

The 'Can-Do' World of Tomorrow?

By Rod Fraser



The Hoover Dam – An Engineering Marvel in its time.

At a recent get-together over the summer, Don complained about his grandson.

"He's bright enough, goodness knows. He's good in mathematics, writes well and works at a part-

time job, while handling his school work without difficulty. What's not to like?" Don said.

"Still there's something missing. He's talking about a 'Victory Year'. Apparently this is something high school students are doing. After four years of high school, rather than going out and meeting the adult world, they repeat Grade Twelve. Take a Victory lap. Strut their stuff. Who knows why?"

After his 'Victory Year', Don's grandson plans to attend university to study math and French, with a view to becoming a high school teacher. "This doesn't show a lot of imagination," Don told me, "there's a world out there that's exciting. I can't understand why he's not rushing to be part of it."

It would be understandable if his grandson wasn't talented. An average student would be a good candidate for the stifling conformity and political correctness of teaching. But for a bright young man who might well make his mark in life, it seemed a waste.



Don told me he tried to influence his grandson. When the boy talked about a 'Victory Year', Don suggested a number of alternatives. If his grandson was interested in seeing the world, he could do what

many did in decades past. He could strap a pack on his back and tour Europe or Asia with a positive attitude as his daily companion.

He could teach English in a foreign country for a year or two, or work in a different province. He could travel and work in the Arctic. Surely a clever young man should have the imagination to do something with a year (or two) of his life, other than repeat Grade Twelve. Experiencing four years of high school should be enough for anyone. Doubling up on Grade Twelve isn't two years of experience. It's one year's experience two times.

If Don's grandson wanted to stick closer to home, there are other options. His Dad is well connected in their community. He could easily find the boy a rewarding job in the trades, working for a legal office or articling in a CPA firm.



Don worked for three years in a Chartered Bank, back when he was a young lad just out of high school. It was a formative experience. It allowed him to mature, led to a university education and a subsequent career running his own CPA firm for over thirty years.

Based on this experience, and that of others, Don felt his grandson should spread his wings and

embrace his 'gap year' as an opportunity, show a bit of initiative and learn some things outside the classroom.

All this assumes taking a longish pause before attending university or college makes sense. It worked for Don, and I found it rewarding as well. Others may not. Some students are more mature upon leaving high school, more conscientious and eager for academic challenges. Going directly to university or college may make sense for them.



For all those who go on to university or college (directly or after a 'gap year'), there are some important decisions to make. Don's grandson wants to be a teacher. He's making plans today, at age seventeen that will last a lifetime.

As Don sees it, the folly in his grandson's plan is its singularity of purpose. He expects to study math and French and earn his degree. For his career plan to work, he must then apply to a College of Education, graduate, find employment and determine that teaching is the life he wants.

But many do not get into a College of Education, don't get hired or decide that teaching is not for them. Let's face it. There is a lot of uncertainty in this boy's future plans.

To prepare for these possibilities, Don suggested his grandson hedge his bets. He should study engineering, accounting, business administration, the hard sciences or possibly law—courses that offer competitive salaries, interesting work and a solid career path in their own right.

Most of these degrees are compatible with a career in teaching. Some might require a few 'Additional Qualification Courses', but all provide a level of accomplishment that is far greater than a bachelor's degree in the humanities.



At coffee last week, I asked Don whether he had any effect on his grandson's thinking. Apparently not. Don told me,

"All I did was get him angry. Rather than considering it helpful advice, he thought I was an interfering old fool, way out of touch with current realities."

Don went on to say he had similar concerns about his granddaughter's education a few years' back. She wanted to find work providing music therapy for older people and planned to study psychology to prepare for it. Here is how Don explained it to me,

"Fortunately, in Grade Eleven, she met a young man who had a lot of drive. He played in the

town's brass band, volunteered at St. John's Ambulance, held a part time job in town and did well at school. The relationship didn't last for more than a year, but 'bless his heart', he convinced my granddaughter to give up on the music therapy and study nursing."

"I'm sure she'll be a wonderful nurse. She's clever, empathetic, articulate and charming. And if she doesn't like nursing, she'll be able to turn her talents to other fields. Everyone wants to hire people who have mastered a rigorous course of study."

As we parted, Don noted with a wry smile.

"I'm not giving up. I think my best hope is to introduce my grandson to a young woman who has some common sense. Before you know it, he'll be enrolled at the University of Waterloo, in the co-op engineering program."

"Perhaps you know someone who might be suitable."

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