

On the wall in my study I have posted the following quotation from Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

"An individual transforms a fortuitous occurrence ... into a motif, which then assumes a permanent position in the composition of the individual's life."

In many ways, this is the story of my life, Let me give you a few examples:

1. Shortly after I came to Penn, Dave Rosen at Swarthmore decided to give an undergraduate topology course. After two weeks he realized that he was in deeper than he had anticipated. He called Penn, located a relatively new Assistant Professor and asked me to complete the course for him. Well, Dave was an officer of the Philadelphia Section of the MAA (now the EPADEL section) and he asked me to serve on the Executive Committee. All that eventuated in becoming active in the MAA and serving as a national officer of the MAA for 18 years. A fortuitous occurrence that assumed a permanent position in my professional life.
2. In 1967 or 1968 Herb Wilf and I were chatting on the back patio of the Goldman's house on Knox road at one of the many colloquium parties that were held in those years. Somehow or other we got to talking about computers and calculus. The next year Herb and I each taught a computer based calculus course. That led to my being on the FAS computer committee and eventually to my serving for 10 years as Associate Dean for Computing, Being the First Chair of the MAA Committee on Computers in Mathematics Education, writing the Interactive Linear Algebra text and other things too numerous to mention. another fortuitous event that assumed a permanent position in my life.

3. In 1975, Penn sponsored a trip to the Soviet Union over spring break. Judy had always wanted to visit Moscow and this seemed like an easy way to achieve that goal. Before we left we were contacted by a few people who were working to help the Soviet refuzeniks and asked to visit in Moscow and Leningrad. That led to a long term involvement in the Soviet Jewry movement that led to the Penn community adopting Leonid Brailovsky, Solomon Alber coming to our department, Mark Azbel to the Physics department, and an honorary degree for Sakharov. Another fortuitous event that became an important part of my life.

4. In 2000, Larry Gross asked me to chair a Task Force on Privacy of Personal Information, a subject about which I knew nothing. I agreed to do that and over the next year the task force worked on a report that became the blueprint for the University's efforts in privacy. It led to Penn being the first school to hire a Chief Privacy Officer and eventually it led to Blue Cross removing your social security number as an identifier on your health care card. Another fortuitous event that assumed a permanent position in my life.

I could go on, but let me stop there for a moment and give one piece of advice: In the words of Woody Allen, When you come to a fork in the road of life, take it.

My children have already had more employers in their careers than I have. I have been extremely fortunate that I have had four or five different careers without having to change employer. Penn has been a great place to work because of the opportunity to do many different things. There is probably nothing

more exciting than proving a theorem and finally understanding how the pieces fit together but that does not diminish the satisfaction one gets from doing a job well and having an influence on the mathematical community, the University community, or on individuals.

Let me give you an example: When Solomon Alber arrived in Philadelphia he came to our house for dinner and brought with him a postcard that he had received years earlier asking for a reprint with the additional words “you have friends in America”. That postcard took me less than two minutes to write and mail but it was a lifeline for Solomon.

Second piece of advice: What may seem like an insignificant act on your part can be very important to someone else. The implications and results of what you do can be much, much more than you anticipate. When asked to help someone or to work on a project, JUST DO IT!. Both you and others will benefit.

I have a t-shirt at home that has on its back the words: “Life is a Journey not a destination.” I strongly believe that is true and on any journey it is important to have good companions. Many of those good companions, colleagues, family and friends are here today and I am glad that you are. Some unfortunately are no longer with us. I particularly think of my parents and in-laws who would have been proud to hear the comments Herman made earlier and may even have believed them. I also think of Oscar Goldman who hired me at Penn, of David Rosen who got me involved in the MAA and of David Hildebrand who was my mentor on the faculty senate. All of them are missed. I have been fortunate to be a member of a department and a University that gave me the opportunity to do many things and I am deeply appreciative of that.

Finally let me return to my earlier theme of fortuitous events and conclude with one additional such event. Fifty years ago my parents joined a swim club in Edison, New Jersey to make the hot New Jersey summers bearable. At that swim club, I met Judy, whose parents even more improbably than mine, had joined the same swim club. This fortuitous event became much more than a motif, in fact it has dominated my life for the past 50 years. And I am most grateful for that. I am what I am today and she is what she is today because of our influence on each other. I can not imagine what the last fifty years would have been like without her. All I can say is that we would both be very different people today not to mention the fact that Dan, Rebecca, and Mike, and by mathematical induction, Joshua, Miles, Jake, Lexi and Caroline would not exist.

So for my final piece of advice; LIFE IS A JOURNEY, Choose your traveling companions well.