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Young Frank - Callison College One Pager

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My interest in international affairs was little more than an intense curiosity about different places and cultures. Much of what I learned about Africa, Asia or the Middle East came from perusing National Geographic at the local library. My personality did not fit that of an idealistic, adventurous seeker of truth and wisdom. I think it was more about breaking away. I knew I was not interested in a career in teaching, banking, the law, or medicine. The pathway to these professions was all so predictable, so planned. The last thing I wanted to do was hang out a shingle in Modesto. I wanted something different but did not know exactly what that looked like. I was not sure what I was willing to sacrifice to succeed. I only knew that I had to leave.

My parents thought I would end up being a suit-and-tie professional and they let me know of their expectations at every opportunity, each for different reasons. My choice of Callison College over Stanford perplexed them. It was a choice that my mother would have difficulty explaining to her bridge club. My stepdad didn't much care as long as he didn't have to pay for it. Both wondered what I would learn there. But to their credit, they went along for the ride and allowed me to join Callison's second matriculating class in September 1968 with the expectation I would spend my sophomore year abroad in India.

I both blame and credit India for much of the last four decades of my professional and personal life. When I boarded a United flight out of Stockton, California in August 1969 with sixty-two classmates, it was like that final scene in American Graffiti where Richard Dreyfuss's character, Curt Henderson, boards the plane out of George Lucas's version of Modesto Airport, knowing that he will probably never return the same person as when he left. Connecting with Pan Am 1 to Tokyo, my classmates and I were soon introduced to the likes of immigration officials, customs inspectors, Asian toilets, fiery cuisine, massage parlors and intestinal distresses the likes of which none of us had ever experienced. It was the beginning of a 9-month odyssey where most of what I learned occurred outside of the classroom instead of inside of it. It launched this bookish, chubby valley boy onto an exploration of people, places, and things where the events, pace and direction were never in my control. It ended with me a wiser, but more confused young man who was 50 pounds lighter (those intestinal distresses) but clearer about what I wanted to do with my life.

I cannot claim to speak for my other 62 classmates who may have diaries of their own. We each had our own purpose for going to India as college sophomores in the final year of a turbulent decade of rebellion and counterculture movements. Some of us were escaping an America we had become profoundly disenchanted with. For others, it was a rebellion against the well-heeled, secure life that our country offered. I think some of us set out on our journey to understand what had made India great and to absorb the spiritual life force of its culture and people. Many of us, myself included, were unclear why we were embarking on this experience except to prove something to ourselves, whatever that might be. Most of us were seeking answers but were not quite sure of the questions.

But something happened along the way during those eight months in Bangalore, something I do not think many of us saw coming. We faced stark contradictions between the culture of India we had deeply come to respect and the unexplainable (to us) poverty that almost two-thirds of its people endured. We struggled with the idyllic vision of village life, and the harsh reality that life for most Indian villagers was hardly a dignified existence. We examined ourselves and what we represented as Americans and found both wanting in helping us sort through the why and how of the things we saw day in and day out. Injustice, inequality, and prejudice seemed to be more widespread than in our own

country and we could not make sense of it. Some of my classmates simply went “section 8” and left Bangalore. A few retreated into themselves, rarely leaving their rooms or the compound we lived in. The rest grappled with how to rationalize what they saw with what they wanted to believe. A few came away from the experience praiseworthy and optimistic about India’s future but castigating its bureaucrats and politicians for the silly rules that prevented India from achieving its potential. I was one of those.

Today, my life is in a place that I could not have foreseen back then. My career took me to Capitol Hill in Washington, DC as a legislative aide to Stockton’s Member of Congress right after graduation from Callison, then to the Central Intelligence Agency and finally to the Foreign Service with the US Agency for International Development. During my career as a foreign service officer, I served in the Philippines, India, Bangladesh, and Ghana. Along the way, I had the privilege of teaching diplomacy to senior military officers at the National War College, and teaching courses on development at Syracuse University’s Maxwell School and at the State Department’s Foreign Service Institute. I did short stints in the private sector as a Vice President at Abt Associates, a Boston-based consulting firm and at General Dynamics where I helped set up the Pentagon’s new Africa Command in the late 2000s. I returned to the Foreign Service in 2010 as Acting Assistant Administrator for Asia (confirming my wife’s opinion that I didn’t know how to retire), did short stints as acting USAID Director in India and Thailand, then headed USAID’s Development Leadership Initiative that brought in over 900 new foreign service officers into the Agency between 2008-2011. I closed out 36 years in the diplomatic profession in 2016 with the State Department’s Office of the Inspector General helping to establish an office to assess the Department’s effectiveness at managing foreign aid. Today, I volunteer on several boards, mentor USAID senior officers in the field, and divide the year between our home in Sarasota, Florida and a rented apartment in Ottawa, Canada.

A half century later, I can look back on that year in Bangalore not quite with twenty-twenty hindsight and finally appreciate what that year was all about. On one level, it was an experience that laid a foundation for what I did with the rest of my life. But it was far more profound than that. It was a lesson in how immersion in another culture can shatter and rebuild one’s ideals and character. It was about how I changed as a person because of a year spent in a south Indian city of one million people. And, it *is* about how I am still changing because of the way that year rewired my world view. It is probably a good thing that the manuscript I hurriedly wrote in June 1970 about my experience did not see light of day. Some things simply take time to get right.