

Smoky Mountain Reflections, October 2009

Fall Greetings! Another season is upon us--colorful leaves, the end of daylight savings time, shorter days, and all those things that come with the arrival of fall, including another school year. As I review my 47-year existence, I have had my life dominated by education. Don't get me wrong—I love to learn, and see myself as a life long learner, but the whole institution of education has some flaws. I feel that the biggest grip it has on our society is our schedule.

Only a few generations ago, education was what you did in your spare time. Education was the pleasant process of making use of our God-given talents to absorb information that was beneficial to our well-being. We did this for entertainment during our leisure hours. It was not to pass a test, but to gain knowledge that would enhance our ability to be more productive and to expand on our God-given talents to give us a wider variety of life-long experiences and opportunities.

But as our world transformed during the Industrial Revolution, so did education. It was no longer the privilege of a select few, or what we did in our spare time between the fall harvest and the spring planting. Our world had learned how to produce everything in a factory, and we also learned that educated societies are more productive societies. So, we started churning out educated people in large institutions called “schools” which in essence were factories for producing skilled citizens.

Again, please do not get me wrong--some of the best years of my life were spent in some of these “factories.” But getting back to that big grip on our schedule...for the first 5 years of my life, my schedule was driven by my needs and desires and those of my two sisters, but in the sixth year of my life came Kindergarten. The greater percentage of the next 42 years would be dominated by school schedules. When I graduated from high school in 1980, I thought I would be free of the school schedule. How wrong I was! Two years of my 20-year Navy Career were spent in job-related school. Most of my spare time from 1985-88 was spent getting a BBA at school on nights and weekends. Once I finished my undergraduate degree, my oldest daughter entered Kindergarten. The school system had a hold of my schedule again for the next 16 years as my three children went through their education. During that time I again became a full-time student in seminary from 2002 to 06, and now, with collage-age children, there is really no end in sight.

If you think you are free from the effects of the school schedule, consider the following: back to school sales, school buses, school traffic, Thanksgiving break, Christmas break, winter break, spring break, summer break or lack thereof. I would be willing to bet that everyone has had to adjust a work schedule or travel plans in the past year because they or someone in their life is a student and their schedule is “inflexible.”

I wonder if any of this is tied to that curse of earning bread by the sweat of our brow. For all its frustrations, I love schools and I love the school environment—a place where we can all become enabled. In my youth, I very much disliked getting up early to sit in a classroom. I still do not like getting up early, but I very much enjoy making daily use of skills I learned while sitting in a classroom. Literacy is a very big part of my daily life. Most importantly, it gives me daily access to God's word—it is how my day starts, and ends, and informs and educates and drives all the points in-between.

Have a blessed 2009-10 School Year—as a student, parent, grandparent, educator or in whatever way the school system has a hold on your schedule.

In Christ,
Pastor Portier