

CAREER ACTION FOR YOUTH

At nineteen, I knew I needed to take some kind of next step in my life. For years, I'd been living in a rut mostly made by my parents. I needed a new direction, a better direction, for myself.

Someone recommended the "Career Action for Youth Centre" to me, so I cycled over on my ten-speed to take the "Choices" computer questionnaire. It was a software program that suggested possible career paths based on how you answered questions about your personality, likes, and dislikes. (Back in high school in 1983, my classmates had been given a chance to do this questionnaire in Grade 12, but I had been sick that day and had missed my opportunity.)

The lady whom I met at the "CAY Centre" said that technically I was no longer a youth and was too old for their program, but she decided to let me do it anyway. I was very grateful to have a second chance to do it, years after high school. I probably wasn't ready back then anyway.

Making Choices

It was fascinating to sit in front of the computer's glowing green terminal, tapping my way through the prompts, being asked about my likes, dislikes, strengths, or preferences. The computer recommended a few different career options to me, mostly in creative or design disciplines. The most appealing category I saw was "Artist/Designer". The computer suggested that I could study at either the Banff School of Fine Arts in Alberta, or at the Emily Carr College of Art and Design, which was located on Granville Island about 15 minutes away from my home.

I'd had no idea that the Emily Carr art college even existed, but I immediately started to see it as my big goal. It was scary, but also felt like a new start for me: going to art school and becoming a real art student.

The realization of that possibility was such an exciting moment for me, like discovering a new personality or that some kind of buried treasure lay right beneath my feet! It was like revealing a secret liberation

plan, sitting right there in plain sight.

In that moment of realization, materially, nothing in my life had changed except that a computer program and a helpful lady had opened my eyes to a potential future that I couldn't have foreseen on my own. My mind and imagination had started to fuel a change in my direction. The exercise also reawakened my curiosity in gadgets and electronic things. How did the computer program come to its decisions about me, and also, why did I implicitly trust its assessment? Was that what I was all about? How did it know?

Training Wheels

I took a part-time job as a (bad) bike mechanic at Boulevard Cycles. I enjoyed assembling bikes (and testing them with a little spin around the block), but I was slow at it and not really all that good, so the owner moved me down to the kiddies bike shop called "Kids Wheels", located down on Granville Island. It was back to Granville Island again for me!

Kids Wheels was located in a little house-shaped building, behind the "Kids Only Market", near to the entrance of Granville Island. It was fun and easy assembling little kiddie bikes in a tiny bike shop located behind a giant toy store. It was almost like a grown-up Disneyland atmosphere, watching the summer tourist season go into full bloom.

One day, a life-sized Raggedy Anne doll walked up and said hello to me. I became pals with her right away. The girl behind the face paint and red wool hair was named Melanie Pope and she was dressed as Raggedy Anne to promote the Kids Only Market toy mall. To me, Mel seemed to positively beam happiness and fun – she looked like she was smiling all the time.

Mel and I became good friends for a year or two. Her enthusiasm was such a breath of fresh air to me. I was a little attracted to her, although I'm sure her joyous personality attracted a lot of male attention, but I never got close to her like that. She was just my friend, in a kind of little sister way.