

Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?

—Mary Oliver

Introduction: Conversation with Mark.

During our brunch at S & S Mark suggested that if we had asked our grandparents more questions and if they had asked their grandparents more questions then we would know a great deal more about our history and would understand our lives much better than we do. I could only agree with him. It never occurred to me to quiz my grandparents about their lives, let alone about what they knew of their own grandparents. I doubt that at that age I would even have known what to ask. This essay is my attempt to answer the questions that you might never ask me.

Persona

I mention a number of people in this piece and you may not be familiar with all of them. The family tree on page 43 of the document *Resurrections and Attributions* may help. You will find this on spillthebeans.org->Robert->Resurrections & Attributions. Here's a quick crib sheet: *Possum* is Margaret Ann Cross Bean, my mother. *Robert* is Robert William Bean, my father. *Red, Ted, and Jerry* are Possum's brothers, my uncles. *Barbara* is my wife of some 31 years. *Melinda* is my friend and companion since 1997.

Enthusiasms



Watercolor by Margaret Ann Bean

*where do the colors come from?
i once wondered.*

*they begin with a thought, she said.
a desire for something out of the gray.*

Owen Bean

Probably the outstanding question is what was important in your life? What are you glad that you did? What do you regret not doing? The answer to this kind of question will surely vary from one person to another. My uncle Jerry was very interested in gardening. Every spring he would look forward to the arrival of his seed catalogs and he would pore over them. I on the other hand am simply not terribly interested in gardening. Red loved to buy and sell stocks and play tennis. He was not much of a reader and certainly never had a garden. Ted was greatly interested in money. Much of his life centered around various business activities. Possum loved her painting and was a great reader. She spent much of her life learning new things. Late in life she had a habit of telling me that she had spent her entire life preparing to do great things and that now it was too late. How did four siblings end up so much alike and so different? Perhaps it doesn't matter too much what you are interested in as long as you are interested in something.

I have had a number of interests. Possum used to call them “enthusiasms”. The first one that I remember was Erector set. One day in Stockholm Possum bought an Erector set (actually Meccano, since we were in Europe). Neither she nor I had any idea what to do with it. That evening Robert built a car that would propel itself along the floor using an electric motor and a battery. That fascinated me and led to a decade-long interest in building things. There was a small toy store around the corner from us in London that sold Meccano parts piece by piece. I used to go in and buy single parts with great enthusiasm – and little money.

Next up came electronics. That started in Washington when I had mumps and was confined to bed and not allowed to read. Possum bought me an old Zenith clock radio for \$2. This fascinated me. I knew little about it and most of the parts were truly mysterious. I tried to read up on the subject but, of course, only learned the very basic elements.

Six months later I had osteomyelitis and was confined to bed in a hospital for six weeks. The young man in the bed next to me had been in a motorcycle accident and was having a series of skin grafts. (Stay away from motorcycles!) He had been a radio operator in the army and knew quite a bit about electronics. He took the time to teach me what he knew, which was wonderful for me. It occupied our time and started me on an interest that lasted for a decade. After I got out of the hospital, I discovered Lisle Street in London. This was a two-block street near Leicester Square. It had dozens of small shops that sold war surplus electronics. You could get radios, signal lamps, radar displays, and all sorts of other things at prices that even I could afford. The surplus stores alternated with bordellos. Young women would stand outside soliciting customers. Every once in a while, I would walk by and be solicited. Once the young woman realized how young I was the usual follow up was: “Sorry luv.”

Soon I made friends with Mossip. (He was a student with me at St. Paul’s School in London. I remember his last name, which was all we ever used, but not his first name.) He, like me, was deeply interested in electronics. We spent many happy hours building gadgets at either his house or mine. I built a radio transmitter (highly illegal) and used it to broadcast music programs for Possum. I doubt that I had enough power to reach much beyond the house.

This interest in electronics stood me in good stead later on. During my time at Harvard, I had a job at Ilikon, a small company that specialized in ultra-high vacuum systems. I was hired to babysit the vacuum chambers while they were running tests for the Apollo moon project over the weekend. Soon they discovered that I could repair and build the electrical and electronic systems that controlled the vacuum chambers and my job morphed into building both control panels and measurement equipment for sale. That was wonderful experience for me and a great cost saving for them. Later, when I worked in the physics labs at Harvard one summer, I was able to modify the control circuitry for a spark gap system that ran a spark chamber. The professor in charge was quite surprised that I had the knowledge to do that.



South Georgia. Remains of whaling gear.



First stop in Italy - Alassio

Other enthusiasms followed: Mountains and hiking; duplicate bridge; car rallies; knitting; sailing; computers; and travel. I won't bore you with all of the details. Probably the most consequential was sailing. In Sweden we had neighbors who owned a small sailboat. I remember being utterly bored on the trips that we took through the Stockholm archipelago. Later I took part in Boy Scout cruises in heavy wooden boats on the Norfolk Broads. You can read a bit about those trips in the blog on spillthebeans.org. Then in 1971 a neighbor took us out sailing in Buzzards Bay. That was great fun and for the next decade or so I read every book I could find that had even a marginal relationship to sailing. We owned a series of sailboats that culminated with a 42-foot cutter called *Felicity*. I sailed *Felicity* across the Atlantic with five friends. Once we were in England, Barbara, Meg, Amanda, and Tim joined ship and we lived aboard in England, France, and Italy for the next year. This was an important and memorable experience for me and for the rest of the crew. There is quite a lot of information about *Felicity* on spillthebeans.org.

Once we returned from Europe I started a small publishing business that was later sold to a subsidiary of the Disney Company. I also ended up with back problems that confined me to bed for a full year. Barbara put up with these problems for some time but eventually we were divorced and I met Melinda Mills Lee.

For some twenty years, Melinda and I travelled extensively. We visited all seven continents, 100 countries, all 50 states, and all of the cathedrals in England and Wales. People will often ask us which place we liked best. I have never been able to answer that question in any satisfactory way. Each place added to our knowledge of the world and of ourselves.

Spouse

One of the defining choices you will make is to decide whom to marry. There are probably as many different marriages as there are couples. Some people truly get along and support each other. Others fight incessantly. You are likely to spend a lot of time with your spouse and you will probably be raising children together. This makes it important to choose somebody that you really get along with and respect. Appearances or sexual attraction simply won't carry the day. Do remember that you get to choose and take your time. Don't settle for somebody simply because they are there. I have seen marriages that turned out well and others that turned out badly. What I don't

know is whether anybody could have predicted which was which in advance. I guess my advice is to take this seriously and to take your time.

Children

The decision to have children is a big one. They will change your life in fundamental ways. (One year we had three children in three different schools. That meant a lot of driving in the morning.) I cannot quite imagine having gone through life without children. We formed our lives around them and their needs. I have no regrets about this whatsoever. Children will have successes and failures and will need support and understanding in either case. Do remember not to live your own life through them. They are independent individuals and have their own lives and their own stories.



Meg and Amanda in the Loire Valley



Meg and Tim in Cornwall

Health

Health is one of the big external variables. We are all fated to deal with ill-health at one time or another. Sometimes this is transitory, sometimes it is lifelong. I remember my uncle Jerry, who had trouble with his back, telling me that he had moved a dresser the preceding weekend. In order to do so, he had to remove all of the drawers to lighten it enough to move. His conclusion was that there was always a way to accomplish something, you just had to figure out what it was. Over the years I have found that piece of advice to be invaluable.

There are four major ways in which ill-health is likely to affect you: Your own, your spouses, your children's, and your parent's. At one point Robert was in one hospital in London and I was in another. Possum was left to tend to the home; to visit each of us every day; and to come to terms with our condition. Later in life, she suffered from a variety of illnesses including: Polymyalgia, shingles, macular degeneration, and when she was quite old she lost a good deal of her memory. (You could have a great conversation with her about events in the 1920s. But a few minutes ago? Not so much.) Throughout all of this, she kept her sense of humor and managed to continue with the things she liked to do. No good comes of feeling sorry for yourself.

Work

A few people know exactly what they want to do and set out early to make it possible. They are the minority. Most people happen into their careers. My roommate Bud Braine set out to be a doctor. He took the right courses in college and ended up in charge of all the leukemia patients at Johns Hopkins. A more common path is to decide that you want to work in a particular area such as finance, or marketing and to look for an entry level job there.

Some people love their jobs and can't quite imagine what they will do if they retire. Others work to earn enough money to raise their families and do the things they want to do. Still others detest their jobs but feel they have no choice.



WHB at work. (Small selection from a cartoon in a company newsletter.)

If you find yourself in the last of these cases (where you detest your job – or even just mildly dislike it), then change careers. I came to the end of college without any clear path forward. Since my chief marketable skill was a knowledge of electronics, I wrote to all of the companies listed in the electronics section of the Yellow Pages (that was a phone book organized by business category). This effort got me a job with Honeywell's Electronic Data Processing division. There I wrote programs to test hardware, developed specifications for custom hardware, and helped to design a new family of computers. Not wanting to continue this. I applied to business school with the clear intention of changing jobs. After graduating from business school, I ended up working in the publishing business for a long time. The business was growing rapidly and keeping up with the necessary changes was endlessly fascinating. Only a very few of the people I worked with were intellectually interesting and that was a considerable drawback. I envied people in other businesses such as consulting where they were always working with interesting ideas and interesting people.

You will spend a lot of time at work so it matters that you chose something that you like doing. If you don't, change! It is also worth considering what your personal strengths are. If you are not a 'political' person, then you are unlikely to like a large company.

Recently a friend who knew that I had studied science at St. Paul's and was a physics major at Harvard, asked me "what happened to physics?" I gave him what I now realize was a flip answer: "Sophomore year". In some ways that was true. But there were many causes. I ran into some teachers that I thought were very bad; I spent far more time playing bridge with my friends than I did studying; I went skiing, I failed to understand the difference between a high school course and a college course; I was struggling with the cultural differences between England and the US. I've been aware of these failings for many years but I have always thought about it in terms of what if I had continued with physics?. My conclusion has always been that I would have had a quite different life but that it would not necessarily have been a better one.

What matters

In the end, when you look back on your life, what really matters? Did you make a lot of money? Were you a major figure in some academic field? Did you invent a new medicine? You have many possible lives in front of you and I would argue that not one of them is absolutely better than the

others. What really matters is that you don't have huge regrets about not accomplishing something that was really important to you.

Possum's Dad, started out as an MIT-trained, electrical engineer. He ended up in his father-in-law's publishing business and kept that business going through the depression. Possum thought that he would rather have been an electrical engineer. Did that mean that his life was in some way a failure? I don't think so. Possum claimed that he was the nicest man she ever knew. He was certainly a great father; he wrote a lively book of memoirs; he kept his family going through the depression; and he loved hunting and fishing.

Ancestors

Some people take great interest in their ancestors and spend endless hours tracking them down. Others take only a passing interest. In case you are interested I will list a few of the available references for our Bean and Cross ancestors. First, there is a book called "My Children's Ancestors" by Rochelle Cross, a cousin of Gorham L. Cross, my grandfather. It traces all of Rochelle's children's ancestors back for many centuries. But, remember Mark Bean's caution that much of the information may be unreliable. Often you have a name, a birth date, a date of death, and not much else. It is hard to know if the person is really your ancestor of the same name, or someone else entirely. Robert became very interested in our Bean ancestors in the late sixties. Over the years we had at least three distinct family trees. And Robert was one of the most careful and precise people I've ever known. Also remember that the author may have his/her own biases. In Robert's case, his mother was the daughter of two refugees from Lithuania and was raised Jewish. We never noticed that over some forty years of research he never reported anything about his mother's family. For what, at the time, were good and sufficient reasons he kept quiet.

We have an account of the life of David Epstein, whom we believe to be a relative of Robert's grandfather Abraham Justman. We suspect that Abraham Justman's experience must have been similar to David Epstein's. You can see this account in the September 2015 archives of the This and That blog on spillthebeans.org.

When I was planning to sail across the Atlantic, Robert produced a list of all of the early crossings by relatives in sailing ships. You can see this list at spillthebeans.org->Robert->Ancient Mariners. It turns out that all of this information came from Rochelle Cross' book.

It seems reasonably certain that our ancestor, William Bean, arrived in North America aboard the ship Admiral Hawke in 1768. You can find evidence in "A Compilation of the Original Lists of Protestant Immigrants To South Carolina 1763-1773".

Fairly early on Robert wrote a memo compiling the evidence for his theory of our family history. I have posted it at spillthebeans.org->Robert->Evidence.

There is also a longer document from Robert entitled "Resurrections & Attributions". It includes a lot of family photographs and Robert's best guess as to who the subject is. It also has family trees and is an altogether magnificent effort. I have posted it in the 'Robert' folder on spillthebeans.org.

We also have several sets of memoirs: “Rubbish” by Margaret Bean, “Visiting Grandma in New Canaan in the 1890’s” by Ruth Warren Chalmers, “KFW Reflections” by Keith Faulkner Warren, “Letters to Jerry” by Lillie Faulkner Warren, “Partridge Shortenin” by Gorham Lamont Cross.

In addition to the memoirs, there is a book compiled from Lillie Warren’s scrapbooks called “Elizabeth Keith Faulkner Warren 1866 – 1957”.

Miscellaneous

A couple more things. Photographs. You are growing up with a huge number of photographs. This has not been true until very recently. This picture is the only one I have of any or your hundred-and-twenty-eight great-great-great-great-grandparents. It is Mary Smith Faulkner who was Lillie Warren’s grandmother and was born around 1812. I have a sampler that she sewed a few years later. My advice is to be very sure that you are preserving the pictures that you will come to value. Make sure that they are backed up and that they are tagged so that you can find them. Even though both my grandfathers, and my father had cameras, I have very few photographs from my youth. Film was expensive and preservation systems were primitive.



Mary Smith Faulkner

I suspect that most of your photographs will be electronic and will be stored on computers. Robert lost his hard drive twice. That verges on carelessness. Just in case you have actual paper photographs, do not write on the backs, it will eventually bleed through and ruin the photograph. Possum’s father used to attache his favorite photos to a closet door with thumbtacks. The holes are entertaining, rather than distracting.

Also, keep track of the timeline of your life. The time will come when you wonder what year you went to Niagara Falls and unless you write it down it will be very difficult to be sure. The wiki on spillthebeans.org is intended to fulfill this function. To access it you will need a user ID and a password. Email me and I will send you one. I’m sorry for this barrier but there are too many birthdates and maiden names in the wiki. Once you have access you can both read it all and add your own material. It starts in 1889 and runs up to the present. Most of the early part is Robert’s work. More recently I have been keeping it up. Now it’s your turn.

Evocative objects

In Sherry Turkle’s memoir “Empathy Diaries” she talks about evocative objects. As I understand it these are objects that bring back memories or otherwise have some special significance. For me, this idea has special importance. Gorham Cross had a room he called “the museum”. It contained many such objects that had special meaning for him: A partridge feather, fishing and hunting licenses, a collection of matchbooks from diners he had visited, and many other semi-mystical things. I have a similar tendency to collect things: An old bookcase that used to hold back issues of the *Banking Law Journal*, my grandfather’s desk, my mother’s dresser, and innumerable photographs

going back as far as my great-great-great-grandmother. These are often objects with little intrinsic value but can mean a lot to us. I encourage you to pay attention to such things and not to throw things out with too much abandon.

There is a risk that when you become very fond of something, you will lose it. You will need to be prepared to deal with that sort of loss.

The Good Life

The ancient Greeks and Romans spent a great deal of time and effort deciding what constituted a “good life”. Their answers included virtue, wisdom, knowledge, and purpose. Sadly, or perhaps happily, there is no good single answer. A good life is whatever you decide is good for you. I do encourage you to think about what that might be, rather than simply accepting what the world throws at you.

My generation has been very lucky. Too young for World War II and Korea, born into a world with working antibiotics, we seem to remember a more peaceful, serene time. I’m not really sure that is correct. We did face race riots and school integration. Civil rights wars in the South. Vietnam. SDS. The Unibomber. Watergate. Things were not as peaceful as we’d like to remember. In this vein, it looks as though the world is in turmoil right now. Ukraine. Israel and Palestine. Climate change. I very much hope that society will resolve all these problems and that sixty years from now you will remember the 20s as a peaceful time. Fare thee well!