl. Our next visit Mary was to come to Fl. For Thanksgiving. She arrived on Nov. 22, 1979. She brought with her this gold pendant which has the date of our engagement 11/22/79. Then she immediately asked for the ruby ring. I said will you marry me, for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time & finally she said yes. Mary & I have what I certainly never thought I would ever have, a marriage based on compatibility, trust, intimacy, loyalty & love. I figured out while writing this that Mary will never leave me because by my calculations if she asked for a divorce I'd be dead 7 years before she did anything about it.

The price of following your heart can be excruciatingly painful but the rewards of facing your truth on your terms in spite of the consequences.....PRICELESS!!!!

**I have been so incredibly blessed, all the dreams I had as I grew up HAVE come true : I got my scholarship, I got my Ph.D., I got my girl, I got my children, I have the best friends in the world, I have a great job, I almost got to the Olympics & I got my Corvette.**

**By the way my father wrote to me before he died & ask me to forgive him, so I went to see him & I finally had a father, at least for awhile. So the gift of forgiveness managed to find its way into the life of me & my father. Fractured relationships are hard enough to mend, please don't take a lifetime like I did & don't ever let go of your dreams!!!**

**In closing I'll leave you with one of my favorite quotes, "Go Forward in the Direction of Your Dreams & Live the Life You've Imagined"! Thank You for your kind attention to my Last Lecture.**