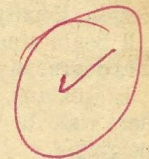




Perspective



By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

I don't even remember his name now. He was short, pudgy, wore black-rimmed glasses and looked like he had been stuffed into his priest's collar and vest. I met him only once — in the lobby of a convention hotel at Swampscott, Massachusetts, half my life ago. Several of us from Mercer University were attending an ATO fraternity convention our sophomore year. While I don't know about the others, I, for one, was desperately trying to determine what I was supposed to do with the life that had been handed me. Was I to be a doctor, lawyer or Indian chief?

That's where the little old priest came into the picture. We were all standing around the lobby of the giant hotel waiting for a tour bus to arrive. In the midst of the jostling and confusion this old priest wiggled his way through the crowd, introduced himself and asked me what I was going to do with my life.

A friend, who later heard about the encounter, said, "Why didn't you tell him to mind his own business?"

Now, in thinking back on that incident 22 years ago, I realize that was the priest's business. Somehow he had sensed my desperation, although it had never been put into words. Those around me in school seemed to know exactly what they were going to be. Reg Murphy and John Schumann were going into the newspaper business. Bobby Dollar was going to be a foreign missionary. Bert Schwartz a basketball coach and Rob Ledford declared he was going to be the next German dictator. But me?

The old priest just stood there, looking up at me. I shuffled my feet and ran down the list of things I had considered doing with my life: athletic coach, teacher, citrus business, insurance business, career military,

writer, medicine, politics, professional girl watcher . . . everything but Indian chief.

The old priest rubbed his chin and nodded. "Stop trying to pin down your profession," he said wisely. "It will probably change in mid-life anyway. Rather, decide now whether you want to work with things — or with people."

He reached up, patted me on the shoulder and disappeared into the crowd. I never saw him again. For all I know he was an angel, although I suspect he was just an old priest who attended fraternity conventions because he had been sent by God to force confused kids into thinking about God's direction for their lives.

I chose to work with people. True to his prediction my profession did take a big change in mid-life. However, because I had not specialized in becoming a "things worker" while in college, the transition came naturally.

Of my other friends who set their direction early, only a few stuck with it. John and Reg are newspaper people — the very best, in my opinion. But Bert is no longer coaching basketball, now he's running a dress shop. Bobby is no longer a foreign missionary, he's a wealthy executive with Day's Inns. And Rob Ledford, who was going to be a German dictator, is now a professional writer after doing a stint with the CIA and the Georgia State Highway Department.

It may be the old priest's advice is no longer apropos. I suspect, however, that as college starts it would be well for a lot of young people to ask themselves the question: "Do you want to work with things — or people?" And to plan their studies accordingly.