



This is a memoir of the author's first 23 years, written when he was in his 70's, which was 30 years after his father explained, for the first time, some of the family's dysfunctional dynamics, alcoholism, and alienation. At 23, he saw his path through mountains and skiing. At 46, he understood it...

THE ONLY PATH: A Memoir

by Dick Dorworth

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DICK DORWORTH



THE
ONLY
PATH

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ISBN: 978-1-63492-659-1

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2017

First Edition

Table of Contents

BOOK ONE.....	1
CHAPTER I - THE GIFT	1
CHAPTER I - THE WAR.....	9
CHAPTER III - THE MOUNTAINS	19
CHAPTER IV - LAKE TAHOE.....	25
CHAPTER V - EXITING PARADISE	37
CHAPTER VI - THE WINTER OF 1952.....	47
BOOK TWO	57
CHAPTER I - HIGH SCHOOL IN THE BIGGEST LITTLE CITY IN THE WORLD	57
CHAPTER II - HIGH SCHOOL: SEX, DRUGS AND ROCK 'N' ROLL	79
BOOK THREE	95
CHAPTER I - SKIING	95
CHAPTER II - TRAVEL LESSONS	115
BOOK FOUR.....	125
CHAPTER I - THE SORTING OUT.....	125
CHAPTER II - CONFORMITY	137
CHAPTER III - CHILE	143
CHAPTER IV - THE FIRST MARRIAGE	157
BOOK FIVE.....	167
CHAPTER I - YIN	167
CHAPTER II - CRAWLING TOWARD YANG	181

BOOK TWO

Chapter I HIGH SCHOOL IN THE BIGGEST LITTLE CITY IN THE WORLD

"The best throw of dice is to throw them away."
English Proverb

"It is, indeed, one of the capital tragedies of youth--and youth is the time of real tragedy--that the young are thrown mainly with adults they do not quite respect."
H.L. Mencken

On the first day of high school in the fall of 1952 Father drove me across town to the new brick structure that was Reno High School in the family car, a gray 1941 Plymouth coupe with gear shift on the steering column. Father had taught me the rudiments of driving a couple of years before and sat in the passenger seat while I guided the machine around and around the one loop road of our Zephyr Cove neighborhood on the east shore of Lake Tahoe where we lived before my exile to the Christian Brothers. He didn't ask me how I felt about the day or the strange new school with more than a hundred times more kids my age than the school at Tahoe. Instead, he spoke of the dangers and rules and mechanics of driving a car in a city. It was more complicated and perilous than driving in the mountains, he said. He must have thought my sullen inattention was due to adolescent hormones and anxiety about starting a new school year at a new school in a new town. This was partly

true, but boredom and resentment gusted through my being like the winds that came off the east side of the Sierra and through Washoe Valley and Reno and across the great Nevada high desert and mountain landscape.

Boredom, among children as well as adults, is more laziness, failure to pay attention to the moment at hand and fear of personal inadequacy than any lack on the part of the universe to provide. The bored human is less alive than the dumbest chicken, cow, spider, ant or crow, none of which are ever bored. Boredom is a narcotic, more addictive, damaging and prevalent than heroin or even alcohol and less enjoyable than either. Besides, boredom is.....boring.

Resentment is a stage of American adolescence, a phase some take into adulthood and some into death. There is so very much to resent in this life if resentment is the attitude of choice, and, at the age of 13, I resented the adult world's obvious and myriad imperfections which I was required to cope with and was powerless to rectify. No wonder I was resentful. Any group of people as incompetent and unhappy as my parents and many of their friends (and relatives) and who finally took me to Paradise in the Tahoe Basin and then tore me away to live in Reno--Reno!!!!--was clearly not to be respected and deserved my resentment.

Besides, Dad was giving me driving lessons in a car I had already stolen several times and taken on 85 mph midnight spins and had proven to myself that at the wheel I was as invincible as he was cautious. And just a few weeks before we moved to Reno I managed to steal the old Plymouth (where almost two years earlier while it was parked in the Wagon Wheel Saloon parking lot Joanne Faye, who had apple red lips and nice tits she would never let me touch, had given me my first passionate kiss and serious make out session) and made it to the Drive In Movie with a girl whose name I don't

remember but I managed to fondle, kiss, suck, lick and adore her warm, bulbous boobs with hard nipples that could put your eye out if you weren't careful. My heart might have failed or exploded with ecstasy and joy or, since that's all she would let me fondle, irreconcilable frustration if my heart hadn't been so young and healthy and strong. I knew a lot more about how to drive that car than Dad suspected and I had had a great deal more fun in it than he was having. He didn't seem to notice that cars were made for fun.

No wonder I was filled with boredom and resentment.

Dad drove into the huge asphalt parking lot by the one year old red brick rectangle that accommodated more than 2000 students, including its first freshman class of which I was a member. I got out. "Phone me if you need a ride home," he said, and drove away.

Fear. Confusion. Though I'd been born in Reno and had lived there as a child (I was a big boy now), Tahoe was the home of my heart, experience and friends. Two days earlier we had moved into the basement of a friend's home at 134 West Pueblo Street, less than a block from the home of the girl who would become my first wife less than seven years later. I stood alone in the parking lot in the presence of more people my own age than I'd ever seen in one place. I searched in vain for one of the four or five Reno people I knew through ski racing. It was a new experience and I was terrified. With my heart in my throat and not on my sleeve I entered the crowded, sterile, tiled halls of Reno High with its right angles and straight lines and rows of identical lockers between doors leading into mostly identical classrooms. O, what had become of my life among the mountain meadows, streams and the ever-changing perfect blue waters of Lake Tahoe with lullaby mountain winds in the pine trees at night? I immediately felt that I was an alien spirit caught behind enemy lines in the hostile land of the institution.

Intuition said I was in for a lengthy guerrilla fight and to be ready for it. Intuition and heart are among one's finest friends and are to be trusted, and I did.

An orientation lecture to the freshman class in the gymnasium set the tone. The school principal, David Finch, began by pointing out the difference in meaning and spelling between 'principle' and 'principal.' A principle was a code of conduct by which a person lived. A principal was your 'pal' who would help you to live by proper principles. Finch seemed more mechanical than spontaneous to me, his chuckle at his own humor more studied than heartfelt. For the four years I attended Reno High School I never saw anything to allow me to change my initial impression of Finch as a prissy, priggish, cold, tight ass who viewed himself and everyone else in the school as parts in a well-run machine. The whole was more important than any or all of its parts, a concept with an obvious simplicity and beauty that has been wholeheartedly embraced by nations, states, institutions, tribes, teams, corporations, armies, religions, dictators, tyrants and movements throughout man's tumultuous history. The flaw in such simplification of nature's complexities is that when each part is not as important as the whole the parts come undone and, eventually, so does the whole. The first thing to be decided, he told us, was which subjects to pursue. The guidelines we should use in choosing courses of study that would occupy our time and energies and human potential for the next four years depended on what kind of student we would be. There were only two kinds: those who would continue on to college, and those who would not.

Finch rightfully emphasized academic achievement. He pointed out that those who don't continue on to college were no lesser people than those of more ambition and mental capacity and higher goals; but he told us to consider carefully what it means to be prepared for the....ahhhhhh.....'lesser

skilled' jobs in our society. And then he added with a chuckle that somebody had to do them. If we weren't going to college, he said, we should pursue such classes as auto-mechanics, wood shop, drafting, short-hand and typing, all good ways to learn skills using the hands rather than the brain. Those students planning on attending college should study math, science, English, history and languages. From the very first day of school even the principal, our pal, divided students along pre-determined lines. Something about it (and Finch) pissed me off from the beginning. He wasn't deceptive or wrong in his advice, and from his perspective he was well intentioned. Nevertheless, there was an underlying message that I did not like and have never accepted. Perhaps it was more the way he presented it and the hidden assumptions about people he implied that caught my attention. Maybe the time with the Christian Brothers had helped me be more mindful of the subtleties of what authority said and wanted one to do. I was 13 and already wary of authority itself. The Christian Brothers had inadvertently given me the foundation of the best education a young American boy of the early 1950s could have. The Brothers did and do pride themselves on being superior teachers, apparently giving themselves a pass around the perils of pride, but I never learned to trust Finch as I had learned to flee the Brothers, and the similarities of manipulation and smug insincerity toward their students were clear to me.

Beware of smugness, particularly when authoritative and self-righteous. Fifteen years later "Question Authority" was a mantra as well as a staple of basic intelligence and an indispensable tool of survival in America. In all systems, including educational, the system itself eventually supersedes the purpose of the system in the hearts and minds of those who live within and from that system. They are necessary and can be beneficial and dependable, but systems are not infallible and

easily lead to replacing thought with habit, purpose with power. Habitual thought or action are life's enemies. To question is not an indication of disrespect, as respect or lack thereof can only grow from the answer to the question.

Still, I didn't want to be a dummy or grow into a man of lesser skills, and I followed Finch's advice and signed up for college prep courses. I was a mediocre student at best, and on clear winter days in classrooms on the south side of the building in sight of the beautiful snow covered Sierra I listened to lectures with half or less a mind while drawing slalom courses in my notebooks and penciling in various lines through the gates until I found one that seemed best. I did well in subjects I fancied and got by in those I didn't. I struggled with all my studies and with the Reno High School administration every winter because ski racing took me away from school for long periods of time. While I was bright enough and eager to learn, ski racing was more important to me than school. I wanted the system to meet my needs as a student who wanted to ski race, and the system did not, and, to be fair, could not, accommodate skiing the way it did football, basketball, track and baseball.

High school was a struggle. From the beginning I was at odds with significant members of both the administration and my fellow students. It wasn't something I set out to do or wanted. Nobody wants to be disliked or marginalized, but it was clearly my own doing. By the tender age of 13 I had learned to disdain conformity, question authority, distrust the majority of adults as a separate species, and, most tellingly, determine that none of the role models available to me would do. I eventually found a group of friends, all of them one to three classes and years ahead of me, and a few good teachers I liked, respected and trusted. I was never able to swim in the mainstream, though I tried a few times. Freshman hazing by

the senior class the first week of school set the tone. Freshman boys at RHS were required to wear ties outside the collar, put shirts on backwards, wear different color socks and roll pants up to the knees for an entire week. Though harmless fun to some, that seemed demeaning nonsense to me and I didn't do it. Perhaps I had been corrupted by those Tahoe years when I learned to amuse myself with only the beautiful lake, the surrounding mountains, trees, rocks, caves and meadows as secretive, benevolent spirits for companions. I already missed solitary swims and hikes and sitting on the deserted Zephyr Cove beach watching sun abandon sky and disappear behind the western Sierra Nevada across the purest of blue water lakes in that time before progress, population, pollution, freeways and man's greed so carelessly scarred its beauty and eutrophicated its waters. Perhaps it was those years of books in the night before the fireplace, chess and cribbage with Father, making candy with Mother, skiing in the backyard alone until dark, and a lot of early age independence and, in truth, solitude with its resultant appreciation of those people who came my way with respect that made it repugnant and impossible to put a shirt on backwards and wear different colored socks and roll my pant legs up to the knees and otherwise play the fool to a tradition my instincts and eyes (and, in truth, uptight fear and distrust) told me was corrupt and not in my best interests. There may have been other reasons but RHS was never a comfortable or entirely happy fit for me and vice-versa. The first day I came to school in normal attire was not too bad. The Senior Patrol which policed such matters told me to be in costume the next day. The morning after that was immediately harder as it was obvious I hadn't just forgotten. That knowledge engendered ugliness in some members of the patrol who cornered me in the school hall. The patrol that year was composed mostly of members of the football team (State

champions that year and one of the best in Nevada history). The leader was Dick Bankofier, a 180 pound right end, the most intelligent of the bunch who I later came to like; but to me at that moment he was only a cocksure bully who meant harm. Years later I was saddened when a careless buck-fevered hunter mistook Dick for a deer and shot and killed him in the dark as he sat on a horse beside his 16 year old son waiting for the opening of hunting season in the hills above Reno. But when I was 13 and he and his friends had me cornered, threatened and afraid in the halls of RHS I would have shot him myself and not by mistake had I the opportunity. Don Manoukian, a clever minded 5 foot 6 inch 240 pound guard who had to shave twice a day was also on the patrol. Needless to explain, Don had a certain influence upon his peers and later in the day saved me a sound thrashing from a less benevolent senior. Don went on to be an All-American and professional football player and then a professional wrestler of considerable repute. With them was Hank DiRicco, a fine athlete in several sports who was big and strong and reeked of malevolence toward me with the perpetual frown of the scowler. He seemed particularly enraged with me and kept calling me an “ass-hole,” “shit-head,” and “a little turd.” He said he would “knock the crap” out of me if I weren’t in costume by lunchtime when he was personally going to make life shitty for me. Recognizing anal neuroses was beyond my scope at 13, but I was properly alarmed by a 190 pound deranged fullback on a crusade against my person and backed by his senior patrol peers.

I told them to leave me alone and hurried off to my next class under the combined protection of several hundred school mates and teachers whose sense of propriety did not permit beatings and mayhem in the hallways. These self-righteous bullies would not be dissuaded and at lunch time eight of them found me, picked me up, carried me to a car in the parking lot

and we drove to Idlewild Park, next to Reno High. They called me a number of unpleasant names and I said nothing, though I was filled with an adolescent mixture of rage, fear, disbelief and disrespect. We piled out on the grass next to the duck/geese pond and Bankofier told me I had my last chance. I was outnumbered 8 to 1 and outweighed at least 10 to 1, and all I had to do was roll up my pant legs and wear a tie the next day and nothing would happen. But all I said was "No, leave me alone."

That shocked them. They had called my bluff and I'd returned the favor. There was a pause pregnant with possibilities ranging from me getting away with it and them leaving me alone to death to expulsion from school to tortures too gruesome to imagine to an old-fashioned ass-kicking. Mine. DiRicco broke the silence. "You little shit," he said, moving toward me with menace and what seemed to me imminent violence. If I could have made a run for it I would have, but I had seniors on three sides and the pond on the other. Accordingly I backed up to the edge of the pond and got ready to plant one foot as hard as I could kick into Hank's groin before he tore my head off and ate it, blood and brains dripping out the corners of his sneer, my blood and brains.

Manoukian stepped in. "Don't hurt him," he said in a matter of fact way that truly carried weight.

"Let's just throw him in the pond," Bankofier said.

"Don't hurt him," Manoukian reiterated.

"Leave me alone," I said.

"You're going in the drink, you little shit," DiRicco snarled, and he was right.

They rushed with the technique and power of the best high school football team in Nevada and grabbed me--DiRicco, Bankofier, Manoukian, Frank Keever and others who just stood around--before I could take a swing or place a kick and with a

one-two-three swinging cadence they lofted me as far out into the Idyllwild duck pond as they could throw. I relaxed in the air not out of defeat or default but rather out of the instinctive knowledge that you can get hurt as easily and badly by fighting against whatever flight you are taking and its inevitable landing as you can by allowing others to determine who you are and who you will be. I lofted through the warm autumn Reno air and landed with a splash in a filthy, stagnant pond rife with ducks and geese and their shit and who knows what else. I was pissed. It's a good thing I didn't have a pistol handy when I hit that vile water because I would have, at least so I fantasized, surely and gladly shot as many members of the senior patrol as possible. Instead, unarmed and harmless, I stood up in the foul, brown, waist deep water, my shoes sunk in unspeakable mud and slime, and hand splashed as many of the senior patrol as weren't quick enough to get out of the way. That was all I could do, so I did it, the most natural action/re-action there can be. Do what you can do.

The entire bunch hurried out of splash range with the agility of high school athletic champions. They looked back at me. We regarded each other by a distance that had just increased by several light years. My hatred for those pricks was so complete that there was nothing for it to do but dissolve. That couldn't happen for awhile, but they laughed as if they'd just won a football game and climbed back into their cars and drove away, leaving me alone in the slime duck pond of Idyllwild Park. These were the leaders of RHS citizenry and it was clear that I needed to seek my life training elsewhere. Survival for me was not to be found in the direction of whatever the senior patrol had to teach.

I climbed out of the water and walked an hour across town to the basement of the tiny house on West Pueblo Street. I was humiliated, furious and uncomfortable, though nearly dried out

by the time I got home. Mom just said, “Well, what did you expect to happen?” Dad told me to do what I thought was right but to be careful. My parents maintained the healthy practice of not interfering with life’s lessons as they came for their son unless absolutely necessary or requested. I appreciated that then, and appreciate it even more now.

The next day I returned to school dressed in normal attire. I don’t remember how my classmates related to me, but since I didn’t yet know any of them I probably ignored them for the most part. I was called out of one of the morning’s first classes for a meeting in the vice-principal’s office. Andrew Rosaschi, the RHS VP, was a man I would encounter often. A note was brought to my classroom by a member of the hall patrol. My teacher interrupted the class to write me a hall pass. Everyone had heard about the events of the day before and all eyes watched as I left the room. I didn’t hurry through the tiled, characterless hall. I took in deep breaths and let them out slowly, something an old ski jumper, Chet Zoberski, had taught me was a good thing to remember whenever you’re scared or nervous. Take it in deep, let it out slow. A mantra for life. Rosaschi’s secretary was expecting me and let me into his office and he told me to sit down in a chair facing him across his desk. We sized each other up. I have no idea what he saw or thought of a 13 year old boy who looked him in the eye while taking deep breaths, but I saw a man who, like Finch, had impeccable posture and dress, each strand of his pomaded dark hair in place. He wore rimless glasses perched atop a long, skinny nose sticking out from a lean face criss-crossed with red veins. In later years I would come to think of and refer to men like the vice-principal as “suits,” mid-level bureaucrats in a system that encouraged, rewarded, insisted on and produced people who exemplify Winston Churchill’s chilling summation of the German character, “Either at your feet or at your throat.”

"It's been brought to my attention that you were absent from all your afternoon classes yesterday," he said, peering at me from cold eyes.

"Yes, that's right," I replied, taking deep breaths, letting them out slowly, slowly.

"Well-l-l-l-l-l-l-l-l-l-l," he intoned with a backward tilt of his head as if regarding a suspicious troll peering out at him from under a dark bridge, "you aren't allowed to just leave school whenever you wish. We have rules about attending classes and we give demerits for missing them. Unless, of course," and he leaned across his desk toward me as if we were sharing a secret and I leaned in my chair away from him, "you had a good reason for your absence. In that case we might be able to excuse you without any demerits."

Breathe deep. Let it out slowly. Whatever he was up to set off every red flag/alarm bell in my young being. I didn't know what a demerit was (it turned out to be a sort of brownie point system of measuring student good citizenship, or, viewed another way, a Pavlovian form of student control), but within 30 seconds of meeting him Rosaschi felt like a threat. He looked and felt malicious and I did not trust him at all and when I left RHS four years later my sense of him had not changed one scintilla.

"Now, tell me," he continued, with a trace of a smile on his tightly controlled face, "what caused you to miss your afternoon classes yesterday?"

He knew! He knew! I knew he knew! But one minute with him made my dislike and fear of the Senior Patrol seem like minor annoyances. The senior bullies might throw me in a filthy pond, beat me to a pulp, tear off my head and have it for lunch, but Rosaschi had bigger fish to fry, so to speak. My every instinct told me unequivocally that the VP could and would damage me far worse and in far more lasting ways than

the seniors ever could, or would. The patrol might be my obstacle, but he was my enemy.

"I fell in the pond at Idyllwild on my lunch hour," I said, looking him in the eye, breathing deep, letting it out slow, gauging the effects of my words, "and I couldn't come back to school with my clothes all wet. So I went home."

Silence. We regarded each other across a chasm that grew wider by the second like two long-time foes who haven't met in several lifetimes.

"Did someone push you in?"

"No. I just slipped and fell in."

The first lie. The loss of innocence. The first move of the first battle of a long conflict. The first casualty of war is the truth. There would be no turning back, no retreat, no compromise. O what impossible situations arise when one leaves the freedom and beauty of mountains and moves to the cities and encounters ugly authority and distasteful bullies and stupid dress rituals and long, tiled, sterile hallways? Truth was the first casualty at RHS.

More silence.

"Are you surrrr-r-r-r-r-rrrrrrr you just fell in? Didn't someone push you?"

"No."

"Well, Dick, perhaps I should tell you that we were informed that someone threw you in the pond. We know you were thrown in the pond. Now, don't be afraid of me. I want you to tell the truth."

Don't be afraid of him? I would have laughed had I not been so frightened, though it would be years before I could articulate that my instincts were warning me that my personal interests, happiness and integrity were not a priority of Mr. Rosaschi's and to fear as if the freedom of my soul depended on not getting caged by Rosaschi or his priorities.

“No one pushed me in. I got wet and went home.”

“Well, Dick, there’s a difference between falling in the pond and being pushed. If a student or students of this school threw you in the pond they should be punished. That sort of behavior is not acceptable. As a matter of fact, Dick, we know that certain members of the football team did throw you in the pond, and we can kick them off the football team for that.”

“Why would you want to do that?”

“Are you saying they threw you in?”

“No.”

“We both know you’re not telling me the truth, Dick. And lying is not acceptable. Look, if you’ll just tell me who was involved in the incident we can help you get back at them. We want to punish them.”

“Why do you want to do that?”

“Because the Senior Patrol overstepped its authority, and we can’t allow that. We can’t allow students to act this way. Now, dropping a few of those boys from the football team will teach them a lesson they won’t forget, and we will be doing them a favor.” Rosaschi smiled broadly and continued, “Otherwise, we can’t accept the explanation that you fell in the pond and went home because you were wet. If that’s your story we’ll have no choice but to give you demerits for the classes you missed, and you’ll be ineligible to participate in any school activities outside the classroom.”

There it was. The mold was set for my high school career. I didn’t know who was more repulsive to me at that moment--Rosaschi and his authority or the Senior Patrol bullies. As my good father was fond of saying, “Six of one, half dozen of another.” It didn’t seem like much of one, but I had a choice. I could align myself with Rosaschi and his authority and system, which I instinctively distrusted, disliked and rebelled against, or I could cover a pack of punk, teen-age,

mush-headed, smirking bullies who had taught me through experience they were not to be trusted, admired, respected, liked or emulated. I might have sold out the football boys if circumstances and Rosaschi had been different, for I certainly owed the pigskinners nothing and felt no allegiance to them, but I chose instinct over experience for reasons I cannot explain. It set a pattern for making choices that has served me well.

I took a deep breath and let it out and privately thanked Chet Zoberski for his technical wisdom and looked Rosaschi in the eye so he would not doubt what I thought of him and said, "Well, Mr. Rosaschi, no one pushed me in the pond and I won't say that anyone did, and you can give me all the demerits you like."

I chuckled as I walked down the hall back to my class at the image in my mind of Rosaschi's face and the shock in his eyes after I said that. We understood each other, a distinct advantage for a 13 year old, but without really meaning to I had set myself apart from the mores and culture of my fellow freshman classmates and into a perpetual if low-grade guerrilla resistance with the administration of my high school. It took only a couple of days for the word to get out to the Senior Patrol and others what had happened, and both incidents (pond and Rosaschi) gave me a certain outlaw status in the high school community. So, in the perfect logic of the situation, I was invited to join the illegal 'fraternity' Delta Sigma, known as the Delts. (Bankofier was President.) The purpose of the Delts, so far as I could ever determine, was to achieve fellowship between members through re-enforcing the crude thinking and behavior of each other and getting as drunk as possible at weekly meetings in town and periodic beer busts held in the hills outside Reno. Other aspirations were

mentioned, but I never achieved them through Delts and never observed their actualization in any of my Delt brothers.

A favorite Delta Sigma chant was called “Rough n’ Tough Nevada Boys.” It went like this:

“We’re rough n’ tough Nevada boys.
We’re dirty sonsabitches.
We wipe our ass
With broken glass,
And laugh because it itches.
We fuck our wives
With butcher knives,
And that is but a trifle.
We hang our balls
On shithouse walls,
And shoot ‘em with a rifle.”

That gives you an idea.

Eventually I found my own circle of friends and comrades, but without exception they were older so that each year of high school I had fewer close friends. By my senior year my best friends were gone to the University of Nevada, including my girl friend, and I spent most of my last high school year socializing with the University crowd. My high school experience was no more difficult or confusing or filled with angst than anyone else’s, but the tone of that experience and much of my life was sounded that first week in Idyllwild Pond and the vice-principal’s office. What I sought in life was always in the mountains and no one around me understood that, even when I told them. So I set about making the best of what I saw as a disagreeable situation and system without losing myself in the process. As with the rest of my classmates,

I found both success and failure in my inner quests and outward journey through Reno High School.

I took a course in typing and Father as always came through with more prescience than seems reasonable for his only son's needs. He indebted himself more than he could afford from his first Reno job as a carpenter to buy me a Royal portable typewriter for my 14th birthday. Father hated that job. I used the Royal for 30 years.

History as taught from the textbooks was never interesting to me until I learned to study it on my own and fill in the blank spots of the record as written by the victors and approved by their school boards. Reno High School American history classes never explored how or why the Paiute people wound up on a reservation by Pyramid Lake or that the land of the free and home of the brave was stolen from the indigenous peoples of America through the atrocious cowardice of genocide. Slavery in America was barely mentioned and its bastard child, institutional racism, was mentioned not at all. The best thing about Freshman history class was my class' brightest student, Garth Sibbold, a lank, thin boy with nearly transparent skin and blue eyes so aflame with information about the world that the sight of him turned my unspoken respect and admiration for his intellectual prowess into terror and shame at my own inadequate, limited, shameful, carnal and experiential knowledge of the same world. Though we were never friends I instinctively liked Garth, and it took me a couple of years before I realized he wasn't a saint and that he could use some rest, good food, sunshine, exercise and a friend a lot more than he could use another book, idea, fact, historical date, study hall or perfect grade. I grew to like the freshman history teacher, Anthony Zeni, for his ability to call on Garth, a 14 year old boy, to verify or come up with an historical fact Zeni had forgotten and then continue with class. It was a humble skill

other, more authoritarian, teachers lacked. Zeni and Garth helped me get and see through the chimera of attaching respect to age and/or position without the substance respect demands. It was probably the most important thing I learned in high school history.

In every school system there are those who are completely involved in it while at the same time seeing right through it. Those are the true teachers in the American system of education and they are few and priceless. In the RHS athletic department the best of them was a physical education teacher, Bud Beasley, a small, graceful man with a huge nose and a big smile in a wrinkled face that made him look like the medieval court jester he undoubtedly was in another incarnation. A professional athlete in several sports, in the natural process of life he had turned to passing along his experience and knowledge and perspective to kids when he was too old to compete. He believed in the value of his own athletic life and loved teaching us how to appreciate and develop the potential of our own bodies, minds and spirits. I always wished he appreciated and knew how to ski but he did not. Though he was the best of the athletic department, like most traditional Nevada athletes of all ages of that time he viewed skiing as something a thin level above ballet dancing, cricket or curling. In mainstream Nevada culture athletics consisted of football (the king), basketball, baseball, track and field and boxing. Hunting and fishing were okay but even golf and tennis were suspect activities for males under thirty in Nevada's mainstream macho athletic culture. In a P.E. class one day we were playing touch football and I scored a touchdown with a couple of open field nifty fake moves. Bud complimented me on the run and asked why I hadn't tried out for the football team. I answered that skiing was my sport and that I didn't want to get hurt playing football. Even though I was the best

known skier in RHS at the time, Bud said, “Well it’s too bad you can’t put that athletic ability to good use.” So, while I liked Bud and very much respected him, I knew that in terms of my education, growth, potential and interests in life he was just another clueless adult to be dealt with the way one deals with a door to door salesman trying to sell you a bible or encyclopedia you neither want nor need. That is, with respect and politeness, warily and not very deep. And Bud was the best of RHS athletic educators. Others were, to my mind, much worse in intention, attention, competency and awareness.

One day Bud devoted an entire class to the skill of walking. A person must know how to walk before learning to run, he said, and none of us walked our own, natural walk. We all walked for an audience. Some guys were ‘cool’ and walked with slumped shoulders and a gait characterized by a slouch and feet lifted as little as possible above the earth and a heel lift that stopped briefly but noticeably halfway up before the step continued. These cool bobbbers appeared to be stalking some unseen, unknown quarry, which in a certain sense they were. It was a popular gait of the ‘50s and I still see a few people practicing it. Perhaps the human gait never changes, only the context does.

Another noticeable walk was the lead heel gait. In this distinctive movement the walker, from laziness or oblivion or both, smashed the heel down first with a stiff leg which jarred the entire body and gave the walker a Frankenstein demeanor and likely caused some joint, muscle, ligament and even brain damage over time.

There was the jock walk, favored by body builders, football players and overweight toughs. It is recognizable by a puffed out chest, pulled back shoulders, thrust out chin, a perpetually pulled in, tense belly muscles, and could not be mistaken for the relaxed, natural attributes of good posture. The jock walk

gave the jock walker a look of inflexibility which was often more than physically true. Naturally, in Nevada there were a few bow-legged cowboy walkers who at 14 had not spent enough years in the saddle to have earned bowed legs but who walked in imitation of fathers and other heroes to the rhythms of Tex Ritter, Gene Autry and the Lone Ranger. There were a few snobs who walked with a prissiness that reminded me of Principal Finch, as if it were slightly distasteful for them to actually touch the earth with their shod feet.

There was the country bumpkin/absent minded professor walk which varied in actual gait, but it was easily spotted in the unconscious demeanor of the walker with eyes focused on some problem of such complexity, depth and importance that the mundane social and bodily practicalities of life were irrelevant in the face of such concern. It was the walk of the deep thinker and the space case. And it was my walk, not because I thought or felt myself superior to my school mates (I was, for the most part, lonely and unsure of myself in a peer social sense), or because of any deep problem or cosmic idea inhabiting my mind and keeping me from paying attention to and acknowledging the present reality of now, nor did I float in the adolescent ozone level of the mind any more than the rest of my school mates. No, it was a huge insecurity about a physical problem that caused me to do the snob's walk. The problem was that I was near-sighted enough that anything more than three feet away progressively blended into a visual, flowing blur of rich color, vague shapes and indeterminate depth. Somehow--perhaps a John Wayne film or a careless or perverse quip from an adult I liked, respected or even loved--I had gotten it into my head that only 'sissies' wore glasses. When I realized at about age ten that my eyes had failed me I was humiliated, ashamed and outraged. My own body had let me down.

I wasn't going to be a sissy, whatever that was, no matter the cost, and I was able to hide my poor vision from the world until the eighth grade when a teacher figured out I couldn't read the blackboard. She marched me to the school nurse for an eye test I promptly failed and phoned my mother to reproach her for allowing a son to live in a world he could barely see. That my parents hadn't noticed that I couldn't see very well illuminates our relationship, but I caught hell from them when I got home from school that afternoon.

Soon I had eyeglasses I was mortified to wear, but being able to see in the classroom made school a lot more fun. Movies, which I had always loved, were even better: I was fascinated by the richness and clarity of form and color and at the interplay between characters and set that I'd missed when the silver screen was mostly a blur. And skiing, which was my salvation, opened up to me in myriad ways, changing my skiing and my sense of its magnificence. I could see what before I had only felt. Glasses changed my life and I loved what they could do for me.

Still, a sissy is a sissy, whatever that was. Many people I liked, respected, admired, trusted, emulated and loved (including my mother, a favorite uncle and a couple of very good skiers) wore glasses, but I was in the third year of high school before I had enough confidence to wear my own all the time. It is often said that image is everything and the matter of wearing glasses or not was my first lesson in the dynamics and consequences of the lack of confidence and self-respect that leads one to be more concerned with the shallowness of how one appears than with the depth of what one sees and, thereby, understands. This was a metaphor for a wide and dominant swath of the culture of Reno High School in the 1950s, and part of my adolescent education was the understanding that

proxy selves were the norm and that it was a long path to the true self.



This is a memoir of the author's first 23 years, written when he was in his 70's, which was 30 years after his father explained, for the first time, some of the family's dysfunctional dynamics, alcoholism, and alienation. At 23, he saw his path through mountains and skiing. At 46, he understood it...

THE ONLY PATH: A Memoir

by Dick Dorworth

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