

IN SEARCH OF OURSELVES

Finding out who we are – by knowing who we are not.

by

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**David is an inspirational writer and motivational speaker to be.
His electronic newsletter “Que Sera Sera” is a weekly boost
to get you back into seeing things a bit differently.**

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INTRODUCTION

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This mini book was previously written as 5 separate columns in the “Que Sera Sera” newsletter. The response on the columns was so great, I knew I had to run them again, or at least make them available. Wouldn’t be right to send them out again.

So this short book is my way of getting the word out and hopefully getting you to think a bit more about who you are and what you have to offer.

As is often the case, we have become accustomed to looking for the negative things in anything and everything. Probably started when teachers took out their red pens and pointed out all the things we did wrong.

Today, we are staying in good practice in the same kind of way saying things like "There's never anything good on television," or "That stupid cow didn't even read what I sent her," or "I am so stupid, but that is just me."

You see, we're especially good when it comes to looking at ourselves. We all "know" what we can't do well, don't like to eat, don't want to do or don't want to be when we grow up. But that's rarely the question. In an attempt to find out just who we are, and because we are so good at doing things backwards, we'll answer a slightly different question. It begins with finding out Who we are NOT!!!!

Because so much changes so quickly in life, we need to first understand
“We learn that we are not who we used to be.”

Next, we do what we can to break ourselves free from our jobs by learning
“We are not what we do.”

Then, we get to the heart of our feelings when it comes to those who know us
“We are not what others think.”

As someone who is always wanting to be and do more, the 4th article is
“We are not what we can be (yet)”

Finally, to sum things up, or even to add more questions than answers,
“We are what we believe.”

The journey begins – NOW!

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LESSON 1

WE ARE NOT WHO WE WERE

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It's funny how something so mundane can change your thinking.

"Congratulations!" the e-mail message read.

Now, that comes to me about each month, and normally I don't think much about it at all. But, having nothing better to do at the time, I clicked on the message to read it.

"David Stoddard, you have new Riverview Gardens High School classmates. Go to Classmates.com to view them." But that wasn't the part that got my attention. Reading further, it turns out that they have added several thousand grade schools to their list.

Finally! I thought to myself.

For years I've wondered why there were so few grade school reunions. Why was it that high school was the time to get together for? My thinking has always been that I only spent 3 or 4 years with my high school class.

But I spent my growing and learning years with the same group of kids for nearly 8 years during grade school. Those are the folks I got to know. Those are the ones I was interested in. Those are the ones I wanted to make fun of as a bit of revenge from the past. But I digress.

So I went to the site to see who had already beaten me to signing on. Of course, I had to go through and sign myself on, which is only fair. When I got to the list, only one person from my class was listed. Charlie.

He was a friend of mine. One of the few I had during those days. He was the left forward of our soccer team, was bright when it came to science and geography, and could serve a mean volleyball. I remember we would play electronic football, only at recess of course, -wink-

As I read what he had written on the list, it was interesting to see how he had changed. He is married, has 2 kids and works in the computer industry. I guess the computer part shouldn't be so surprising as it seemed, but when I knew him 20+ years ago, computers were not even a glimmer in the world. Well, unless you count a small calculator that could also play blackjack a computer, than yeah.

I began to wonder what everyone else was doing. I got out the yearbook and wondered some more. Had Dan gotten into the comedy circuit, did Kelly become a nurse, it Paula teaching, did Steve get taller. Are some of them still burdens on society as we may have imagined.

Then, I came across my picture in the yearbook. Glasses glaring back the flash from the camera. Hair long and curly. Reading what was entered, I thought back to what I was then. A quiet soccer playing alter boy. All around nice guy who would trade you some pencils for almond windmill cookies and an orange juice. Okay, made up the last part, but was true.

I thought about how much different I am today than I was back then. Sure, some things are still the same. I still bite my nails once in a while, have trouble lacing my shoes and can't sing for the life of me. But so much is different as well.

Back then, I hated school, but now see how important it is. I didn't care for English, but I can write halfway well. I was always the shy kid in the corner, but for some reason, want to teach. Wasn't very technically minded, but have worked with computers and some electronics. Thought people who were 30 were old, but now at 35.... Darn Kids!!!

You don't have to go back 20 years to see how you've changed. It doesn't take that long at all. Everyone is different than they were 5 years ago, or a year ago, or even a week ago perhaps.

Maybe we are not the people we thought we would become. But we can do something to be more of what we want to be. Perhaps we wish we could be more decisive or more outgoing or less of a workaholic or less cynical of the world and everyone else in our lives. But it's gonna take time. And when it does, you can write your own message to yourself saying something good has come your way. And let me get you started....

Congratulations!

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LESSON 2

WE ARE NOT WHAT WE DO (necessarily)

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In an era of the Internet, e-mail, chat rooms and electronic bulletin boards, the world has gotten to be a lot smaller. You can now talk to someone across the globe any time of day or night. Making friends and acquaintances can be done from the privacy of your own home without the need for getting dressed up.... Or even dressed.

Conversations often begin about the weather or what people are up to. Eventually, they get into more personal matters as a way of getting to know someone. The biggest and most popular item that brings people together involves questions about jobs.

In chat rooms, someone will ask what you do for a living. On online bulletin boards, introductory messages contain some info about the person writing it but almost always mention what they do. At work, someone will see you in the hall and ask what department you work in. At seminars, someone will come up and ask what company do you work for. In classes, the instructor often asks how the class will benefit the student on the job.

Even at the supermarket, should you end up in a conversation with someone for more than 8 minutes, the question about what you do for a living is bound to come up.

Friends whom you may not have seen in months may run into you and ask what you've been up to? Now I doubt they want to hear of your planting petunias all spring or that you locked your keys in the car last winter on your way to work.

It's a shame what we do for a living labels us so much. This is never truer than when we are applying for a job. Forget how unnatural the interrogation, um, I mean interview is. In most cases, it's about what you have been in the past that labels what you can do for them. If you have never done something, chances are you won't do it in their eyes.

It's like taking the Barry Bonds home run record set last night. He hit his 72nd home run of the season. His previous high had only been 49 throughout his professional career. Does that mean there was no way he could hit 72? (Or more?)

I'm often reminded of a story from a few years back. A faculty member of a university had a committee meeting. During the meeting, a secretary had been invited by her boss to come and mention her idea for ways of improving things.

Almost everyone in the meeting seemed impressed and backed the proposal. Once the secretary left, the dean said something that has stuck with me ever since. "I wish these secretaries would just stop trying to be something they are not." And she went on with the meeting. Needless to say, the secretary left the university and moved on to something bigger and better. The faculty member...is still there.

I know this leads to next week's topic about what others think, but its quite fitting here.

Perhaps because of our past employment record, no one including ourselves can see us doing much of anything else. Because of this, we need to begin looking at what we do differently. Although this is not necessarily a career guidance newsletter, it is an important part of being happy.

Without going into the whole find out what you like to do, research it, get involved in it, try it out, talk to people doing it, network and just do it speech... One other thing needs to be done. You need to see yourself as doing it.

Begin today. Find out what you love to do. Learn how you can make a career out of it. Then, work on seeing yourself as having that career. If you want to be a horse trainer but you are a waitress today, tell yourself you are a horse trainer - who just happens to be a waitress at the moment. Then do what you need to do.

In that way, (seeing things as though you are already what you want to be) it will make all the hard work and studying and roadblocks along the way seem like child's play.

When you get there, write me about it. After all, in this era of the Internet and e-mail makes building acquaintances so much easier. Plus, I'll try not to ask you what you do for a living right away.

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LESSON 3

WE ARE NOT WHAT OTHERS THINK

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I was an outgoing kid.

I'd run to the front door welcoming relatives, friends, neighbors, or perhaps even the mailman whenever they would ring the doorbell. I'd run from person to person, telling them stories of my adventures in the back yard or perhaps ask them questions. Basically, I'd make a pest of myself.

Well, that's the sort of thing my mom has told me over the years. Personally, I don't remember too much of that side of me.

The part I do remember is the kid who rarely raised his hand in class, found his own private seat on the bus, liked eating his olive loaf sandwich in the back of the cafeteria, and would spend time in his room playing solitaire or some other game while sitting on the floor. Maybe that is where the writer has come from. Such a solitary life at times.

So, why the change? From those days knocking over mom and dad to get to the door to see who had come to see us, to my sitting in my room or in the back of the class watching life go by.

The best answer I have (and least clinical) is that I allowed everyone else's opinions to be more important than my own. By doing that, I helped to prove that what they thought of me was right. To solidify their ideas, I ended up changing into the person they saw in their minds.

It's like the saying goes, whatever your picture of another is, they may very well become.

Maybe I felt it was more important to know they liked me instead of my family saying it. After all, at that age, family members are supposed to tell you how much they like you no matter how many times you spill grape juice on their good clothes.

Perhaps, in the minds of the other kids, I missed the transition of it being acceptable to be friends with the teacher and being labeled "teacher's pet." Also, I was far from the smartest person in the class. I was in the half that made the upper 80 percent possible. (get it...Ok, I was better in math than that).

Looking back, I can see how I was changed. Thing was, I didn't really notice it at the time. So much of what I had become had little to do with anything anyone did or said. I

was in control of what was going on with me, but didn't know enough to think of changing it.

The best thing that happened was time. Growing up helped. Getting older and hopefully wiser was a good thing. Getting out of the unnatural world of classes drastically helped. But what about today? Just because we are older and should know more about ourselves, doesn't mean we are immune to the thoughts of others.

While being different than we used to be is expected, is the person we are today a result from our thoughts or someone else's?

Maybe we used to be this independent person, and today we let the world walk over us. Maybe we've allowed ourselves to end up in positions we never imagined being in. We have gone into jobs because someone "knew" we'd like it. We followed the family business (if we liked it or not) because not wanting to hurt anyone's feelings. We continue getting fish sticks for dinner because we may have liked them once.

While it's important to get opinions on different things from others, we need to remember that they are not us. Throughout our lives, there will be so many people who act as though they know who we are, what we think, how we feel, what we should do and who we should be. (Try not to confuse these people with those who you would like to tell where they should go on a daily basis).

The truth is, so very few people will actually get to know who we are. In addition, there will be even fewer (maybe 1 or 2) who will seem to know us better than we know ourselves. And that is a pretty good thing.

But right now, I better hurry up and wrap this up. I just saw the mail truck drive up the street and I gotta go meet the mail carrier at the door. Ya see, getting through all the past feelings we've allowed others to unintentionally place on us can be done. Just takes work in allowing our own thoughts to have more value than anyone else's.

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LESSON 4

WE ARE NOT WHAT WE CAN BE (yet)

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What do you want to be when you grow up?

Now there is a question that brings back memories. It's probably one of the first "adult" questions we are ever asked. Granted, no one ever held us to our answer whatever it may have been. I think my first was something like "bayble braayit."

Translation: Baseball player.

Later became cowboy, fireman, doctor, quarterback, ballerina, jockey, play-by-play announcer, and guy who sleeps til noon. Note: There's not a good future in that last one.

Anyway, it's a question that sets us in motion to think of the future a bit. It gives us a chance to form a plan. It lets us see what may be on our minds at that time. It gets drinks thrown on us at bars. Guys, rotten pick-up line.

But it is a question we should keep asking ourselves from time to time. Maybe not the exact question, more like: What do you want to be - in the future?

There are those who have their whole lives planned out. Some even have every hour of their lives scheduled in a Palm Pilot of sorts. They know what they want, they know how to get there. And even with such a detailed schedule, they still have time to iron their socks and fold underwear. Martha Stewart would be proud.

Most of us are not quite like that. We may have pictures of what we feel we'd like, but for fear of jinxing things we don't look at it for long.

There are also those who may have been in one area for so long, they don't see themselves doing anything else no matter what the possibilities may be. Related to that are those having too many choices, so they just sit and let whatever happens.

Yeah! That's me. I pretty much have seen myself as a generalist. Not necessarily because I could do a bit of everything, but because I couldn't find that one area I did well.

It doesn't just have to be about jobs. It can be about other parts of our lives. Perhaps we want to be a better parent or be more assertive or less angry. Maybe we'd like to travel the world or be a photographer or even live in the country in a quiet wood house with a pool

table in the living room and a den like Mr. Brady. The same question can cover those things as well.

The future is still going to be here. Just think, today is the future from our days past. We are definitely not the same people we used to be. How can we expect to be the same in the future?

A few nights ago, Biography covered the Sesame Street story. It was interesting to see the characters and images from the early days of the show. So much about it has changed over the years while still having the same core, the same street, the same "mission." It's different than it was, but it's still Sesame Street.

Finally, there's the other extreme. It's when we feel there's nothing left for us. When we feel so trapped in ourselves or our jobs or whatever. When we look around at people in positions we'd have liked to have been. We put them down not so much for because they did something, but perhaps because we didn't.

If we have those moments when we think the world is against us or feel there is nothing out there, it may very well be because we are just unhappy with our past decisions. We didn't get off our tails when we could or should have. Maybe we didn't have the opportunity for one reason or another. If we're frustrated or upset by our current situations, there must be something inside us which we "wish" we'd rather be doing.

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LESSON 5

WE ARE - WHAT WE BELIEVE

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It all comes down to this. The moment we have been waiting for. It's time to separate the champs from the also-rans. All the practice and training has brought us to right here and right now. Success is within our grasp. We just have to take it one step at a time. Put everything we have into it and let the chips fall where they may. This is what it's about.

And I don't mean game 1 of the World Series that begins tonight.

There is truly one defining moment when it comes to who we are and what we can do. And that moment lasts a lifetime.

While it's true there are other moments when our lives can be changed, such as an encouraging word from a teacher, a gentle yet firm nudge from a friend, or a swift kick in the tail from Dr. Phil, there is one thing that makes us keep going.

The deciding factor is what we believe about ourselves.

None of those people can be with us 24-7. Events that influenced us can not be relived as they happened. It all comes down to our having to do it on our own. So it's important what we think of ourselves and what we can accomplish.

Or, paraphrasing Henry Ford for a moment, if you believe you are, or if you believe you are not, - you're right.

Now it won't just happen overnight. It takes time to change our habits. A lot of our personal characteristics we may not like about ourselves have been acquired over years. We did not all of a sudden become shy, or tired, bossy or nosey or cynical or resentful, or needy or lazy in the blink of an eye.

So it will take a while to change things. The first step is in believing that we can be different. Then, we should act as if we have already become the new person we want to become. We can begin to be more outgoing, do more activities so we are not so lazy and tired, look for the good in things to be less cynical, to take that first step of doing things on our own to be less needy.

Even if you don't really "believe" 100% that you are something, pretend that you do believe it. What if you believed you were the most outgoing, people person? What if you

believed you didn't care about everyone else's business? What if you believed you didn't get tired every day after work from "living for someone else?"

For myself, if I didn't believe I was doing anyone any good by sending out this newsletter, I couldn't do it. If I didn't believe I would become a columnist at some point in the future, I wouldn't put myself through some of the frustrations of writer's block. If I didn't believe I could get up in front of people making a presentation, I wouldn't have bought so many books on it.

While it is easy saying that all you need to do is believe, there is still a lot of work involved. But it will be the daily "acting job" you do on yourself that will bring about the changes in the future. Believing in something will help you push forward when it seems impossible. Seeing the goal (as if you already achieved it) will make it possible.

And if you want an easier way of looking at it... fake it til you make it.

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THIS

We all go through life
With thoughts in our heads,
Dreams say do something else
But we Do "This" instead.

We say we do "This"
So we can pay the bills,
Our dreams slowly fade away
For it is "This" that kills.

So to our selves, we sit and cry
Year by year and day to day.
We tell ourselves, we'll be there soon
But here is where we forever stay.

So is "This" all there is?
I swear there should be more.
I feel my dreams within me still
But it's hard to find the door.

I know I must change things
Because "This" is just not me.
My dreams will be realized,
I'll get there. You'll see.

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME

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Before I go and let you get going on the more important things of your own life, I want to once again invite to you subscribe to my weekly newsletter “Que Sera Sera.” In each week’s issue is a “speech” from myself, usually a guest column from an expert in a related field, maybe a story that makes it all come together as well.

The web address once again is <http://www.djstoddard.net>

This booklet may be handed out freely from newsletters or web sites.

For anyone who may have their own newsletter or web site and you would like to trade links or ads, I am available to do that as well. Write me at the address below.

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