

ACKERMAN BIO SUBMISSION FOR 50TH REUNION

May 14, 2018

Education and Work

- At Dartmouth, my lack of work habits meant I nearly got drafted sophomore year for being in the bottom 1/3 of the class. Escaped that, but was deeply interested only in radio announcing, acting, photography, my fraternity (not just the drinking part), and driving hours every weekend to, you know, women's colleges (see later life note re women).
- Graduated feeling I'd been half asleep (I still dream of a do-over), entered Harvard Graduate School of Design in architecture that fall. Still no work habits. I was actually relieved to be drafted that fall, signed up for OCS, which I figured would delay going to Vietnam by nearly a year and a half, and would also turn me into a more effective person. Was right on both counts.
- Turning points; the Army was definitely one. Showed me all the other kinds of good people who make up the U.S.A. Helped me experience myself as successful. As any of you who have served know, at 22 they give you ridiculous responsibility, and the institution is set up to usually keep you from killing anyone in your command.
- Was an LT in Corps of Engineers, one U.S. command then one in Quang Tri in Vietnam. Just close enough to the war to say that I know it for the last resort it is, and far enough from it to be uninjured and sleep nights. Luckier than many, rest in peace.
- GI Bill paid for the rest of architecture school. Got out in recession. Took non-architecture job for the money. Fell into contract to write homeowner's guide to saving energy. Sold 2mm copies. Suddenly had national credential in energy conservation.
- Second turning point: turned down HUD energy job in DC to start company devoted to saving energy in buildings.
- Third turning point: seven years later had laid off all 50 employees and closed doors as price of fuel levelled off and I discovered being a CEO was not the same as being a First Lieutenant in the Army. This uninvited crisis led me, after three years of re-inventing and wandering, to be a management consultant, which I am to this day. You might say that was a dead end with a door.
- A required public speech in high school was one of the worst moments of my life (probably for them too), and perhaps thus scarred but intrigued, I spent time at WDCR and the Dartmouth Players. I now regularly seek and love to speak to and work with groups at all kinds of companies, Chicago's Booth Business School, and do so with joy from both the head and the heart.

Life and Love

- I live with my wife Martha in Chicago, where I've been for 25 years. My son Sam and his wife, six-year old daughter and two-year old son live a mile away, and that is heaven. Sam is an artist, an illustrator, always has been (RISD), and unlike the stereotype, loves to be around and work with people. So he makes a good living drawing the ideas of groups of managers while they talk about where they are and where they want to be. Six years ago he carried my pack the last ¼ of the way up Half Dome in Yosemite.
- My daughter Molly lives in Newport RI with her husband and two children: Charlie (13), and Elizabeth (10). Molly became a daily national business news reporter for Fox for two years before she was married, and having focused on the kids for a decade, has a foot in the work world coaching executives on how to be interviewed on television. She always wanted to be a journalist, was an English major at Harvard.
- I am just thrilled with my family, having grown up in one that was very fractured. I have more former half-siblings than most people have cousins. I married the woman who is Molly and Sam's mother; we were married for 21 years and were not at all suited to each other.
- That divorce was another turning point for me; bitter as it was, I persisted more than I knew I could for about a decade to rebuild sound relationships with and for both children. The starting point was not pretty, and what I have with them, and that they know they have a father, is my greatest point of pride.
- I am a survivor of a cancer with a 50% survival rate, now fifteen years ago. The sweet things are even sweeter now, I now know even better what you should really be scared of, and don't experience it much any more. Following cancer at 55, ran marathons with son and wife, switched to triathlons as less wear and tear; still trying to make up for being a lousy runner for Sam Hoffman. Learned a lot from running.
- If I had no work habits when I left Dartmouth, neither did I know how to love women, or anyone else really for that matter. Going then into the Army for three years didn't help. To get to the point, I have worked on this and will the rest of my life with and without professional help, and feel I am getting somewhere. With humility, I am asked to coach people, and let's just say I bring to that the awareness of someone who has had to unlearn just about everything.

Other Stuff

- I have had less security than my parents because it is just plain harder to make a living now, and in those terms, my children and grandchildren have even less. But I have more than my parents because I have had to figure out how to work, and how to love, so it's harder to knock me down, and harder to keep me down, since I don't expect the security they did.
- I haven't explicitly given back anything to society unless military service, raising good kids, and helping companies do a better job counts. I hope to spend the next years finding a more direct way to contribute, and welcome suggestions.

I will miss seeing and talking with you, fellow men of '68. Please call ahead before you come to Chicago so we can spend time, you can meet the dogs, we can tell some stories, and look ahead.