



Hardware stores have drifted through my days like a leitmotif in some symphony score of family, boy, and manhood. In 1896, my grandfather Arthur Lindsey and his partner Fred Day opened the first hardware store in the little town of Omro, Wisconsin. My father regaled us with stories of the mercantile and hardware: a pot-bellied stove for loungers and yarn spinning, brass spittoons, racks of muskrat and beaver traps, Stanley and Record Planes, shot and shell for hand-loaded scatter guns, engraved Belgian shotguns and Winchester repeating rifles, Barlow knives, pearl oil, decoys, froes, kerosene lamps, hinges, "Swede" whip saws, Nicholson files, oilskins, decoys, castor baits, mackinaws, Farlow, Tonkin-cane fishing rods, hooks, sinkers, keged-nails, and screws. Sitting on my father's lap, I would be transported, lost and entranced in a reverie of reminiscence. If my father had finished his chores, cleaned and trimmed the kerosene lamps, hauled blocks of ice from the ice house, he would be given special dispensation. Strategically placed at the store's front door were two barrels: one contained B.B. shot, the other hard peppermint candy. Grandpa would let my father dip into these stores, one handful of shot, one of sweets. I shared those special times at my father's telling. By inclination a carpenter, by disposition a raconteur, my father knew what makes boys tick. I roamed those shelves of hardware and the Wisconsin river bottoms in my dreams.

In my fourth year, he built me my first workbench, complete with diminutive vise and drawers. Its construction entailed a visit to the local lumberyard. That first trip to a lumberyard is eternally engraved in my sensibilities. What a congress of smells and sights! Scents of Creosote and conifer resins, the marbled lustre of galvanized iron, the sheen of well-honed blades, bubbles floating in level vials, fat, red cedar pencils, racks of hammers, saws, and chisels. All beckoned alluringly to young hands. Confronting these wonders, I was transfixed, rapt, drawn out in my senses like a fine wood shaving.

My family returned to Cannon Beach in the Fifties after two decades in San Francisco. For my adult life there has been but one source of hardware and building supplies, Cannon Beach Lumber. Established in 1935 and operated in its current quarters since 1937, the Jacobsens, initially, then the Clarks (assisted by John Zommers in recent years), have operated the consummate hardware store and lumber purveying business. We on the north coast have been pampered and spoiled mercilessly for fifty-odd years. In my decades as a home craftsman and contractor, I have not encountered its like anywhere. Lump your Parris, your Home Bases and your Copelands together, and they would not approach the caliber of our own Cannon Beach Lumber. Imagine a Winks Hardware with a touch of Chowns, a dash of Disdero, and the variety of Powell's Books, and you get a notion of its range and service.

Monday, October 19th, Cannon Beach Lumber, as we knew it, will be no more. I would like to toast Ken Clark, its former owner. No kinder gentleman walks the earth. Few are better friends. I find myself snuffling back a tear or two here. Damn. Thanks, too, to all its employees, the Louies, Dons, Sherrys, Kens, Mikes and Johns whose voices echo through the decades in those old stacks of lumber. This Monday will be like awakening from a good dream. We must console ourselves with the stories; they season like fine old clear-grain boards through the years. Do you remember when...?

(A note to my faithful readers. Your Professor will be taking a sabbatical for a few months. Genevieve Arnold and Darren Peters have consented to guest write this column for a few sessions. I thank them immensely.)

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OPPOSITES ATTRACT, Life on the "Other" Edge

"So, what colleges are you looking at?" Sounds innocent enough, doesn't it? But when it's getting hurled at you 20 or 30 times a day, it's not so innocuous. Adults ask me this all the time, and I bite my tongue trying to not ask them if they actually CARE about the response. Are you just trying to make conversation, and that's the only thing you can think of? Or are you just waiting for a chance to give piles of advice so the person you think I am will turn into the person you think I should become?

Everyone from a stranger on the bus to my boss at Applegates Ice Cream seems to know what college I should go to. Everyone, that is, except me. Kids at school ask the dreaded question, too. Then it's not pure evil; it can be good conversation. Better, at least, then the endless round of who's dating who and more interesting than the impeachment proceedings. Plus we can commiserate on the horrors of college applications, although my dear friend Jon takes it to the extreme. We both received 1360 on our junior-year SATs, but I bounded off proudly to tell Mr. Bollenbach, my much-loved programming teacher, while he enrolled in an SAT prep class. I think I'll major in psych only so I can handle the nervous breakdown he's going to have in a few years (as soon as he gets a wife, corner office and 2.4 kids. Comes with the territory.). While I vary my career plans from truck driver to programmer to nurse to psychologist to nightclub singer on a daily basis, Jon's set on a stable career in business.

Everyone else seems to have their minds made up. A gorgeous girl tells me at lunch that she's going to Rutgers because her boyfriend's there... that is, they've got a great veterinary program. Will announces his plan to take a year off before college, to play Nintendo, establish residency in Massachusetts, and get a job (I'm sure he'll accomplish at least one of those). Brian and Damian are heading off to the military. And my friend Garan is so talented he can't decide whether to go to Juilliard for bass or pursue engineering.

But the worst of this hell is from the colleges themselves. Everyday I get thick envelopes from colleges in the mail, full of racially correct pictures of smiling students strolling across their beautiful 240-acre campus. Their first page reads "<College name> was founded by <name> in <year>, in the lovely town of <name> and has grown since then from <miniscule number> to the <larger number> of students here today."

Then there are the more offbeat colleges. Being somewhat offbeat myself, these seem great at first. Their brochures vary slightly from the general format, they don't always picture a female of an ethnic minority peering into an expensive microscope to advertise their New, state-of-the-art Science Building and show, a couple pages later, a few muscular males crowded around a PC in a frighteningly clean dorm room to show that Every Dorm Has Internet Access. They use different fonts to advertise different things like, "300 miles from any form of public transportation or commerce!" and "99.9 percent of students go to our Sunday Mass, but it's not mandatory," and "Nation's top school for the study of bivalves!"

A few nights ago I was at choir, when Paul, my wonderful music director, asked the dreaded question. I mumbled a few buzzwords "Scholarship... institute of technology... good psych program," while looking at the floor. Julie, an eighth-grader who consistently forgets I'm four years older, turns to me and says, "You're going to college next year, Meg? You must be so happy!!!"

(Meg Stivison is a high-school senior in New Jersey.)

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