

A conversation and an option not yet explored



Earlier this year, Alice Marie Jacobs, Ph.D., the president of Danville Area Community College, spoke at a part-time-faculty

breakfast. She updated us on various issues and answered questions. The usual stuff folks expect when the boss speaks. Never one to let a free meal go unappreciated, I sipped coffee and munched on some terrific eggs, listening to the give and take.

At the end, my appetite satiated, fork down, a final cup of steaming Joe in my hands, Dr. Jacobs garnered my full attention when she closed with a memory from her high school days. Raised with modest means and expectations, young Alice Marie figured her next step was a year at business school and then work.

Then it happened: A conversation with a teacher, five min-

utes perhaps, who expressed a different vision of Alice Marie's future.

Forty-some years later, undergrad, masters and doctorate degrees earned, a wealth of teaching, administrative experience and professional success achieved, it is that particular conversation that Alice Marie, i.e. Dr. Jacobs, pointedly shared with a roomful of teachers.

And rightly so.

In a perfect world, everyone would experience such positive, life-changing conversations. Flashes of clarity in our otherwise cluttered lives.

But many of us don't.

We are swept up in the everyday hustle and bustle. Our parents, preachers, teachers, family and friends riding the prevailing winds of safe, familiar routes, leaving little time for considering alternatives. Unfortunately, it's often the options not explored that cause the deepest regret.

About Voices

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Dr. Jacobs talk brought to mind, my son, Michael, who graduated with honors from Illinois State University with a dual major in international business and East Asian Studies. He spent a semester in Taiwan as a sophomore and a summer in northern China teaching English as a second language while learning Mandarin. After graduation, my

wife, Yolanda, and I expected Michael to hook up with a corporation and be on his merry way.

Last summer, however, Michael, side-by-side with his girlfriend, Meredith, ran her parents' horse-riding business, Millbrook Trail Rides, as a project for their business degrees. They enjoyed great success and formulated plans for boarding and riding lessons, along with purchasing horses at auction, training them and selling them.

"Revenue streams" and "future camping sites and tours" were bandied about as they recounted their experiences with us over Thanksgiving.

"Yeah," Meredith said, when Michael was out of the room, "I've never seen Michael so engaged in anything. He loved it."

The next day, in the silence of a Thanksgiving morning while everyone else slept and

the outside world was held at bay for the holiday, Michael and I talked. The crux of the conversation was brief, then on to family, football and turkey.

Michael still checked out companies, interviewed and even had a job offer. He remains open to the right opportunity. For the time being, however, life has led him to an Illinois farm, not China. Neither Yolanda, nor I, are surprised. And Michael knows it is OK by us.

Robert Frost wrote "In the Road Not Taken."

"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I —

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference."

So can a conversation.

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