

In Whose Service is Perfect Freedom

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As any tenured, full professor would, when Kathy Kane invited me to talk on this panel today, my first reaction, of course, was, "Hell no! Why should I waste my precious academic time and brain on such a trivial matter. This is just another example of how people take advantage of my good humor and try to get me to work more than my allotted two hours of class time per week. Hell no. I've already exceeded my "service" quota for this year. You can't make me do more than my contract requires."

Then Kathy explained that I was to talk about why I won the Clopton prize for Service to the Community, and I realized I was hoist on my own petard. Take a measly \$1000 from these guys and they think they own you forever.

Well, OK.

I regret to say I could never respond that way. I'm just a guy who can't say no, and always have been. Not because of any virtue of my own of course but because of my upbringing.

My mother and step father were professors in a small liberal arts college-- Stetson University-- in DeLand, Florida, and their entire life was one of teaching and service. They never had a moment to themselves--everything they did was for their students and the wider community around them. My following their example--or trying to--was absolutely inevitable.

Summers in DeLand (otherwise known as DeadLand) were pretty bleak in the old days. The main source of entertainment then was the foreign missionaries who would come through town, in sort of a poor man's Chautauqua. My grandmother would take me to hear them--some of the residue of the mighty preachers and orators of the late 19th Century--in what was called "the Baptist Chain of Missions." Everything they said made it clear that the only life worth living was one lived in service to others.

Now, I was an Anglican--not a foaming Baptist--and I was impressed and reimpressed by the passage in the Book of Common Prayer which refers to a life lived for God, "in whose service is perfect freedom." And while I'm not much of an Anglican anymore, "service as perfect freedom" still sounds about right to me.

Of course, years of indoctrination into service by the Danforth Foundation was influential as well. Old man William H. Danforth, whose generosity made it possible for me to attend graduate school, gathered all his Fellows to the shores of Lake Michigan every summer where we were harangued by various great teachers of the time. Danforth himself was quite a character. He wrote a book, a little red book which I still have, called "I Dare You." He would stumble around Camp Miniwanka with his book in hand, offering it to anyone who

couldn't get out of the way quick enough, saying, "I dare you to live a life for others. Will you do it?" And woe unto the poor person who would answer back, "I'll try."

"You'll try?" he would shout back in retort, his long white hair shaking.
"You'll try? No! You WILL. I dare you."

And then he, and all the rest of us, would break into the chant:

Good, better, best!
Never let it rest!
Till your good is better
And your better best!

No, I never had an option. For me not to be doing something for others--or at least feeling real guilty when I am not--was inevitable.

So when I came to Hawaii in 1969, just as the Governor's Commission on the Year 2000 was starting up, I took the opportunity for community service which they provided me as the chance of my life.

I had the opportunity which any academic should be willing to die for. I had the chance to try out my crazy ideas about the future on the entire population of Hawaii. And if you know anything about the activities of the old Commission in 1969 and 1970, you will know EVERYONE in the islands, and on all islands, young and old, all ethnic groups, men and women, all professions, and none, radicals and conservatives, urban communities and rural hermits--everyone was involved, and I got to talk with them. To find out what they thought about the future, and why.

Can you imagine anything as exciting as that? For me to come here, wholly innocent of Hawaii, and be thrust into that kind of community interaction?

Of course I would keep it up, from them to now. So for me to be given an award for it was, and is, crazy. It was no choice of my own, and it certainly was no hardship.

It is the way I live my life.

But I would like to offer one complaint, or one statement of profound disappointment about my life, since I have this chance.

Winning the Clopton award for Service to the Community was nothing, though I certainly revere Bob Clopton for whom the award is named. Of course, I appreciate it, but the service itself was its own reward, and by definition, no award could possibly be expected, or even truly accepted.

I also was very pleased when the World Futures Studies Federation, at its most recent meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, awarded the prize for excellence in futures research to the Hawaii Research Center for Futures Studies. I am very grateful for that. I sort of view that as my "medal for excellence in research."

But the only award I have ever really wanted is the one I have never received, and know I never will.

It is an award for good teaching.

You see, my Mother has won scads of awards for good teaching, and is one of the very small number of professors who has her picture hanging in the hallowed halls of Stetson because of her excellent and devoted teaching.

Well, I view myself mainly a teacher--or at least I would like eventually to become a good teacher. My community service is really teaching, and not service, in my view. Much of the futures research I do is actually community and organizational education--helping groups become learning systems.

My students are very important to me, and I think a lot and worry a lot about them, and about how I can best help them learn because, I guess the truth is that I am not so much a teacher as a co-learner--with my students, with my research and consulting partners, and with all of the people in the local and global community with whom I interact .

But God is just. She denies you the only thing you, in your hubris, really want. She keeps you humble, under her thumb, right where she wants you.

So, as much as I appreciated winning the Clopton award, and respect those of you who have won the Wilson award and the medal for excellent research, my hat is off to, and I kiss the hand of, those of you on this platform, in the audience, and throughout the campus who have won departmental, college, presidential, or regents awards for excellence in teaching.

You guys are my heroes. You're the guys I admire.

And I remain just a jealous wannabe.