

Unidentified
1945 or '46?
Grandfather's monologue
at the Old Bonehead

GLADSTONE MASON - Nov. 6, 1975?

Without intending to assign the blame, this paper was formulated during a Rotary Club luncheon at which Russell Cansler spoke. He was trying to impress us with the changes that had taken place in the world and particularly with mankind since the beginning of time. He had divided the age of mankind into 60-year generations and told his audience what had happened during various of these generations. The point that he was making was that practically everything of importance had happened during the past two of his 60-year generations.

I will not attempt to recall the startling things that he had to say. I would like to piggyback on his remarks, and to discuss us and the future. This is not a Future Shock thing, but rather will be a look at trends in the near past and translating them into what we will be doing 30 years from now. I hope that understanding these trends will help us to understand, if not prepare for, the future. I am indebted to an author named Lyle E. Schaller, who wrote the little book "Understanding Tomorrow", which I happened to have been reading when Russ Cansler gave his talk. This is not a book report, but I will borrow liberally from the theories advanced by Mr. Schaller.

My grandfather was born in Ohio County, Kentucky in 1885. His world during his young adulthood was limited to the horse, both the four-legged and the iron variety. During his lifetime, Henry Ford got automotive mass production started and therefore made wheels available to many people. In 1907, my grandfather witnessed, at Fort Lee, Virginia, the acceptance tests that the Wright Brothers

flew in order to try to sell their aeroplane to the Army. he died in 1957, in August. To my knowledge, he never rode in an airplane, but had he chosen to do so, he could have ridden in the first jet airliner, the British Comet, which was in use by the time of his death. Remember what happened in October of 1957? Yes, Sputnik went up then. So, my grandfather's 72 years went from horse and buggy almost to space.

My grandfather remembered seeing his very first automobile. How many of you remember your first view of an automobile? Or an airplane? up close? I remember that. Here is one that will catch most of us. How about the first time that you looked at a TV set? According to my calculations, every member of the Athenaeum Society was born before TV became a part of the home, with a couple of possible exceptions. We remember the pre-TV period, but a child born after 1960 grew up in front of the boob tube. We blame many things on TV, and ask why Johnny can't read while believing that he was just made too lazy to read. TV is one of the trends that will have a tremendous impact on your future. Let us see why.

We grew up in a verbal world. The adage "A picture is worth a thousand words" was true, but no more. Probably more like three hundred now, because today's children grow up in a visual world. Because TV came along during my mid-teens, my generation is the last one to have really learned to read books. We reacted to words with an occasional picture, and could be taught by the lecture method. Do not try to get anything across to today's children by lecturing, because they are not oriented that way. But they are being taught largely by people who are verbal people, who often feel

that the teaching profession is in a fine state because of TV teaching and many audio-visuals. But the verbal-visual conflict explains this.

Even more basic than teaching methods is language itself. All of the early alphabets were graphic or pictorial. Japanese characters are pictures, and one picture always means the same thing. Later on the Phoenecians devised an alphabet that could, with minor modifications, fit just about any language. Today most languages can be read phonetically, because a letter or particular combination of letters is always pronounced the same way. Alas, not English. There are eight different pronunciations of the first letter of the English language. Our language defies being read as it looks. But my children were taught to read by the phonetics method. This has largely been abandoned, because of the frustrations of words that looked right being spelled wrong because of our rules of spelling. Another verbal-visual conflict. My verbal generation tried to teach the next one to read verbally and got confused, while the next generation is having Sesame Street to show them the different sounds of A, as in flag and car. We begin to get a feeling for Johnny's reading difficulties. If Johnny cannot now read, it is probably too late for him. What it tells us is to accept things as they are and to try to figure a way to make sure that Johnny's children are taught to read, or we might find ourselves in a totally visual world, with no books, newspapers, or magazines.

The complaint that Johnny can't read is but a symptom of the things that have changed around us and to which we have not reacted properly or promptly. Each person is a product of his environment because his parents trained him to cope with the world that his parents knew. If the world changes in the meantime, the training is inadequate preparation, with the greater the change meaning the greater the inadequacy. The world has changed much more rapidly during the past, say, 40 years, than it changed during any similar period since Creation. Let us take a look at the world in terms of an American family, starting with a person born in the 1930's. As the family is fictional, let us use a number-name, the name of the person being the time period in which he was born.

Thirty was born to parents who lived through World War I and were a part of the great 20's, a whacky, heady time. These parents went from a very bright time into the darkness of the Depression. Thirty didn't remember the hard times, but his parents remembered, and their training of him came from their first-hand knowledge of what had happened. Thirty does remember Pearl Harbor, and saw his older brothers, cousins, uncles, and maybe even his father go off to war. He remembers rationing, propoganda, loss of family members, Hiroshima and victory.

Thirty's post-war world is a boom time, and he sees it happening, including the tremendous baby boom, although he does not realize the tremendous significance of it. Thirty goes off to college in the late 1940's. He marries, and his son Fifty is born. Thirty wonders about the fact that the elementary schools are bulging at the seams, and realizes that the local school boards are raising taxes for more buildings, but he has a good job, and so what?

Then Korea happens, and Thirty and his friends go off to fight. He remembers how World War II worked and realizes that this situation is not quite the same, but doesn't recognize the significance of the difference of this police action. The distinction between Victory and Truce somehow blurs, as the result is the same and Thirty goes home. He rejoices at his survival and expects that the reaction to that war would be the same as to WW II. He expects full employment and boom times. He expects a big bunch of babies to be born, and as he gets on school boards, etc., he votes for more school rooms. The Supreme Court segregation decision in 1954 has added to the need for more school rooms and many more teachers, and Thirty thinks that he has learned the lesson and is going to be prepared.

But something happens, because things don't go as Thirty had figured. There was no boom, either economic or baby. Fifty grows up as a part of this huge group of boom babies, suffers from the lack of preparation for his group, and becomes a part of the suburban culture. Fifty also has TV, sees great technological advances in the world, and survives. He goes off to college, and finds inadequate housing, and a system largely tied to the past and doing things the way the college had always done them. Fifty and his friends talk against the status quo, but nobody listens. Many of them talk louder, and some of them take over buildings, some burn them, and their elders wring their hands. At the same time, the American Establishment called upon Fifty's generation to defend its honor in Vietnam.

So Fifty goes off to war or to a draft haven, and the world seen a generation in revolt against a war that it considers unjust. This same generation had revolted against the colleges and their way of doing things, and changes were affected. The revolt against the war was eventually successful, having caused President Johnson to retire and having caused such pressure against the war that, under President Nixon, we finally withdrew. Thirty was fit to be tied, because he and his brothers had not questioned the war that they were in. But all he could do was mutter in his VFW beer about the pinkos and liberals, because the younger generation had gotten its way.

He was being had in another way, although he largely didn't realize it. Remember the baby boom that didn't happen, or as Schaller put it, the 700,000 babies that weren't being born each year. When Fifty married, he either decided to have fewer children than his parents had or even more drastic, none at all. In 1972, Zero Population Growth was achieved. In other words, not enough babies were being born to assure a stable population.

The changing times have also gotten deeply into Thirty's pocketbook. He was born during a time of great increases in governmental involvement in society. The boom that didn't happen heightened the growth of welfare systems, because the baby boom that did happen put many more people in search of jobs that were not there. Social Security had come along, and to create more jobs, the government started retiring people at an earlier age. This did put more people to work, but it also put more people on the rolls of people being helped financially by a part of Thirty's paycheck.

Fifty failed to learn the lesson of changing times. He came home from Vietnam or Sweden, married and brought Seventy into the world, and found himself in a still-changing world. He sees schoolrooms already empty and realizes that Seventy will have to fit into a system that overreacted. Yet Fifty is paying taxes to pay for these unused rooms and the salaries of teachers who have no students but have tenure. Fifty changed the colleges, but he reads predictions that by the time Seventy is ready for college, the cost will be around \$10,000 per year. He got the U.S. out of Vietnam, but he has to wonder what will happen in the event of a conflict that will have to be supported without being able to draft people to fight in it.

This admittedly generalized genealogy shows us how we got to where we are. It doesn't tell us where we are going, or how to go about getting there. Let us see how Schaller explains the phenomena and how we might prepare ourselves for the future.

What we saw happen to Thirty is explained by Schaller in a chapter entitled "From Survival to Identity". Thirty was motivated by a desire to survive, because this was the way his parents had trained him from their background. Fifty was more motivated by a search for identity. Instead of going into Dad's firm, Fifty joined the Peace Corps, or saw the world from under a backpack or from a van or a motorcycle. He was raised in a period of rising affluence, and the idea of survival was not anything for him to worry about.

Again Thirty is left shaking his head. He cannot understand Fifty's unwillingness to go into business with him. He also looks to the future, and can see his business going down the tubes if it does not have close supervision. So, Thirty sells the business and retires or goes into other work. The conglomerate that he sold out to grows larger because of the number of Thirty's peers that went through the same thing.

Parallel to the Survival/Identity shift is one from functional to relational thinking. Thirty joined the American Legion, Kiwanis, Lions, the Church, whatever, because he perceived that his contacts would help him in the community. But Fifty didn't have these purely functional thoughts. He looked for groups to provide the relationships that moved him, regardless of function. How many Thirties have grieved because their children joined the beat generation or the hippie movement, or joined a commune that existed only to maintain itself? But these groups provided the relationships that were important to Fifty, and Thirty could just accept it or not.

The most important thing that happened, in terms of the future, is that Fifty got into positions that mold the minds of children. Teachers, governmental agencies, and other positions were filled by these people. They therefore will transmit their philosophy to others, who will in turn get into positions of responsibility and the circle goes on. But the most devastating possibility for the future will come from the reluctance of Fifty to produce the number of children that were expected.

These children will be missed in several ways. First, they will be missed by the industry that geared up for them. The baby boom people are now about 30 years old, at about the time when most couples build their first home. Will the industry be prepared for those who are not going to be there to build homes? On the other side of the coin, let us take the Gerber Products Company. Before 1957, they advertised that "Babies are our only business". Their planners foresaw the baby dearth, dropped the word "only" from their slogan, and diversified. The company now even sells life insurance. Will American industry make the transition from a youth-oriented society to an elderly one? How many people will be affected when we have more elderly people than children to shop for?

Second, they will be missed if the United States becomes involved in a major war in the late 80's or early 90's. Remember that wars are fought largely with persons in the 17-25 age group.

Third, they will be missed when it comes to filling the church buildings and school buildings constructed for them. Their absence will be felt down the line to book publishers, classroom equipment manufacturers, the colleges that produce teachers for them, and thus on and on.

Fourth, they will be missed sorely by their born brothers and sisters as they vote on pensions and increases in Social Security benefits in 2020. The Census Bureau estimates that the elderly population will more than double by then. Or, put in another way there will be two people drawing for every one paying in.

How our chickens will come home to roost can best be shown by a case history. In 1975, a New York City bus driver retired at age fifty, after driving for 20 years at an average salary of \$13,000. During his last year, he worked an average of 35 hours per week overtime. This boosted his total salary for that year to over \$30,000. But it also set his pension payments, under state law. Because he worked hard during that year, he collected over \$17,000 in overtime pay but also added \$750 per month to his pension check for the rest of his life. He retired with an annual pension of \$15,600. This money will come from the city, which had an unfunded pension plan. This means that the people who paid him while he worked have deferred the pension payments to another generation, and the only place they can come from is taxes. Yes, those unborn babies will be missed. Will their born brothers and sisters be able and willing to pay for their parents' lack of foresight? Remember these same people took on the colleges and the Vietnam war, both successfully.

These missing people will be missed in many other ways, but I think you get the idea. What can we do about the situation? I am not here to tell you what to do, but it won't work to hide your head in the sand and hope that it will go away. The majority of you are in the middle of your working years, as am I. How will we feel if the generation that must pay our retirement bills says that it won't do it?

Closing this paper is difficult. Perhaps two laws would suffice, neither of them passed by any legislative body but both of them more valid than statute. Hardin's Law, penned by biologist Garrett Hardin, reads "You can never do merely one thing". This can be illustrated by many governmental agencies and the effect of what they do. EPA does its thing to clean up the air from an industry. The cost of this cleaning is passed on to the consumer, fewer of them who are then able to buy the product, which causes some people to be laid off which causes more people to be drawing checks from Uncle Sam, which increases the tax burden....

Forrester's Law is also appropriate: "The more complex the situation, the more likely the intuitive response will be counter-productive". A simple example of the validity of this law was the Volstead Act of 1919 which was supposed to eliminate drinking and enforce moral virtue, but instead turned out to be a means of creating a large organized crime network. The use of non-return bottles is practical in the eyes of the industry, because it takes more energy and scarce resources to clean the old bottles than it does to make new ones. When FHA was pressured to insure homes in the inner cities so that more whites would stay there, the result was that a flood of white families who previously could not find buyers sold out and moved to the suburbs.

These are only a few of the many examples that could be cited. Problem solving is not as simple as it once appeared to be. In fact, it may be worth asking this one question. Is it possible to solve problems?