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## **I was asked to write about my education...**

Many might say education for a successful future requires a formal approach through school and traditional continuity in order to be effective. Many others who have taken their own route will find this debatable.

I was four when my parents divorced. My father went on “adventure” sailing around the world on a 50-foot schooner. I didn’t know much about it, but had a small picture of a sailing ship I took to bed at night. This took his place. My mother and baby sister simply disappeared, and I went to my paternal grandmother.

She was a movie fan, and always took me with her. I remember cowering in my chair when King Kong climbed atop the Empire State building with a shrieking Faye Wray in his huge hand. This old original still remains among the greats because unlike today’s digital age, every movement of King Kong had to be mechanically improvised and filmed. Movies

were black and white in those days, but sufficiently expressive to a five-year-old. In the classic Gunga Din, there was no red in the blood and guts when the Bengal Lancers charged at the villainous heathens, but the reality and terror were there. I threw up all over the seat in front of me.

My mother once told me I attended twenty different schools before high school. I don't recall them all, as some were very brief. I vividly recall enrollment for first grade in Washington DC and the required vaccination. Nurses chased me up and down, back and forth, through the aisles of seats in the school auditorium. That needle punched extra hard into my arm when they caught me. Otherwise, primary schooling became a blur from one to another, with mere vignettes of different homes and never in one place long enough to make friends.

My grandmother considered school incidental to her whim. During first grade, we moved twice. We left Washington DC for Miami in November and returned a few months later. The following year we remained in Miami, so I was able to complete the second grade.

Miami is the period remembered fondly as "my childhood." My aunt and uncle were truly pioneers of an early Florida. Their square house sat about two feet above the black earth with crude steps into a plain door. A hose came through the kitchen window to supply water to the sink. An outhouse was perhaps

twenty-five yards from the back step. I was caught in there one day when a poisonous coral snake crawled through the crack. I screamed for what seemed like hours until someone found me and killed the snake.

They had five children. We roamed at will from morning till dusk among the palmettos and swampy Florida muck of a yet undeveloped world. We chased the tar truck begging slivers of the black stuff to chew, and cut chunks of ice off the cakes sliding around the back of those less than pristine trucks. (No one worried about anti-bacterial spray in those days.) I loved it all and didn't learn until years later that my aunt hated the entire primitive situation.

Childhood freedom ceased after another year. My father's great adventure ended. He had remarried and now lived in California. He came for me, and we sang "California Here I Come" for 3,000 miles. Our first stop was to see the Golden Gate Bridge before heading on to Morro Bay to meet my new step-mother and baby sister.

My father was on the engineering crew for the new highway being constructed from one end of California to the other. (Now known as Highway One) During this phase, we lived in a small three-room cabin on a hillside facing the ocean. My young legs didn't mind the climb of 100 log steps, twice a day, to and from school. Appropriately, a small sign read "Nuts End" at the ground level of those steps. That period was also

the beginning of my love affair of the ocean.

We moved on every few months: Morro Bay to Pismo Beach, on to San Luis Obispo, then Santa Rosa—four more schools. My eighth birthday arrived with the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor and the advent of World War II. I still remember that morning, and the wide-eyed, horrified look on my step-mother's face as she held the iron poised in mid-air.

Then there was a letter from my mother. She also had remarried. Within days I was on a train to the naval base at Corpus Christi, Texas. Monotonous rows of plain white, square housing had been quickly erected to accommodate families of the quickly immobilizing forces. I was enrolled in school, but no matter. We weren't there very long.

My step-father Austin was transferred to Memphis, Tennessee. I enrolled in mid-semester, actually finished the fourth grade, and after a hot, humid summer began the fifth. It's said girls mature early in the South. I was introduced to lipstick and would smear it on beside the porch the minute I left the apartment.

War called Austin overseas. Mother and I took the train to Cincinnati, Ohio. Her hope was that we would become a family with mother's father, step-mother, and my now five-year-old sister. I completed the fifth grade, but jealousies and frictions of family can be defeating. Hope fades. Mother and I took the train to California, forced to leave my sister behind where life

for her had been and would continue to be consistent, and what one might consider “normal.”

Those school years and places offer a few vignettes along the way. My several trips on the trains, the primary transportation of the times, provided firmly embedded happy memories: cavernous and impressive stations, blaring loudspeakers, conductors whistling, calling and directing. Once aboard: loud snorts, jerks and bursts of steam as engines got under way. Cars lumbered and swayed, filling a ten-year old heart with excitement. Evening came and seats turned mysteriously into snug, enclosed sleeping areas that snapped shut, with the continuing clickety-clack as a lullaby.

In Los Angeles, I attended two more schools as we stayed briefly with relatives, then a third when Mother found a job in Santa Monica. I entered sixth grade and reaped heaven’s blessing. Each day after school, I clambered down the dirt cliff of the craggy Palisades to the beach and ocean. I usually had the beach to myself as I played in the surf and basked in the sun until dusk. In those days, children could come and go, and play without fear of predators or Child Protection Agency rules and regulations.

Despite the bloody push of war in the Pacific and Europe, my life that year was a period of bliss. Then, mother found a good job in Los Angeles and we moved away from the ocean. I became a permanent student!

In Los Angeles I attended Virgil Junior High School (now Virgil Middle School) for three years. I had friends for the first time, actually chose electives, enrolled in a journalism class, tried out for the volleyball team (however I was tall and unathletic). I attended the Ninth Grade Prom and graduated. How proud I was to receive a diploma – and actually achieve something.

My father now lived in Mountain View, California. I had two sisters. (Half-sisters, true, but I never considered that important. They have always been my sisters.) I went to visit them for a few weeks, but that lengthened and I enrolled in high school there. Then, within a few months, stability ended. My grandmother in Miami died. We all moved there. A pattern similar to my early years began anew: Miami High back to California and San Fernando High, then Belmont High in Los Angeles, back to Miami Edison, until my final year at Hollywood High School and graduation there.

My mother hadn't been very lucky with men up to that time. Austin came home from overseas, but when he tried to climb in bed with me one day, that ended that. The next one, Stan, wanted to be an opera singer and practiced his scales every morning while Mother supported us.

She had been working in Hollywood radio. In April, just prior to my graduation, Mother was sent to Europe on a government contract to broadcast radio musical programs. I was to join her

after graduation, but Stan was not included. Circumstances changed the scenario when he decided I was to be part of his life instead. Therefore, I caught the Greyhound to Miami.

As a loner, reading from an early age was a primary activity - whatever was available - novels, classics, biographies, Hemmingway, Stone, Steinbeck, the encyclopedia, even Dostoevsky and Kafka (which at twelve I didn't comprehend). Perhaps this contributed to receiving fairly good grades. Enrolling in another new school had become a habit. College seemed only natural. I entered the University of Miami, Florida. However, permanence and traditional education had not been programmed into my psyche. The ocean had, and it beckoned.

One day my French teacher took me aside. "You could have a good future if you would settle down." I acknowledged her words, but buried them at the time. Another restless student had come into my life. Summer came. "What to do... let's get married... good idea." Two immature souls without a rudder continued to drift: his home in Baltimore, two years; move to Los Angeles, two years; back to Florida, two years; to San Francisco and other points... When does maturity kick in?

Having been wise enough to study business subjects in high school, I was always able to get a job. Though a good person, my husband was still unsettled in spirit. Despite the birth of a daughter, the marriage eroded after twelve years. I then recalled my French teacher's words, "Settle down..."

I remained in San Francisco, took a job with the International Bechtel Corporation and was able to support my daughter and myself. Three years later I remarried. My husband Floyd became the stabilizer that settled my life and laid the foundation for my ultimate career as artist and writer.

One afternoon I stood before an art gallery window gazing at a magnificent seascape, wishing I could do that. Within a week, I enrolled in art classes. Time passed as I studied, attended seminars and workshops, joined art organizations, won awards, sold work and gained a national reputation. I lectured, was juror for prestigious art exhibitions (among them the famous Catalina Art Festival), and in 1992 became a Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts (RSA) headquartered in London under the patronage of Queen Elizabeth.

What began as a fulfilling hobby had become a profession and serious way of life.

Soft pastel had become my favorite medium. I joined the Pastel Society of the West Coast in 1986, became a Signature Member and served on the Board of Directors for thirteen years, as President and later Newsletter Editor. This latter position for eight years spurred an enjoyment of writing and my first book in 2003, *The Little Book About Pastel*. In 2004 I was invited to Buckingham Palace for the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the RSA and met HRH Prince Philip, President of the Society, who was aware of my book. We discussed its contents for several



minutes, and I sent him a copy when I returned home.

Writing is now my career and way of life. Released in 2011, *Adventure in Color – the Impressionism of Anita Wolff* won Honorable Mention at the San Francisco Book Festival of 2012. My first novel, *Somewhere the Road Turns*, was released in 2013, with the second novel *So the River Flows* early in 2015. A book in progress, *Impressionism – the Inspiration and Evolution*, chronicles the political times and lives of those French Impressionists such as Renoir, Monet, Pissarro and the others, opening the flood of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism throughout the world.

I believe education takes many forms and directions. For me, the prerequisite has been a desire to know... with an open mind, curiosity and determination to learn.

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