

Unveiling the Most Impactful Decision

Choosing a life partner-- when I was young we called it a spouse-- that's the 2nd most important decision a person makes. First, of course, is the religious commitment a person makes to determine eternity and what the main influence on their thinking and behaving from then on. But after that is 'settled', a life partner is considerable. Through my youth I wondered if I would find a woman who would 'fit' my desires for a simple, suburban life. Would she share my values as they were developing? Would she be beautiful and rich and play an instrument so we could make music together? In fact, I had a punch list.

Those were some of the items on that list. Oh, she should be Jewish, of course, and have long straight hair, not sure why that was on the list. She had to be smart, university degree, obviously. Pretty, although I think I listed beautiful. Rich made sense because I'd never been rich.

Whenever I would meet a person of any of those categories, and let me say that pretty always made a woman noteworthy before anything else, I stacked the girl into the framework of a checklist. Not a good idea of course, but hey, I was immature and that made sense.

Different candidates crossed my path, not so much in high school at all, but at Wash U that started and kept going until Fall 1974 when Patty

Lisson attended the Mustard Seed gathering at the house on Tennessee Street. Over a very short period of time I began to woo her and invite her into my life. We went on dates and I really liked being with her. Of course in those days dating was different. Both in the young enthusiastic "Jesus movement" communities and in ordinary non-religious life. Sometimes our dating included other people. The traditional 'double date' might have happened, but really it was 'odd numbers' that I wanted for safety's sake. More like a small fellowship group, but then we moved to dating and that meant being alone and with only one person, and Patty was terrific. We could talk for what seemed like hours. She would tell me about her life, her stories, her issues with school or friends and God, and I would usually try to fix things, because well, listening was not my strong suit. Maybe it's better in these days, at least I hope so.

Narrowing down the candidates and the punch list, Patty didn't fit. Not rich. Not Jewish. But hey, she was a serious believer and loved people and well, the list morphed in front of my eyes. I remember the late spring of 1975 when I told her that I just couldn't keep dating her because, well, she wasn't Jewish. She, like the woman she already was and was fully becoming, took it in stride. But then fall 75 I took up with her again and in the midst of her sophomore year at KU, she and I took a poetry class together and I fell deeper in love with her. By January 76, I was 'all in' but with trepidation. After all, a life partner is for life. Was I really all in? She was terrific in every aspect of life. She loved beauty. She loved God. She loved her family. Everything a man could

want. She trusted the Lord when she stepped on a branch near campus and had to go to the clinic/hospital for removal of wood out of her foot/leg. Without complaining, she kept going. That's what I wanted; an immovable, unshakeable, unflappable stable woman no matter what.

So by spring 76, I wanted her to be my wife.

My proposal was ridiculous. It was an evening phone call. Some of the guys and gals at Country Kitchen on 23rd Street, Lawrence, where I was working, wondered about our relationship. Was she a girlfriend? Wife? Going steady...? Come on, what gives?

So I phoned her at her folks' house. She had just returned for the summer break. I asked, "What can I call you?" Nothing like smooth operator here. No clear answer. She said, "we'll talk about it." She had just returned to KC!

Cathy Heitzman and I were having a coffee at "the Kitchen" and she said, "If you are serious, don't play around. Go ahead and propose if that's what you want." I put that in quotes, but that's only the 'gist' of the story. At least, that's my takeaway now 50 years later.

So there it was May 1976 and it was a Saturday evening. I was pondering "the most important decision in my life." What a long night, but full of hope and my confidence grew. I decided to drive into KC the next

day to propose. At the Mustard Seed I found some wrapping paper. A week earlier I had bought a set of knives at "the Kitchen" from a traveling salesman. I thought that housewarming gift would be perfect if and when I asked Patty to marry me.

So downstairs I went that Sunday morning. Wrapped the knives' box in the wrapping paper and hopped into the 1964 Ford. Drove on old K-10 and got to Patty's home. I was beaming with gladness as she came to the door. I showed her the package. She opened it. Turns out the paper was baby shower wrapping paper. I was clueless. "What is this?" she wondered. I told her it could be an engagement present. She wondered and then voiced, "Does this mean I don't get a ring?" I thought and then voiced, "You want a ring?" Oh clueless man of 24 years in age.

But even so, after sitting in the living room with her dad, and asking his permission to marry his daughter, and after she told her mom in the kitchen and she shrieked with gladness, asking only, "Is this what you want to do?"...so many moving pieces, all within minutes.

Gertrude came into the living room and told John to approve.

John put his newspaper down and wondered, "How are these two religions going to work?"

Finally he approved and well, that was 50 years ago and that decision,

made and confirmed by so many, but especially by the Lord has stood the test of time. I'm a grateful man.



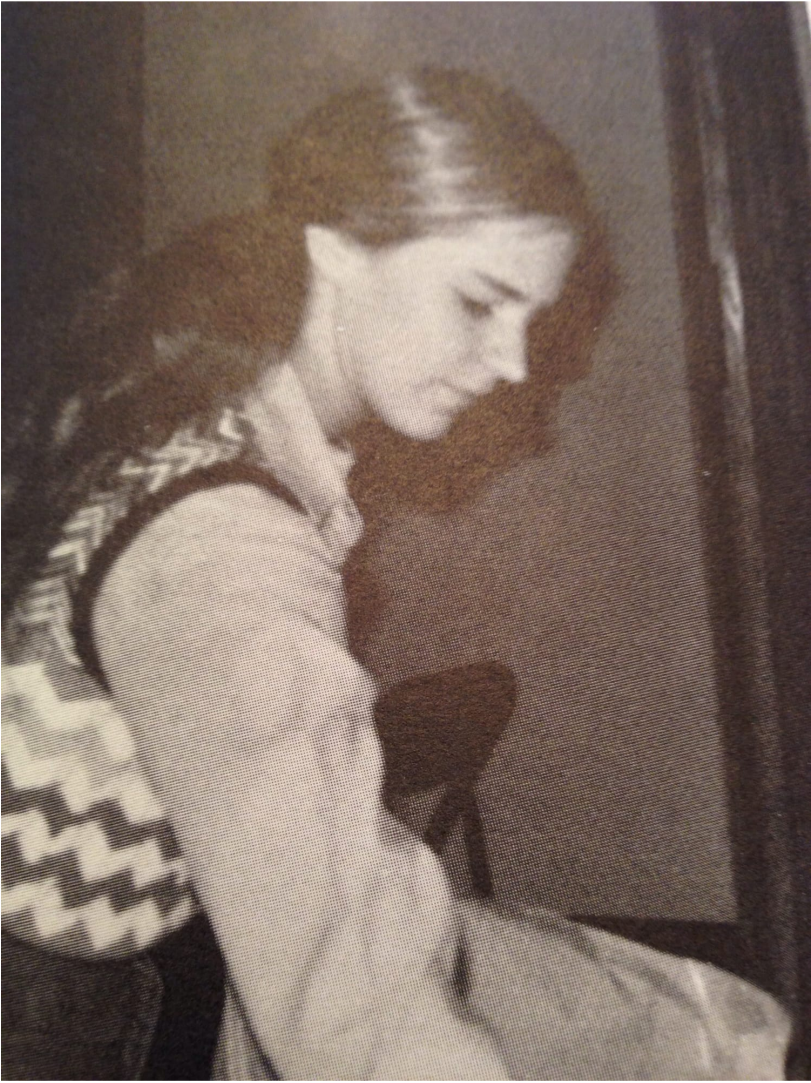
Behind the Mustard Seed when I still lived there.



Patty at her dad's retirement dinner from Sears.



Patty with the National Honor Society.



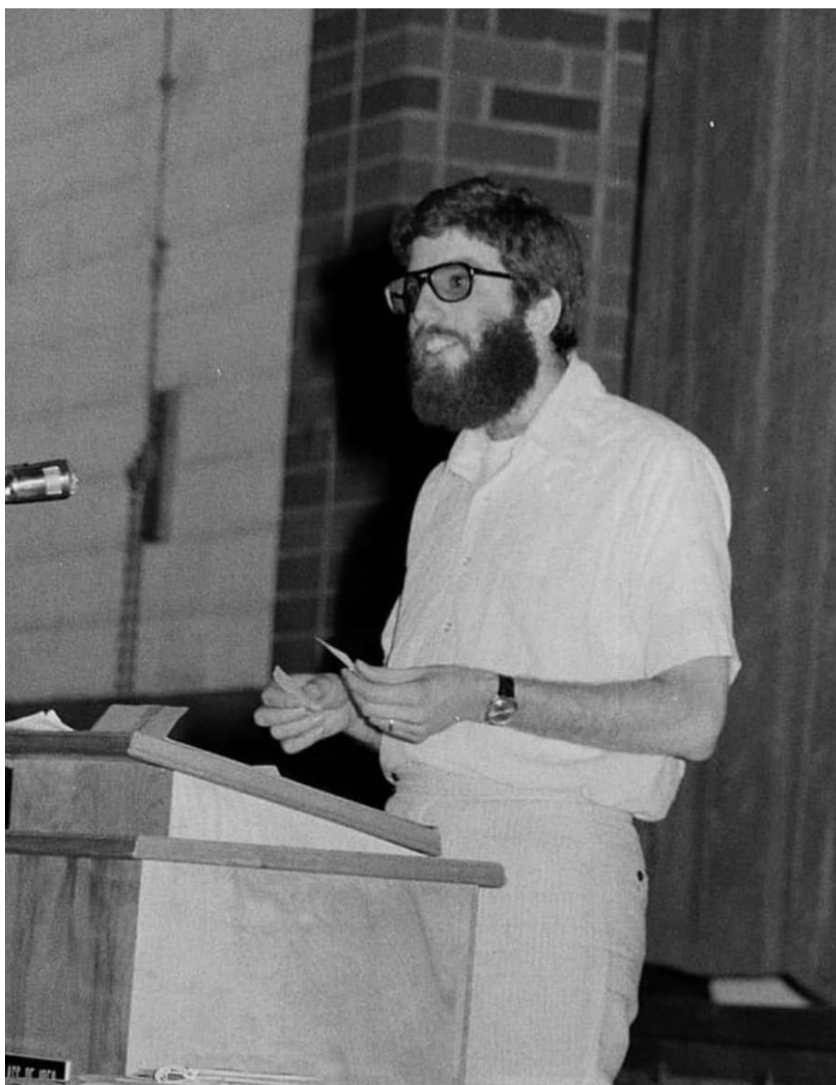
Senior year work at home.



Teenaged Patty in KC



In the front of the Seed in a shirt that must have come from a Thrift shop.



Speaking at an auditorium at Basehor High School where I taught school from 78-79.