

DUARD THURMAN  
MAY 2, 1991

Page 1

MUCH IN LITTLE

The opportunity to address an Open Meeting of this Society is one that has never before been mine. I would be less than honest to tell you that this is an opportunity which I would seek. The plain truth is that I have been frightened to death!

What can one say to such a group as this?...A group of successful business and professional people...up-to-date on what is going on in the world ...well read and informed concerning the past...prepared to face the future with great anticipation, knowing there will be an even higher level of success. In addition to our members, tonight we have as guests family and friends---those who are part of each member's success. Do you understand why I am nervous and why I have wondered what I could say that might be of interest to you and would not be an embarrassment to me?

I began my preparation by reaching two conclusions: first, you are my friends, and knowing me, you will not expect too much. Second, being number two in years of membership should give me the privilege of being myself. Since I am among friends I trust you to understand and, if necessary, to make the proper excuses for me.

As I approach a point in my life where I take time to look backward, a number of questions arise. Are the goals I set worth the life I spend? Will the attainment of those goals result in success? What are the real results of success? Are the goals realized? I read recently Robert Nisbet's book, History of the Idea of Progress. He traces the idea of human progress from the early Greeks, and supports the theory that we humans are on an upward movement toward perfection. Does the "success" that we seek help move human progress toward perfection? We won't pursue that idea;

but, it is something that we can think about as we move toward realizing our own goals.

Herbert Spencer, a 19th Century philosopher and social thinker, promoted his idea of how human perfection can be realized. His theory asserts that only when we have complete freedom can we progress toward perfection. This could be taken to mean that progress is being made when we free ourselves from all the artificial needs that our culture forces upon us. When man becomes a victim of those artificially created needs, he loses the freedom he requires to reach full potential as a person. (Which could be called success.)

I want to tell you about two people who took this approach to becoming successful. You can be the judge whether they succeeded or whether they failed.

This is a true story of a fellow Kentuckian and his lovely wife. I hope that you can catch a glimpse of what I consider to be successful living.

Harlan Hubbard was born January 4, 1900, in Bellevue, Kentucky. His father died in 1907, leaving seven year old Harlan to look after his mother. When Harlan was 15, he and his mother moved to New York to join two older brothers. Harlan attended Childs High School in the Bronx and the National Academy of Design in New York. After returning to Kentucky in 1919, he studied at the Cincinnati Art Academy.

Until his mother's death, Harlan looked after her, earned needed money as a day laborer, and developed skills in all the building trades. He found time for painting, reading, writing, music and long walks through the countryside. He explored by canoe the Ohio River and its tributaries. He had become successful in his own eyes, even

if not successful by the world's standards. He was true to himself, was learning many things and longed to learn more. He appreciated the beauty of the out of doors, his art and music. In only one endeavor did he ever think of public approval. He was lonely as an artist, received little encouragement in his art, but continued to paint, even refusing to offer any of his paintings for sale.

He could have been called an "odd fellow", but from those lonely moments he found his way to joy by doing those things important to him. He admired women, but had never had a steady girl friend. Somehow, he could never imagine that a woman could understand the wildness that seemed to be a part of him.

Rose Anne Swingle was born on September 7, 1902, to a Dutch family in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Her family loved music, and Anne and two sisters were trained in music in their home. Anne graduated in 1925 from Ohio State University and taught French and German at Hope College in Holland, Michigan, for a number of years.

In 1933 Anne found her way to Cincinnati, Ohio, and worked in the fine arts department of the Cincinnati Public Library. She got acquainted with Harlan Hubbard as "the young artist from across the river in Kentucky". She thus knew Harlan for several years as a patron. There is little information about their courtship. It started when they discovered their mutual love for music and spent Sunday afternoons together ... Harlan playing the violin and Anne the cello.

One day after a visit to an art exhibition, Harlan asked Anne where she would like to drive. She had no preference, so Harlan took her to the Ohio River. Anne loved it, too!

Harlan was 43 and Anne 41, when they married. It appeared that

they had been waiting for each other. Harlan expressed it as follows, "She was not only brilliant and beautiful, but she loved me devotedly as I was". The following 43 years was to prove Harlan correct.

In 1944 Harlan and Anne moved into a "river shack" on the stony banks of the Ohio, near the small town of Brent, just down the hill from Fort Thomas, Ky. They made the decision to carry out a plan that Harlan had dreamed about for years. The plan was to float down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, become self-supporting and independent. Harlan set out his aim in his book, Shantyboat, from which I quote:

I had no theories to prove. I merely wanted to try living by my own hands, independent as far as possible from a system of division of labor in which the participant loses most of the pleasure of making and growing things for himself. I wanted to bring in my own fuel and smell its sweet smell as it burned on the hearth I had made. I wanted to grow my own food, catch it in the river, or forage after it. In short, I wanted to do as much as I could for myself, because I had already realized from partial experience the inexpressible joy of doing.

The "river shack" became the "construction camp" and the department for planning. Anne made the shack into "home" and became a builder's helper. The material used to build the shantyboat came from an old building, and was salvaged from dumps and from drift piles. Harlan's skill as a builder and his art training was put to full use. The shantyboat had a place for everything, including specially designed storage spaces for the musical instruments. They knew that it would be necessary that everything be kept in its place.

At 11:00 A.M., December 22, 1946, the shantyboat drifted into the Ohio River. It was loaded with canned goods from their summer garden, all weather clothing, books, music, art supplies, rope, anchor, etc., and their dog, Skipper, plus a hive of bees. There was no power, only a row boat with oars and a long paddle on the deck for aid in guiding, if needed. The winter current of the Ohio River became their sole source of power!

The routine for living had been fairly well established during the two years of preparation. There were no modern conveniences; but Anne and Harlan were dedicated to quality living. Anne took great pride in the shantyboat and maintained it as a home. Meals were served in good taste and were enjoyable occasions. After the evening meals Harlan would write in his Journal, as Anne finished her kitchen tasks. Most evenings included music and reading aloud. One would be doing a needed task with their hands while the other read aloud. This routine became one that would be followed for the balance of their lives together.

After 100 miles and 66 days of drifting, Anne and Harlan tied up about 10 miles below Milton, Kentucky and Madison, Indiana. They chose the Kentucky side called Payne Hollow, a spot that had been a landing for the river boats when they were the principal transportation for farm products to market. They met the local people and decided it would be "port" for the summer. They received permission from a neighbor to raise a garden. They fished, gardened and foraged; became friends with the local folk, and at the same time were preparing for the next leg of their journey.

A local congregation asked Harlan to make a large painting for their church. They had suggested a picture of the Jordan River, but

Harlan would not be influenced; he gave them a beautiful oil painting of his and their beloved Ohio River. The painting still hangs in the Mount Byrd Christian Church, Milton, Kentucky.

The summer of 1947 established the pattern that they would follow for the remainder of their voyage. The next stop was Bizzle's Bluff, near the mouth of the Cumberland River. The third winter found them a few miles up stream from Natchez at Bisland Bayou where they stayed for ten months. They arrived in New Orleans in March, 1950. They had drifted 1,385 miles and had been living on their boat for five years and three months.

Harlan and Anne were not ready to give up life on the shantyboat, and decided to enter the Intracoastal Waterway and explore the Bayou country. They spent several weeks exploring New Orleans, before starting this new adventure.

Some changes had to be made - the "power of the river" was missing in these new waters. Harlan went in search of a new source of power. He finally purchased an old two horse power gasoline motor. It was weeks before he found all the missing parts and learned how it worked. This was a new field but Harlan was a fast learner! He also purchased a small skiff and outfitted it to push the shantyboat. What speed! -- about two miles an hour through the still waters of the Bayous. There was no hurry, no arrival time and as Harlan expressed his feelings, "I believe whatever we want is at hand."

Harlan's book, Shantyboat on the Bayous gives a detailed picture of this adventure. The Bayous provided a complete change in scenery, but only an extension of their life of freedom.

On July 1, 1951, this part of their life together ended. It was

a sad day for them both when they sold their shantyboat, a row boat and the skiff for a total sum of \$679.00.

Harlan and Anne accepted the fact that they not only needed, but had to have, an automobile, and purchased a 10 year old Dodge. Harlan, again using his skills, built a trailer which was to serve them until they were ready to settle down. As they started up the road for Kentucky, looking back to see if the trailer were following, their spirits began to rise. They still had each other, and were still shantyboating, on wheels, with all the world before them. They found they could live on the road as free as gysies! They returned to Fort Thomas, visited friends and relatives; but, by September, they felt the call of the road. They headed for the West, visiting Los Angeles and San Francisco, and all points of interest in between. They camped each night, cooked their own meals and enjoyed meeting fellow travelers. Seven months had passed by the time they returned to Kentucky.

Together, Anne and Harlan, decided they would find a place "beyond the road's end" and make themselves a home. The Shantyboat had set them free, not only had it set them free from excess baggage but also excess wants. They wanted to continue that freedom, and needed a place to start the process from which a home would grow. At first, their search was not successful. Most folk just didn't understand what they wanted, and weren't sure they wanted the Hubbards as neighbors.

Anne and Harlan remembered their first summer on the Ohio, and friends they had made at Milton, Ky., Madison Indiana, and Payne Hollow. In the winter of 1946/47, it had taken them 66 days to drift from Brent to Payne Hollow. Now, it took them only three hours

to drive to Payne Hollow. Their old neighbors welcomed them. The neighbors hitched a tractor to the trailer and pulled it to Payne Hollow. At last, they were at home!

Anne and Harlan Hubbard built their home and life around what they had gained by cutting themselves away from "culture imposed" needs and learning to live as free as the birds. Their story became known and people came to them, asking questions, seeking advice, and admiring what Anne and Harlan had created by their own hands. Harlan's art became known and appreciated. Their place was "beyond the road's end" on the Kentucky side; however, the Indiana road came to the river. Harlan, never wanting to discourage friendly people, installed a bell on the Indiana side. Visitors had only to ring the bell, and Harlan would row his boat over and pick them up. His only complaint about visitors was that they thought he had nothing to do! In fact, gardening, fishing, building, canning, chopping wood, etc., kept both he and Anne busy. Work was necessary, but the results from work were to be independent, self-sufficient and free! There was always time to enjoy God's good earth, but also time to play their music and read aloud from the great books. This was not "roughing it". It was a good example of two people who learned to live and who became successful.

Anne died in May 1986. A memorial service was held for her in Payne Hollow where Harlan continued to live. He continued to write "I am never quite myself" he wrote, "except when alone." "Then my weaknesses vanish and I am neither young or old, just living on this earth and doing my work, taking care of myself and my habitation. I want nothing more than I have".

Harlan was lonely only as a musician. For over fifty years he



and Anne had played duets - piano and violin or cello and viola.  
Now, he was a soloist.

Harlan died in January of 1988 at the age of 88 years. Just a few months prior to his death he had written in his Journal, "I stand before my paintings and weep. I have worked hard, with great love. My rewards are great."

Were Anne and Harlan Hubbard successful? Did they make a link in the chain of human progress, man's march to perfection? My vote is, "Yes"! How would you cast your vote?

Presented at the  
Annual Open Meeting of the Athenaeum Society  
Hopkinsville Golf and Country Club  
Thursday Evening, May 2, 1991  
By Duard N. Thurman