

Paths

By Mike Harris

The playing field is not level! "Every journey starts with one step." The same is true of the journey of life. The individual is carried forward on the path of life by circumstances none of which he or she has absolutely any control. The first paths of our life are a continuation of an unlevelled field.

My next thought is, "Where do individuals begin to make their own paths?" The path we are set on is not of our own choice. As I think about this I despair and wonder how the human race has managed to survive these many centuries. But that does not answer to today's subject. We have to somehow come to starting point. The environment into which we are born and the path we are thrust on by our parents definitely starts a pattern. Not all parents are equally skilled in parenting. In discussing that subject a thought was put forth that society should have a law that might level the playing field, namely, "No marriage license without a passing mark in a course called "Parenting." To my knowledge no such law exists.

I will therefore arbitrarily choose the age when one gains the ability to walk, talk, and exhibits curiosity, say at the age of three or four, when our parents begin to despair of all the trouble this offspring of theirs has become.

I have been told by my parents, more than once, that I was not what they expected. I was a red headed curious handful and not the tractable child they expected. Here is where "chance" ended and they took control of their situation. My parents were a dichotomy. My mother a tough, no nonsense lady who survived with the help of rules, my father an emotional man in love with his wife. He sent her love letters in the mail at least once a week as long as she lived. Yet they figured out a way to somehow do an excellent job of parenting. They both agreed that it was a big enough job for both. After discussion, my mother's system was adopted. She made the rules for home behavior, my father was to take care of the rest and they agreed to support one another in the face of objections. For example, Mom said, "It's time for bed." When an appeal was made to Dad his answer was always, "Mom's rules, obey."

Until I was four and half I was allowed pretty much free range, then upon mutual agreement, because I was making it difficult for my mom, who now had another youngster on her hands they decided it was time for my father to step forward. So a new path was put before me. I got my first paying job. I was taught responsibility, work ethic, and money management. Now all the questions that a curious five year old could think to ask became my father's problem.

He checked homework, explained in down to earth, understandable terms bible stories, and made sure that I was bilingual. He steered me onto paths that prepared me for my growing up. Most of my peers just attended public school, I spent two hours every day getting a secular Jewish education.

When things got real tough, and the Depression took hold, Hoover could not find the corner behind which prosperity was hiding and Roosevelt was elected, my father explained world

economics, communism, fascism and the president's alphabet efforts to get America on track.

With a high school diploma and the economy what it was, two things were expected. First that I somehow was to continue my education, second find some way to help financially. The first was easy, City College of New York City, night school "free." The second a lot harder, jobs were scarcer than hen's teeth. My father helped me by focusing my efforts. "Look to your own for possible help." Certain industries were dominated by different ethnic groups, the insurance was owned by the Catholics, Wall Street was owned by the Protestants the garment industry by the Jews.

Once my path was pointed out, I got a job as a shipping clerk. Due to a work ethic developed over previous years in time I learned two trades, meanwhile attending night school. Much was happening the world, and World War Two came along. Three and half years of service, honorable discharge, my old job waiting for me. The path of marriage at age twenty eight seemed to be the next path. This path with the right partner happily lasted sixty years. Just as I was moderately successful in all the paths that I followed I now am trying to continue my own happy way on this path to whatever the destiny may lead.